



# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

### SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2024-2025

Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

### ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by: Ms Leanne Castley MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Children, Youth and Family Services

Redirection:

Reference: Children, Youth and Family Services

Hearing Date: 02/08/2024

In relation to: Early Intervention to Support Children and Families

Question Lodgement Date: 02/08/2024

Date Answer Due: 08/08/2024

**(1) Aboriginal-led Early Intervention:**

- Is there specific, ring-fenced funding for Aboriginal-led early intervention services? If so, how much is allocated for this purpose?

**(3) Family Preservation Services:**

- What are the planned investments in family preservation services aimed at reducing entries into out-of-home care?
- How does the government plan to support family finding services to help children and families develop long-term supportive relationships within their community?

**(6) Addressing Non-Financial Barriers:**

- What measures are being taken to address non-financial barriers to early learning, such as transport and language barriers?
- How will outreach programs be enhanced to locate and assist families facing difficulties accessing early learning services?

**RACHEL STEPHEN-SMITH: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:**

**(1) Aboriginal-led Early Intervention:**

- **Is there specific, ring-fenced funding for Aboriginal-led early intervention services? If so, how much is allocated for this purpose?**

There is not specific ring-fenced funding for Aboriginal-led early intervention services. The ACT Government has committed to transferring 30 per cent of funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOS) under the Next Steps Strategy. This will be facilitated by procurement approaches that encourage the participation of ACCOs. Through the Aboriginal Services Development Branch, the Government is also providing support to assist in capacity and capability building of new and established ACCOs within the ACT region.

### (3) Family Preservation Services:

- **What are the planned investments in family preservation services aimed at reducing entries into out-of-home care?**

In August 2023, the Territory released an RFP (GS3925427) to establish a new Children, Young People and Families Panel of appropriately qualified and experienced non-government organisations including ACCOs. The Panel will deliver statutory and non-statutory services to children, young people, families and carers. The RFP closed on 10 October 2023. Sustaining Families is one of the service packages being procured to deliver earlier support for families and strengthen diversion, preservation and restoration from the statutory child protection system.

ACCOs have been encouraged to respond to the RFP as part of the Government's commitment to transfer case management responsibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to the ACCO sector.

- **How does the government plan to support family finding services to help children and families develop long-term supportive relationships within their community?**

Children, Youth and Families Division (CYF) has designated funding for a family finding position. The Family Finding Officer assists with tracing and locating family members, initiating contact with family members, providing guidance with family issues, undertaking family research advice, and providing cultural advice and information.

As part of the new Children, Young People and Families Panel, young people aged 15-18 may, on a case-by-case basis, access additional Family Reconnect support to reconnect or strengthen their connection with family and significant others ahead of transitioning from care. This is in addition to support available through general case management practice.

CYF is committed to the continual uplift of capability across the Division through training and development. The Cultural Development Program explores finding kin and working with families to identify supports for children and young and people if they are not able to live safely at home.

### (6) Addressing Non-Financial Barriers:

- **What measures are being taken to address non-financial barriers to early learning, such as transport and language barriers?**

CYF facilitates referrals for vulnerable children to the 3-year-old pre-school program when developmental concerns arise. Additionally, in the course of ongoing case management CYF will support parents and/or carers through the referral process, locating a ECEC close to the family home and offering warm referral by supporting the parent and/or carer to attend introductory meetings.

#### 3 year-old initiative

The 3 year-old initiative warm referral form requests the following information from families:

- *Does your child and/or family require translation services or have interpretation needs?*
- *Preferred suburb(s): If this is not the same suburb as the child's main address, please provide details. E.g. grandparents will support transport / parent or carer works in the area etc.*

- *Are there any areas or suburbs which would not be appropriate? If so, please list and outline reason. E.g. court orders in place / limited funds for petrol / public transport with siblings particularly challenging etc.*
- *How will your child travel to the ECEC? E.g. your family has own transport, you use public transport, you are supported by neighbours / friends /family.*
- *Are you currently in temporary accommodation?*

The Education Directorate's Placement Pathway Group, which assesses the most suitable early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for priority children in the 3-year-old initiative, takes into consideration the information provided on the warm referral form and makes an offer of a place based on information such as:

- The family's residence, and whether they are accessing temporary accommodation. If a family is in temporary accommodation an ECEC close to a town centre is considered optimal, as the family will be able to continue attending the ECEC when a permanent residence becomes available.
- Whether the family has access to a car or uses public transport, and the bus routes and times near their residence.
- If there is a sibling attending an ACT public school or ECEC.

