



STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION

MICHAEL PETERSSON MLA (CHAIR), JOHNATHAN DAVIS MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), PETER CAIN MLA

**Inquiry into referred 2019–20 Annual and Financial Reports and Budget Estimates 2020-21
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Asked by Elizabeth Kikkert MLA:

In relation to: Update on Future Directions at the C&FCs and the CDS

The Annual Report lists four focus areas for 2020-21 under the heading 'Future Directions' {p. 96}. Can the minister please provide an update on each of these focus areas?

Yvette Berry MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows: –

Update on Future Directions for the Child and Family Centres

The Child and Family Centres (CFCs) are committed to working alongside children and families to strengthen their abilities to support improved long-term outcomes. The 7 focus areas across both the CFC and Child Development Services (CDS) identified for 2020–21 were:

1. *Co-hosting “NAIDOC in the North” with six community partners involving a collection of online and face-to-face activities to celebrate NAIDOC Week in November 2020*

UPDATE:

- Several COVID safe events and activities were coordinated across the CFCs and CDS and through online forums to celebrate *NAIDOC Week 2020*. These included a BBQ at Yerrabi Pond in Gungahlin on 11 November 2020 with attendance by the Strong Women's Group; and cultural activities at each of the Koori preschools, including participation in the Belconnen Art Centre's "NAIDOC in the North" online program: <https://www.belcoarts.com.au/naidoc>.
- The staff groups at each of the four sites also held morning/afternoon teas to mark the occasion and to reflect upon the 2020 *NAIDOC Week* theme: "Always Was, Always Will Be".

2. *Delivering the new Mindful Motherhood program at Gungahlin CFC aimed at new and soon-to-be mothers to build confidence and skills to cope with stress, promote emotional balance, and how to respond appropriately to children's emotions*

UPDATE:

- Mindful Motherhood is an eight-week program that supports pregnant and new mothers. The program is based on the work of Cassandra Vieten, PhD who authored "*Mindful Motherhood – Practical Tools for Staying Sane during Pregnancy and Your Child's First Year*".
- The sessions combine yoga (with a licensed instructor) and mindfulness approaches to:
 - Increase confidence and skills to cope with stress



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- Promote emotional balance and assist with regulating emotions
- Increase acceptance of emotions and thoughts
- Approach experiences with a calm, non-judgemental mind
- Assist in responding to baby's thoughts and emotions.
- In 2020, the group was run at Gungahlin CFC (Term 3, 2020) and Tuggeranong CFC (Term 4, 2020). Both groups have a maximum of eight participants.
- In Term 1 2021, the CFCs are running two Mindful Motherhood groups – one at Gungahlin CFC and the other at West Belconnen CFC. For term 2, programming is underway, with a Mindful Motherhood group confirmed to take place at Gungahlin and forecasted to run at West Belconnen.
- Feedback from participants at both groups has been very positive and attendance has been strong.

3. *Delivering playgroups for families with young children in larger outdoor venues through the Tuggeranong CFC to support community connectedness, reduce social isolation and promote play-based parental bonding while ensuring compliance with social distancing restrictions*

UPDATE:

- The CFCs continue to provide a flexible and agile service offer to families in the wake of COVID-19. As social distancing and hygiene measures are still in place in the ACT, some of the larger groups continue to be facilitated in local parks to ensure that all members can attend safely.
- An example of this is the Multicultural Supported Playgroup at the Tuggeranong CFC:
 - The playgroup ceased for Terms 2 and 3 due to COVID-19 restrictions. During the lockdown period, Tuggeranong CFC continued providing fortnightly phone/video contact with all members, regular newsletters and craft packs.
 - Families who reported feelings of increased anxiety and depression during lockdown were provided with extra supports and relevant referrals to enhance their parental capacity. Topics included self-care and talking with your children about COVID.
 - The playgroup resumed in November with adjustments made for continuing COVID-19 restrictions. The enrolled group is now divided into two smaller groups providing fortnightly sessions to all families, and a community venue has been hired to accommodate the large group. Playgroup activities include language and speech development, gross motor development, movement control and coordination. The aim of the group continues to be to strengthen social connections and supporting vulnerable families.
 - Approximately 29 families with 39 children are currently enrolled in the program.

Update on Future Directions for the Child Development Service

The Child Development Service (CDS) is committed to continual improvement to optimise service models to best meet community need. The focus areas identified for 2020–21 were:



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4. Expansion of the occupational therapy drop-in clinics across community sites, and embedding Children's Hearing Services as a core function of the speech pathology drop-in clinics to provide a better level of support for children and their families

UPDATE:

- After moving to appointment only drop-ins for COVID-19, CDS is returning to non-booked drop-in clinics for occupational therapy services, as well as speech therapy and physiotherapy. These drop-in clinics provide parents in the ACT with an opportunity to discuss concerns about their child's development with a qualified allied health professional.
- This is a transition from the CDS booked appointment system that was in place for the 2020 period where service delivery was impacted by COVID-19. Currently the sites for these clinics are:
 - Child Development Service
 - Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre
 - West Belconnen Child and Family Centre
 - Gungahlin Child and Family Centre.
- The 2021 drop-in clinics have been expanded to include occupational therapist clinics across the three CFC sites to further meet community need.
- Drop-in clinic timetables can be accessed from the CDS website:
<https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/childdevelopmentservice/drop-in-clinics>.
- Children's Hearing Services were successfully embedded with some Speech Pathology drop-in clinics at the end of 2020. This service is subject to availability and CDS continues to work with Children's Hearing Services about options for 2021.

5. Strengthening collaborative functions of the Early Years Engagement Officer role to work across the Children and Families Branch (CDS and CFCs) to improve communication and service pathways

UPDATE:

- The CDS and CFC Early Years Engagement Officers continue to work closely with the Education Directorate, including attending and working with staff and families who attend Koori preschools across the ACT in 2020-21.

6. Creation of a digital resource library to prepare for the future need of flexible platforms to deliver services and information relating to children's development, with a focus on strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in programs

UPDATE:

- During the peak of the COVID-19 period, CDS remained connected with families through the delivery of groups, drop-in clinics and parenting workshops by utilising video platforms where virtual face to face support and information was provided.
- One method of service delivery that proved to be both effective and incredibly popular with families, was the provision of QR codes for educational children's books including "I Went Walking" (written by Sue Machin and illustrated by Julie Vivas) and the powerful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resource "The Rainbow" (written by Ros Moriarty)



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and illustrated by Balarinji). The QR codes allowed families to access videos of these books being read by CDS staff.

- A number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources were also provided to families through QR codes or via email during *Reconciliation Week* in 2020.
- CDS staff also produced several videos which guided families through therapeutic and playtime activities that could be done by families at home.
- These resources, and many more that were compiled during 2020, have now formed the basis for an ongoing digital resource library that will continue to be used by CDS staff and families into the future.

7. Optimising current service models by exploring and designing options to improve access to early supports that promote positive developmental outcomes

UPDATE:

- CDS has several strategies in place to optimise their current service models and improve upon access to early supports for families, including:
 - continuing to strengthen relationships with key government partners (e.g.: CFCs, Health and Education) including the identification of opportunities for innovative and collaborative service approaches.
 - regularly reviewing referral to service processes to streamline and make access to CDS services as simple as possible.
 - expanding Occupational Therapy drop-in centres to the three CFCs to increase accessibility.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Community Inclusion

Signature:

Date: 14/04/21

By the Minister for Early Childhood Development, Yvette Berry MLA