To support people with language barriers, families are asked which language their child and/or family prefers to communicate in. If the warm referral form notes that an interpreter will be required to support the family in the enrolment process into the ECEC, this information is communicated to the service.

The 3-year-old initiative family record, which provides the family an acknowledgement of the information captured in the warm referral form, has been translated into five of the most commonly spoken languages of families in the initiative: Arabic, Tamil, Hindi, Farsi and Ukrainian.

Transport Canberra provides free or reduced fares for many concession card holders. Free travel is available at all times for children aged five and under not attending school.

The Student Transport program is available for eligible primary, high school and college students. The program enables eligible students free travel on school days and MyWay student fares on non-school days.

The Special Needs Transport program provides transport assistance for eligible students with disability who are residents of the ACT and who attend ACT public schools.

In addition to the above free travel is available on weekdays from 9:00 am - 4:30 pm and after 6:00 pm and all day on weekends and public holidays for holders of a Health Care Card or Pension Card issued by the Department of Human Services, ACT Services Access Card, DVA Gold Card and ACT and Interstate Seniors card. A reduced concession fare is applicable through the peak travel periods.

Libraries ACT core children's programs (Giggle & Wiggle/Story Time) take place at 8 of 10 branch locations, across the week. Core programs = approx. 15 hours per week.

Additional regular programs:

- Sensory Story Time at two branch locations (Kippax and Belconnen), serving neuro-diverse children and their families, as well as children with diverse developmental needs.

- Bilingual Story Time at four branch locations: Hindi, Thai, Farsi, Vietnamese, Urdu, Spanish and Tamil programs.

#### Introductory English Centres (IEC) Transport:

The ACT Government offers bus transport to Introductory English Centres (IEC) for eligible students. This is provided by Transport Canberra, however the approval process sits with the Education Directorate.

Since 2020, transport has been made available to: domestic students; students that hold a permanent visa to remain in Australia; and students who are substantive or bridging visa holders for humanitarian, protection, asylum seeker or refugee visa.

Eligibility criteria considered also includes whether the student can access the services provided by an IEC; the distance from the student's home to the IEC; whether the student has access to private or existing public transport; and whether the student is impacted by other special circumstances.

Priority is given to students with humanitarian, protection, asylum seeker or refugee visas and students in K-2.

#### Early Entry English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) placements

Early Entry English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) placements in ACT Public Schools are available for eligible students who are non-English speaking. Placements are a maximum of six hours of preschool education per week for up to six months in the year before preschool.

#### **• How will outreach programs be enhanced to locate and assist families facing difficulties accessing early learning services?**

The Child and Family Centres assist families to access early learning programs by facilitating connections to appropriate early learning services. The Centres have relationships with preschools and primary schools which they work with and regularly refer families to the Quality early childhood education for three-year-olds initiative which is a key part of the Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT.

The Child Development Service (CDS) does not provide early learning programs however if additional supports are required in accessing early learning services the CDS will explore how these supports can be provided to the family. The In-School pilot run in collaboration with Education has also enabled opportunity for trial offering CDS services in school locations to support families in terms of lessening travel time and having the service in an environment which they are already familiar with.

The Education Directorate is continuing to expand the number of warm referrers across the ACT, who can refer priority children into the 3-year-old initiative. During 2023–24, 40 tailored sessions were held with 221 warm referrers representing government and community organisations.

AEDC data helps to inform some programming decisions in the Family Literacy space at Libraries ACT. For example, the Preschool Pathways transition to Preschool Workshops are being presented by the Libraries ACT Family Literacy Coordinator in areas evidenced to be experiencing developmental vulnerability such as West Belconnen (Kippax) and Tuggeranong.

Libraries ACT Family Literacy Coordinator intends to facilitate "Get ready for preschool" program again in January 2025.

Libraries ACT Family Literacy Coordinator attends regular outreach visits at Playgroups facilitated by Child and Family Centres across Canberra – Gungahlin, Tuggeranong, West Belconnen. This gives direct contact with families and opportunities to engage children and families in literacy learning experiences.

Libraries ACT Family Literacy Coordinator attends regular outreach to parenting support programs – MACH new parent groups; CRCS “Healthy Habits” program.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025

Signature:



Date:

7/8/24

By the Minister for Children Youth and Families, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith