

2014-2019



East Arnhem

Communities for Children

We grow
them up!



COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

**FUNDED THROUGH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES,
COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN FACILITATING PARTNER PROGRAM**


The Anglicare NT, East Arnhem Communities for Children Facilitating Partner Community Strategic Plan results from research, feedback from key community members, Community Advisory Groups and stakeholders, consultation with current Community Partners, analysis of the service system and input from members of the East Arnhem Communities for Children Strategic Advisory Committee. This Plan guides and informs future decision making and supports implementation of the Communities for Children Initiative in the East Arnhem region. Note due to the current uncertainty surrounding funding outcomes across a range of high impact Federal and NT Government Departments and the resultant unstable state of the regional service system, it is recommended the Community Strategic Plan is reviewed by April 30 2017.

Section One: Communities for Children Facilitating Partner's Details

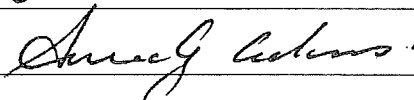
Facilitating Partner Details

Service Area Name	East Arnhem Site
Facilitating Partner Name	Anglicare NT
Facilitating Partner Contact Name	Wendy Scarlett
Facilitating Partner Contact Title	Initiatives Manager
Address	PO Box 36506, Winnellie
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Community Strategic Plan

Date Communities for Children Committee agreed to Community Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Draft lodged with DSS 7th April, 2015.▪ Final draft lodged with DSS 22nd April 2015. Referencing completed, EA C4C Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) endorsement secured.
Name of Facilitating Partner Authorising Officer	Ann Buxton
Signature of Facilitating Partner Authorising Officer	

DSS Use

Date of Submission to DSS	22/4/15
Date of DSS approval	23.4.15
DSS Delegate Name	TIMOTHY DAVIS
DSS Delegate Position	SECTION MANAGER
DSS Delegate Signature	

Section 2: Community Informed Service Mapping

Geographic Scope, Population and Cultural Landscape

The East Arnhem Communities for Children (EA C4C) site is located in the far north east of the Northern Territory, an isolated region bounded by the Arafura Sea to the north and the Gulf of Carpentaria to the east. The area is approximately 41,000 km² in size and all population centres within the region are classified as very remote.

The EA C4C site encompasses 12 distinct yet culturally and economically connected population centres comprised of very remote Aboriginal mainland and island communities and mining towns/ sub-regional administrative centres including: Nhulunbuy (and environs), Yirrkala, Gunyangara, Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwin'ku, Gapuwiyak, Milyakburra (Bickerton Island), Alyangula, Angurugu, Umbakumba and Numbulwar. The majority of communities also provide a base for a network of homelands, seasonal living sites and outstations.

Numbulwar now falls within the Roper Gulf Regional Council boundaries and the new regionalised model created by the Department Prime Minister & Cabinet (PMC) in 2015 to implement the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). As the EA C4C Facilitating Partner, Anglicare NT has recommended the continued inclusion of Numbulwar within the EA C4C site due to the strong cultural connections with Groote Eylandt Archipelago communities. It is also recognised that the Numbulwar continues to have very limited services and is one of the most isolated communities in Australia.

Galiwin'ku clearly forms part of the EA C4C site and has been actively included in the prior three EA C4C Facilitating Partner contracts as evidenced through funded activities. Galiwin'ku, one of the largest population centres in the region, was selected in 2014 as a Stronger Communities for Children site and benefits from the associated funding provided through the PMC. The Department of Social Services (DSS) has confirmed it will fund an Intensive Family Support Service (IFSS) in Galiwinku and the Department of Children & Families funds on the ground positions with a child and family focus. For these reasons Galiwin'ku is not included in the direct delivery of place based funded activities through the 2014 -2019 EAC4C contract. However, we will explore ways to build relationships with the new Stronger Communities for Children site and will continue to offer opportunities for inclusion in broader regional forums as these emerge.

The 2011 Census figures give an indication of the population of the various remote communities forming the EA C4C site. The high mobility patterns within the East Arnhem region are culturally and seasonally driven, with frequent movement between communities and into the larger regional centres for a variety of reasons. Differing data sources are available but can be contentious; so we largely will continue to use the ABS data stream, but consider this indicative information only. Over the life of this Strategic Plan our understanding of the regional population profile will be augmented by new information on demographic changes. The regional population is largely Indigenous, with higher numbers of non-Indigenous people living in the mining townships/administrative centres of Nhulunbuy and Alyangula.

Cultural traditions and language remain rich with the majority of Aboriginal people in East Arnhem speaking a number of languages, with English often the fourth or fifth. Key language groups include Yolgnu Matha (North East Arnhem), Andilyakwan (Groote Eylandt), Wubuy (Numbulwar) with Kriol remaining a dominant communication tool across the Tropic of Capricorn.

The region experiences extreme climatic conditions with increasing vulnerability to periodic natural disasters. In addition to the impact of cyclones and serious flooding in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, the North East Arnhem region was hit by two cyclones of high intensity and impact in February and March of 2015. A State of Emergency was declared for 4 of the 12 communities within the EAC4C site (Milingimbi, Ramingining, Gapuwiyak and Galiwin'ku) due to major damage to housing and other infrastructure including utilities and schools.

Table One: Population Profile EA C4C Site (based on ABS Census data 2011)

	Gove Peninsula	Yirrkala	Numbulwar	Galiwin'ku	Gapuwyak	Ramingining	Milingimbi	Alyangula	Milyakburra	Umbakumba	Angurugu	TOTAL
Total population	4072	843	687	2124	874	833	1,081	986	174	581	835	13,092
Indigenous Population	528	649	626	1890	826	766	1,017	88	157	524	791	7,858
Non – Indigenous Population.	3544	194	61	234	48	67	64	898	*153	*381	*351	5,211
Children Aged 0-4	465	72	52	258	81	91	97	87		47	67	1,317
Children Aged 5-14	754	130	155	492	182	145	236	144		120	205	2,563
Total 0 -14 years	1219	202	207	750	263	236	333	231		167	272	3,880

Notes: * Morphy, F. (2011) Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Population Survey 2010 as provided by Angurugu & Milyakburra then GBM Robert Hyland.

East Arnhem Region Service System

These isolated small and dispersed population bases of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people present unique challenges for governance systems, the provision and maintenance of infrastructure, the development of sustainable economic activity and the delivery of education, health and community services. In effect, each community has its own micro service system, which can vary considerably pending the vagaries of both Federal and NT Government funding, the population size, and the degree of difficulty in terms of access, prevalence of strong community leadership and the level of political influence.

The East Arnhem regional service system is comprised of locally based services (in situ within a specific community) and services based in sub regional (Nhulunbuy) and regional centres (Katherine and Darwin) which provide fly in fly out services on either a scheduled or ad hoc needs basis. The majority of specialised services in the education, health and community services arena are only available to the majority of remote Aboriginal communities in the region on a fly in fly out basis. Services are delivered by a mix of government agencies, Aboriginal Controlled Organisations, non-government organisations, independent foundations and a growing number of private providers.

Service provision in the region is complex due to the very remote geographical location, limited infrastructure and high cost of ground, sea and air transport which combines with seasonal access issues to impact heavily on most communities. Recent increases (2014) in the cost of flights (standard and charters), barge and bush taxi services has placed significant additional financial strain on already stretched service providers, individuals and families.

Many organisations also report that they experience high turnover of staff, have difficulties in recruiting and that operational costs keep growing in a context of static or declining funding. This results in lengthy vacancy periods and undoubtedly affects the viability, consistency and quality of services and impacts on the capacity of service providers to build meaningful relationships within communities.

In practice, this means both the regional and micro service system (within each community) can appear more comprehensive and robust than it actually is, particularly if we dig deep to analyse the real time presence and impact of services.

It is important to understand that for the majority of service providers, whether they are government, Aboriginal controlled, non-government or private 'service functionality and performance' can fluctuate pending a range of variables. However, without doubt, it remains the case that services for children and their families in very remote East Arnhem communities are limited in terms of presence and capacity in the majority of communities.

The Northern Territory Government (NTG) continues to be the key provider of services for children and their families, in the critical areas of Education, Health and Child Protection with a growing profile in the areas of Early Childhood, Nutrition and Family Support resulting from Federal funding.

Regional Councils, namely the East Arnhem Regional Council (EARC) and Roper Gulf Regional Council (RGRC) [in relation to Numbulwar] is the next major provider of infrastructure and services in the majority Aboriginal communities within the EA C4C site. Other than NTG and Regional Councils, Miwatj Health, Laynaphuy Homelands Association and Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) are probably the most notable providers of any size. There are also a number of Clan based associations and entities which manage and distribute Royalties, those which exist for a special purpose and/or to pursue economic development and culture and arts enterprises. A number of emergent bodies are being established as a result of the development of new governance systems. These are in addition to NT based and National organisations funded to deliver services and Foundations which self-fund initiatives in the region.

The East Arnhem regional service system is heavily impacted upon by the availability, nature and scope of funding sourced through a multitude of Federal and NT Government departments. The 2014 - 2015 and 2015 - 2016 years will undoubtedly be remembered as a period of budget cuts and funding volatility combined with major changes to the service system.

One of the key concerns raised through the service mapping process is the heightened instability and degree of change in the regional service system at present. Service mapping cannot be done in isolation from understanding the funding context and what will and won't be funded in a particular locality. It is critical that as part of Community Strategic Planning process we understand the operating environment within which both the Facilitating Partner and Community Partners must work. Mapping the service system informs our understanding of what the service gaps are and what needs to be strengthened; allowing us to better address the identified needs of children and their families.

In addition to the funding outcomes of the PMC IAS, other Federal funding streams in the areas of Aged Care, NDS and the Remote Job Community Program (RJCP) are flagged for major reform. A range of NTG Departments are also undertaking significant tendering processes for critical program areas such as Youth, Diversionary and Homelessness. The combined impact of funding outcomes across Federal and NTG Departments stands to impact significantly on children and families and service providers active in the region. As more information becomes available the nature and scope of activities to be conducted in the region will be included in the ongoing service mapping exercise.

The EA C4C initiative cannot afford to operate in a silo and must actively form working relationships with relevant Federal and NTG Departments. This helps inform planning and sector collaboration and development efforts. For example we will continue to seek clarification about which if any additional communities within the EA C4C site will be included in the next stage of the PMC roll out of the Stronger Communities for Children, as this may impact on planning and prioritisation of Community Partner activities.

All in all it is a difficult time to undertake the service mapping task for this site, hence we recommend that the Community Strategic Plan is reviewed by April 30 2017 once results of key tendering processes are known and prior to the next round of Expression of Interest processes to identify Community Partners.

It is also important to capture the input and record gaps identified by stakeholders during the consultation process which fall outside the scope of the C4C FP mandate but which impact on the overall health and wellbeing of children and families in the region.

The following summarises the key issues raised:

- Continuing concerns with inadequate and substandard housing, overcrowding and increasing transport and utilities costs. Noting that some communities have benefited from investment in additional housing and property upgrades but there remains significant unmet demand.
- Substantial unplanned infrastructure costs from impact of cyclones are likely to impact on service provision at NTG and local levels;
- Substance abuse programs are needed to prevent and address continuing breakouts of volatile substance misuse, with growing concerns over the availability and use of alcohol and the impact of emergent drugs such as 'Ice' and methamphetamines amongst young people/young adults, as well as concerns regarding potential impact both during and pre-pregnancy.
- Limited availability and functionality of some women's safe houses and men's cooling off shelters.
- Need for more on site disability support, aged care and carer respite and counselling and mental health services.
- Limited on the ground Police presence in some communities; noting Police posts have now been re-established at Angurugu and Umbakumba whilst some communities for example Milngimbi, continue to advocate for a permanent Police presence.

Key needs identified

Communities differ in infrastructure, services, family and clan profiles and the extent of community unity. Traditional eldership, emergent community leadership and community strengths also vary across communities. The following identified broad needs apply across the region; however the prevailing **health, wellbeing and social issues experienced by children and families vary in detail from community to community.**

It is important to recognise that the majority of families in the disadvantaged communities which form the East Arnhem C4C site are vulnerable due to inter-generational poverty, location, limited access to services and circumstance. It is therefore important that responses and activities are structured to be inclusive and not overly targeted or stigmatised.

Communities continue to face a number of challenges including high levels of **chronic disease, disability, teenage pregnancy, early parenting, child development and wellbeing concerns including child abuse and neglect, high levels of domestic and family violence and the resulting trauma, substance misuse, low income, unemployment, underemployment and high dependence on Centrelink benefits, mental health issues, suicide rates and poor school attendance compounded by food security issues and poor nutrition.**

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data for the North Miwatj cluster (East Arnhem, Gapuwiyak, Gawa Homelands, Milngimbi, Ramingining) indicated that **32.1 % of 5yrs old children assessed were developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains** (physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication and general knowledge)¹. This is approximately 3 times the National average, of those assessed 92.8% spoke English as a second language. South Miwatj AEDC data (Angurugu, Milyakburra, Numbulwar, and Umbakumba) provides a similar picture with 38.3% of children developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains.

NAPLAN results are also consistently below the national minimum standard for the overwhelming majority of children across the site.² School attendance rates continue to be a significant concern though some improvements have been made in the previous 12 month period. **School attendance rates** for East Arnhem region for Term 2, 2014 was 54% for Indigenous students compared to 89% for non-Indigenous

¹ Australian Early Development Census Data, 2012. Available at <http://www.aedc.gov.au/data>

² National Assessment Program results, 2014. Available at <http://reports.acara.edu.au/Home/Results>

students.³ My School website provides a measure of community socio-educational advantage (ICSE) with some East Arnhem region communities as low as half the national average on this scale.⁴

The **availability of employment opportunities** and effective work ready programs continues to be limited. Recent Census figures (2011) indicate an unemployment rate of 19.7% and labour force participation rate of 41.5%.⁵ The unemployment rate is understood to be much higher in the majority of communities within the EA C4C site that have not experienced employment opportunities arising from mining related activities. The RJCP is active across the site, but engagement rates vary across communities. **Cost of living expenses are also extremely high** in very remote communities and an average of 34% of income in remote areas of the NT is spent just on food, compared to 23% in Darwin.⁶

Emerging concerns

The East Arnhem region has recently been affected by two cyclones in February and early March 2015. Cyclone Lam and Cyclone Nathan both caused significant destruction and severe disruption to community functioning and service provision in many communities including Gapuwiyak, Millingimbi, Galiwink'u and Ramingining. There has been **significant damage to roads and housing**, with many **families forced into already overcrowded accommodation, temporary shelter or flowing into regional centres**.

Affected communities are in the recovery phase as many services are yet to return to normal functioning. Some service providers have also been affected in terms of infrastructure and access and there has been **disruption to service provision** in areas affecting children and their families. **Significant trauma has also been experienced by those exposed to the severe weather events** and it is likely this will impact on some children and families and service providers for some time into the future.

Community consultations and feedback gathering processes have revealed heightened concerns over the **low engagement levels of young people, high rates of sexually transmitted infections, and teenage pregnancies**. Community members and service providers have also talked about the **challenges of engaging young mothers** in existing support programs and securing their active engagement in parenting responsibilities where this is shared by other adult women and grandmothers within the extended family. East Arnhem region has a **young population with median age at 27 years** from the 2011 Census figures and a median of 23 years for the East Arnhem Indigenous population.⁷ This is compared to the Australian national median age of 37yrs.⁸ Recent census data summaries from Adelaide University indicate 30.2% of the EA population is aged 0-14. **Population projections confirm this trend may continue with the rise in women reproducing early and tending to have more children** than the national average.

Nhulunbuy Township is a key population and administrative centre for the East Arnhem region which has experienced **considerable economic uncertainty and demographic change** over the past 12 months resulting from the closing of the Rio Tinto alumina processing plant. The population of 4,500 declined by 2000 people (predominantly non Indigenous people) post the closure, but indications suggest numbers have rebuilt to a current figure of around 3000. There is an **increase in the movement of Indigenous people into the Nhulunbuy township** area from Gove Peninsula and more remote communities due to housing availability and the recent impact of cyclones. The **closure of services such as the AOD Rehabilitation Centre** and reduced capacity of the Nhulunbuy Sobering Up Shelter was also raised as it may put increased pressures on already vulnerable families and give Police and Courts less options.

³ Department of Education, NTG. Enrolment and Attendance Statistics, Term 2, 2014. Available at <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/students/at-school/enrolment-attendance/enrolment-attendance-statistics>

⁴ My School, "Find a School" data, 2014. Available at <http://www.myschool.edu.au/>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census Community Profile, East Arnhem, 2011. Available at http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/communityprofile/710251300?opendocument&navpos=220

⁶ NT Council of Social Services Inc., Cost of Living report, Issue No. 6, 2014.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, op.cit., p.6.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census Quick Stats, Available at http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/0?opendocument&navpos=220

Domestic violence continues to be of increasing concern in the Northern Territory with statistics indicating that **Indigenous women are 22 times more likely to be victims of domestic violence.**⁹ Noting Police have responded to an **increased number of domestic violence assaults** within Nhulunbuy Township - with a 20% increase from the 2013-2014 year.¹⁰

Gambling problems have been identified as an issue in some locations and a factor cited in child neglect cases. Where gambling is prevalent this can impact on parental vigilance and supervision of children and impact on the ready availability of money for food.¹¹

A boarding school for high school students from across the East Arnhem site is projected to open in 2016. **Community members understand the importance of education**, but some Community members are concerned regarding the potential impact on younger siblings due to the absence of this cohort of older role models from their communities. There are concerns that this absence will potentially **disrupt sibling care patterns** that are a traditional feature of caregiving for younger children across the region.

Engaging with fathers, in particular young fathers has also been identified as an emerging need. There are known particular challenges to engaging with this group regarding parenting. Communities have identified the need for whole of family approaches that create opportunities for engagement with both young mother and fathers.

Three direct quotes from Milingimbi community members help summarise some of the strong themes emerging through the consultation process:

- *"Families need to be supported so they are safe, healthy strong places for djamarrkuli to grow"*
- *"We want the school and community to work together"*
- *"We have so many services come out independent of each other. My big suggestion for the welfare of children would be for you guys to talk to each other"*

In the NT Children's Commissioner Annual Report 2013-2014, Dr Howard Bath makes some poignant statements of high relevance to the EA C4C region *"It is hard to do this work and hard to do it in the NT...and presumably even harder to do it in Remote NT Communities! That doesn't mean we give up, it means we put extra effort in".... we need to "focus on ensuring struggling families have the services they need to look after their own kids, that has to be the first priority"*.

Section 3 - Community Engagement

Efficacy of the Program Advisory System

Anglicare NT has worked with a two-tiered Program Advisory System to guide the EA C4C initiative. This is comprised of a formal regional Strategic Advisory Committee and locally based informal Community Advisory Groups. Both levels include community leaders/elders, along with key service providers and stakeholders. Issues raised at the Community Advisory Groups directly influence local planning and support the roll out of activities with information and perspectives fed into Strategic Advisory Committee. We plan to continue this two tiered approach as in general it has worked well and brings together expert knowledge, strategic thinking, regional connections, cultural and local community knowledge and lived experience of community members and carers.

⁹ Northern Territory Government, Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy. Available at <http://www.domesticviolence.nt.gov.au/>

¹⁰ Northern Territory Police, NT Crime Statistics, Nhulunbuy, up to 31/1/2015. Available at <http://pfes.nt.gov.au/Police/Community-safety/Northern-Territory-crime-statistics/Nhulunbuy.aspx>

¹¹ Gambling, housing conditions, community contexts and child health in remote indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, Australia. M., Stevens & R., Bailie BMC Public Health 2012, 12:377

Overall attendance at Strategic Advisory Committee meetings is strong but can fluctuate due to field work and travel obligations of members. We want to explore how to make better use of technology during 2015, and give members the option of participating by tele or videoconference if they are unable to attend in person. Meeting dates necessarily change at times due to other events and the availability of key people and at times we have not been in a position to provide sufficient notice. We will establish an 18 month meeting schedule by the end of May 2015 to assist members in forward planning.

At the March 2015 Strategic Advisory Committee meeting membership was discussed. It was agreed that we needed to refresh membership to reflect changes to the regional service system, the movement of key people into different roles and to ensure we have a strong community based presence not overly dominated by Departmental Officers. It was also identified that we need to strengthen connections with researchers in the area of early childhood development with a focus on supporting the movement towards evidence based activities.

Community Advisory Groups vary across communities and have been kept flexible in order to maximise the participation of diverse voices. Some locations have preferred ad hoc needs driven approaches, while some have smaller but more regular meetings. Opportunistic informal meetings may also be convened due to local drivers and/or visits from EA C4C field staff etc. This responsive approach has maximised community engagement in the strategic planning process and C4C activities in general.

Importantly the Community Advisory Groups respond to local needs and reflect what does or doesn't already exist in terms of interagency meetings, elders advisory forums etc. This reduces the risk of 'over consultation', makes sure there is a good reason to bring people together and helps community members see the outcomes of their input whilst demonstrating respect for a range of community based contributors.

Community Engagement, Feedback and Sustaining Relationships

Central to the ethos of the EA C4C initiative is the need to create and sustain critical relationships at multiple levels which relate to the region of East Arnhem and the key communities which form the site. The EA C4C initiative has been able to capitalise on Anglicare NT's long term presence in the region and build strong relationships with many communities, service providers and key stakeholders. Our organisational respect for culture and language and commitment to Indigenous employment and the employment of culturally competent non-Indigenous staff has and will continue to support community engagement efforts.

Engaging with specific communities and maintaining a working knowledge of what is happening across the region requires a collective effort. Robust working relationships must be sustained with key community leaders, service providers, Community Partners and stakeholders. There is no 'point of arrival' in terms of community engagement; it requires continued effort, ongoing nurturing and intentional strategy.

As the EA C4C Facilitating Partner we need to be realistic about what can be achieved in terms of the depth and nature of community engagement - it must make sense and have rigour at both the community and regional level. It is important to acknowledge that due to geography, travel costs and the dispersed and very remote nature of these communities, we are reliant upon a multifaceted approach to community engagement. It is the combined efforts of the EA C4C Resource Unit, Anglicare NT staff based in the region, Community Partners, service providers, Cultural Brokers and Community Leaders which help maintain these relationships and keep the feedback loop active.

Networks, Collaboration and Resource Sharing

We are committed to targeted networking in the region. This entails participation in selected high value regional and community networks/interagency forums and encouraging Community Partners to participate in interagency forums particularly where we do not have an on the ground presence in a community.

The EA C4C initiative has a strong history of convening the biennial "We Grow Them Up" a Learning Festival and Good Practice Forum which has successfully brought together on average 150 community

representatives, Community Partners, service providers, academics, policy makers and stakeholders working with children and families across the region.

Due to funding constraints a regional forum of this scale will not be replicated during the 2014 – 2019 period unless another funding source is secured. However, we will explore new partnership and sponsorship opportunities and cost effective ways to bring smaller groups together for professional development, sharing of good practice and skills development.

We will work also with Community Partners to explore alternative and/or sustainable funding sources where an activity is filling a recurrent gap in the service system and/ or where a valuable activity requires a higher level of funding outside of the C4C parameters.

Access to infrastructure and key resources is often a challenge when delivering services in remote communities. We will discuss the potential for resource sharing amongst Community Partners, service providers and key stakeholders as a strategy to help things happen that may otherwise be cost prohibitive.

Strong Messaging about Children and Families

Although each C4C site is unique, undertaking the C4C Facilitating Partner role for the East Arnhem site involves heightened complexities and challenges which are not present in the majority of C4C sites across Australia. Whether it is the rate of natural disasters, the impact of climate on service delivery, the small and geographically dispersed nature of communities, the mobility of the target group, the degree of change in service providers, volatility in funding for health and community services, limited infrastructure, the high cost of service delivery and the depth and nature of intergenerational poverty and interface with land, community, culture and language.

Given the above it is important we promote the role of the EA C4C Facilitating Partner and Community Partners and profile the funded activities to ensure communities and stakeholders understand the scope and limitations of the C4C initiative and how activities will value add to community life, help build child friendlier communities and make a difference.

A central platform of our approach to the implementation of the EA C4C initiative is a strong commitment to acknowledging the challenges whilst encouraging a child focused family friendly, strengths based and capacity building approach. This commitment is central the Strategic Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Group discussions and informs the activities to be delivered by Community Partners.

The EA C4C initiative will renew its efforts around electronic and hard copy newsletters and updates, help showcase culturally relevant approaches to working with children and families and promote new resources, shared learning's and emergent promising practices.

We will also work with Community Advisory Groups, local service providers, Community Partners and community members to provide information and a focal point for 'listening to children' at key community events and cultural festivals.

Hearing children's and families voices is pivotal to the development and delivery of effective services, in conjunction with Community Partners, key service providers, peak bodies and special interest groups we will promote innovative tools and child focused and family friendly ways to consult and seek feedback on service design and improvement processes.

Section 4: Service Area Vision

Our Vision

'Communities are child friendly, families are strong and services work together - We Grow Them Up'

We will achieve this by:

- Promoting the right of children to play, learn, grow and thrive in a safe and nurturing environment and for families to have access to the information and support required to be effective caregivers.
- Being part of cross sectorial efforts to build a collective understanding of the regional service system, community needs and cooperative working relationships with a focus on the early intervention prevention continuum for families with children under 12 years of age.
- Supporting bicultural approaches to service delivery and capacity building which respect culture and language and bring together evidence based practices and traditional knowledge.
- Creating meaningful Indigenous employment and skill development opportunities.
- Working with Community Partners and stakeholders to support the development of an evidence base for programs relevant for the EA C4C site, while responding to community aspirations.
- Promoting good practice and the use of trauma informed child safe and strengths based approaches when responding to the needs of families with children under 12 years of age.
- Encouraging opportunities to value add to existing services, share resources and build connections between communities and across the East Arnhem site.
- Using a range of strategies to increase access to information about child development needs, good parenting strategies, services for children and families and referral pathways.
- Promoting understanding of child development milestones, the benefits of early learning opportunities and ways to build the capacity of parents/care givers to support their child's transition to school and ongoing engagement with the education system.
- Contributing to regional strategies focused on making communities safer, including those targeted at preventing child abuse and neglect and community, family and domestic violence.

Section 5: Priority Areas

Priority Area 1: 'Growing Up Strong and Healthy Kids'

Early intervention to enhance child development, particularly in the years prior to the commencement of formal schooling, makes a significant and positive contribution to children's long term health, wellbeing and overall life outcomes. Existing Child development and educational outcome data from the Australian Early Developmental Census for the East Arnhem region (North Miwatj; South Miwatj areas) highlight the critical need for increased support in this area.

Research strongly indicates that positive cognitive, social and emotional development outcomes, particularly from birth to 3 years, have a long-term impact on a child's chances in life. The brain is strengthened by positive early experiences, especially stable relationships with caring and responsive adults, safe and supportive environments and appropriate nutrition.¹²

The opportunity to develop attachment to a consistent caregiver optimises a child's capacity for development. Critical neural connections and pathways are laid down from pre-birth and during the first 3 years in life, noting high levels of cortisol associated with stress in early childhood may impede the child's capacity for learning and the formation of memory. Continuing stressful experiences and environments can impact negatively on school readiness.¹³

One of the NT Department of Education goals in the Strategic Plan 2013-2015 is "A Great Start for Children" this is to be achieved by "working with families so children have the best possible start in life and begin school ready to learn".¹⁴ Families in East Arnhem communities demonstrate a strong desire for children to learn to read and to be educated, however children in remote communities continue to struggle with this fundamental skill. Experts in the field of early childhood development argue that pre-literacy and numeracy programs play a significant part in enabling children to develop key skills during their school years.¹⁵ Children in the early years prior to school need exposure to books and other age appropriate communication resources that include familiar concepts in local languages.

A recent study of selected communities reports one quarter of total food expenditure was on non-alcoholic beverages; 15.6% on sugar sweetened drinks; 2.2% spent on fruit and 5.4% spent on vegetables; Sugars contributed to 25.7-34.3% of dietary energy. 71% of which was sugar sweetened drinks and table sugar. White bread was a major source of energy and most nutrients in all 3 communities. Poor diet continues to be a characteristic of remote Aboriginal community nutrition profiles since the earliest studies almost 3 decades ago.¹⁶

Access to adequate and nutritious food and developmentally appropriate play and learning activities is critical for child development. Food security for families across the site is an issue; this is compounded by growing pressures on family financial resources. The interface between nutrition, child development, early identification of health issues, and building the foundations for learning present a critical focus point.

¹² Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2010). *The foundations of lifelong health are built in early childhood*. http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports_and_working_papers/foundations-of-lifelong-health/

¹³ Farrar E., Goldfeld S., Moore T., (2007). School Readiness. Communities for Children Compendium 2007. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

¹⁴ The Department of Education Strategic Plan 2013-2015, *Creating Success Together*. Available at <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/about-us/strategic-plan>

¹⁵ Justice L. M. Literacy and its impact on child development: Comments on Tomblin and Senechal. *Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood Development*, 2005:1-5.

¹⁶ Characteristics of the community-level diet of Aboriginal people in remote northern Australia. J. L. Brimblecombe (2013).

This Priority Area meets the C4C FP objectives:

- **Healthy Young Families** - supporting parents to care for their children before and after birth and throughout the early years.
- **Early Learning** – provide access to high quality early learning opportunities in the years before school; provide early identification and support of children at risk of developmental and behavioural problems; assist parents with ways they can stimulate and promote child development and learning from birth.

Strategies to improve outcomes:

- Continue to identify, adapt and provide culturally relevant in-depth learning opportunities and information resources focussed on increasing parents and caregivers' understanding of the development and wellbeing needs of children aged 0-5 years.
- Highlight the importance of developmentally appropriate nutrition, particularly during key periods, including transition to solids.
- Provide high quality play and learning support activities to facilitate early learning and development experiences, including pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities.
- Strengthen parenting skills, engagement in support systems and peer learning opportunities to build the capacity of vulnerable families with young children.
- Building community awareness and understanding of child development including impacts pre-pregnancy, nutrition and the importance of early learning.

Measurement of outcomes:

Methods for measuring outcomes will include participation and engagement data and activity evaluation including feedback from participants, families, and key community stakeholders. Longer term site wide outcomes measures include feedback from community stakeholders, early childhood development and education services and health providers. Population level data results for example NAPLAN and AEDC results will be monitored as this data provides high level information and helps set the context for ongoing decision making - noting that there is a complex interface of variables impacting on these results.

Key stakeholders:

The target group for this priority area is children age 0 -5 years and their immediate and extended families, with a particular emphasis on the engagement of young mothers and young fathers. The key stakeholders identified for this priority area are family and child related support services, early childhood services, health clinics, and schools, Department of Children & Families (DCF) and Community Advisory Groups.

Priority Area 2: 'Strengthening Vulnerable Families'

The vast majority of families in the disadvantaged communities of East Arnhem face considerable challenges which impact on the health and wellbeing of children. Population data available through the ABS and reported on the My School website (2014) for specific school communities within the site indicate economic indices and developmental outcomes are poor relative to mainstream population centres, with the majority of children assessed as developmentally vulnerable in relation to at least one domain (physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication and general knowledge).¹⁷

¹⁷ Australian Early Development Census Data, 2012. Available at <http://www.aedc.gov.au/data>

This is compounded by isolation, limited specialist services, and the extensive social and environmental issues faced by the remote communities combined with high incidences of current and inter-generational trauma. Indigenous children in the NT are more likely to be victims of child abuse and neglect than non-Indigenous children and are over-represented in out of home care placements.¹⁸

Chronic illness combines with community and family violence to impact on the capacity of caregivers and extended family networks to ensure children's health and wellbeing potential is optimised through safe, secure and consistent environments. Consequently, strengthening the capacity of vulnerable families is central to outcomes. Feedback from stakeholders and Community Partners indicates a need for targeted support for young parents (with anecdotal evidence of an increasing prevalence of very young pregnancies).

Early intervention is critical to achieving good health and improved cognitive functioning and life outcomes for traumatised children. Successful interventions have been proven to reduce the incidence of chronic disease, antisocial behaviour, mental health problems and substance misuse.¹⁹ Addressing risk factors in children is enhanced when the overall functioning of the family is supported and this is aligned to improved access to adequate housing and addressing health, family violence and income management issues.²⁰

Effective interventions are characterised by a strong child focus, culturally appropriate practice, collaborative service provision and flexible delivery that takes account of the patterns of remote community life in order to ensure outcomes are achievable within the local service delivery context.

A strengths-based approach to working with families to identify solutions to child health and wellbeing issues and safety concerns based on assessing the collective and individual capacity and needs of family members has been identified as an example of a successful bi-cultural practice in NT.²¹ Support services are more effective when they can work alongside existing family resources to promote help-seeking behaviours and support the development of family skills. Effective activities enhance collaboration with other service providers in order to successfully address complex family issues.

This Priority Area meets the C4C FP objectives:

- **Supporting Families and Parents** – support for parents to provide children with secure attachment, consistent discipline and quality environments that are stable, positive, stimulating, safe and secure.

Strategies to improve outcomes:

- Provide strengths based bicultural case-management support for vulnerable families and parents/caregivers of children up to 12 years of age who have been identified as at risk of poor outcomes or at risk of abuse or neglect abuse or neglect.
- Strengthen parenting skills through engagement in support systems, mentoring and peer learning opportunities.
- Deliver culturally appropriate targeted assistance designed to engage and support new and particularly very young parents, from pre-birth and through the early years.

¹⁸ Office of the Children's Commissioner (2014) Children's Commissioner Northern Territory Annual Report 2013-2014 Available at http://childrenscommissioner.nt.gov.au/publications/annual_report_2013-14.pdf

¹⁹ Early Childhood Intervention Australia Chapter, 2010, revised 2014. *Early Intervention Best Practice discussion paper*. Available at <http://www.ecia.org.au/documents/item/114>

²⁰ *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2014* (2009) available at <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business>

²¹ McGuinness, K, & Leckning, B (2013) *Bicultural Practice in the Northern Territory Children and Families Sector: Practitioners' reflections of working two-ways*. Menzies School of Health Research, Centre for Child Development and Education and Strong Aboriginal Families, Together (SAF,T)

Measurement of outcomes:

Methods for measuring outcomes include participation and engagement data and activity evaluation including feedback from participants, families, and key community stakeholders. Longer term site wide outcomes measures include feedback from community stakeholders, early childhood development and education services and health providers. Population level data results for example NAPLAN and AEDC results will be monitored as this data provides high level information and helps set the context for ongoing decision making - noting that there is a complex interface of variables impacting on these results.

Key stakeholders:

The target group for this priority area is the immediate and extended families of children age 0-12 years identified as at risk. The key stakeholders identified for this priority area are family and child related support and early childhood services, schools, health clinics, DCF and Community Advisory Groups.

Priority Area 3: 'Strong Families, Strong Schools, Strong Communities'

In each of the remote communities across the East Arnhem C4C site, the school is a critical and central hub for children and their families. School attendance and achievement in the East Arnhem region continues to be low, particularly for Indigenous students.²²

The Department of Education has a commitment "to creating opportunities and the environment for successful learning for every student in every school".²³ Various approaches have been used by the Department of Education to increase school attendance rates, these efforts combine with PMC measures such as the Remote Schools Attendance Strategy which are active in remote communities across the EA site.²⁴

The relationship between schools and parents is a key component in the transition to school process and in terms of the child ongoing engagement with school i.e. parents/caregivers can either be active supporters of education or passive detractors from attendance and educational attainment. Feedback indicates that in some communities, parents feel disconnected and disempowered in their relationship with schools and along with other measures the relationship interface must be addressed.

Feedback from Community Partners and key community members across the site combines with our own observations to indicate children benefit from investments made in building the capacity of parents (mothers and fathers)/caregivers to engage more confidently and positively with schools.

No parent intentionally wants their child to fail at school. Providing parents with safe and culturally relevant experiential learning and development opportunities which encourage participation with school, other families and services providers helps address issues of disengagement, low self-esteem and lack of confidence. Activities that build on and link existing services and support structures, and which adopt an action research approach in working to identify effective ways to strengthen communities and families in East Arnhem assist in providing children with a supportive environment conducive to optimum growth.²⁵

²² National Assessment Program results, 2014 Available at <http://reports.acara.au/Home?Results>

²³ The Department of Education Strategic Plan 2013-2015, *Creating Success Together*. Available at <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/students/at-school/enrolment-attendance/enrolment-attendance-statistics>

²⁴ Attendance Data NT Government RSAS Schools. Available at http://minister.indigenous.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/2014-02-27_school_attendance_data.pdf

²⁵ Price-Robinson R. and McDonald M., 2011. *Working with Indigenous children, families, and communities: Lessons from practice* CAFCA Practice Sheet. Available at <https://www3.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/working-indigenous-children-families-and-communities>

This Priority Area meets the C4C FP objective:

- **School Transition and Engagement** – support children and families to make a smooth transition to school and work with local schools to assist children and families in their ongoing engagement with school.

Strategies to improve outcomes:

- Strengthen links between families and schools and build collaboration between schools, early childhood learning and development services maximise community and family engagement with schools during the early and primary years.
- Contribute to early childhood development and learning networks and support small-scale locally based initiatives.
- Deliver culturally relevant parenting programs which strengthen the capacity of parents/caregivers to support their child's education and manage the complex interface with the education system.

Measurement of outcomes:

Methods for measuring outcomes will include participation and engagement data and activity evaluation including feedback from participants, families, and key community stakeholders including schools. Longer term site wide outcomes measures include feedback from stakeholders, early childhood development and education services and health providers. Population level data results for example NAPLAN and AEDC results will be monitored as this data provides high level information and helps set the context for ongoing decision making - noting that there is a complex interface of variables impacting on these results.

Key stakeholders:

The target group for this priority area is school age and pre-school age children and their immediate and extended families. The key stakeholders identified for the priority area are the Department of Education, schools, family and child related support services, early childhood services, health clinics, DCF, RJCP and Community Advisory Groups.

Priority Area 4: 'Creating Child-Friendly, Connected Communities'

Building service provider and community awareness about how to make children central to our deliberations, planning and decision making processes by hearing children's voices and keeping focused on meeting their needs is important. We will ensure opportunities to share learning's, embed bicultural practices, promote cooperative approaches and address service fragmentation (where this is identified as an issue) are created along with encouraging collective efforts to work together to address issues such as limited infrastructure and resources.

Contributions to planning processes at community and regional levels focused on keeping children safe and strengthening the sense of community connectedness experienced by families will also be a feature. Children's needs should be highlighted in planning, including responses to traumatic events such as natural disasters, community violence and suicides.

To be functional and economically productive communities must be safe for all members. The release of the Little Children are Sacred Report ²⁶ and the Inquiry into child Protection in the NT ²⁷ highlight the need for communities to take an active role in championing the safety and wellbeing of their children.

The diversity between communities across the East Arnhem site means that each community's perspectives and circumstances need to be respected, and localised solutions and approaches to issues evolved in conjunction with the provision of relevant mainstream and tailored evidence based activities. This is an important consideration as at present there is a limited number of programs approved through the C4C Expert Advisory System that have been applied in remote Aboriginal community contexts.

There is also benefit in facilitating opportunities for remote community members, service providers, policy makers and researchers to learn from each other's experiences. Supporting collaborative approaches to planning will be vital for effective resource allocation and the development and sharing of local solutions and evidence-based practice.

This Priority Area meets the C4C FP objectives:

- **Create Strong, Child Friendly Communities** - that understand the importance of children and apply this capacity to maximise the health, well-being and early development of young children at the local level.

Strategies to improve outcomes:

- Identify and resource key community members and local employee participation in community and in regional planning processes that involve services for children pre-birth to 12 years.
- Create and/or participate in forums and processes which encourage service providers to work together, share learning's, collaborate in planning and share infrastructure and resources at both the local community and regional levels to the benefit of the children and their families/carers.
- Ensure the rights of children to be protected from harm, abuse, exploitation and neglect, to practice and grow up with culture and language with access to a quality education and health services remains a central focus.

Measurement of outcomes:

Methods for measuring outcomes will include participation and engagement data and activity evaluation including feedback from participants, families, and key community stakeholders, Community Partners. Longer term site wide outcomes measures include feedback from community leaders, stakeholders, early childhood development and education services and health providers, Community Advisory Groups, Strategic Advisory committee and other interagency forums. Population level data results for example NAPLAN and AEDC results will be monitored as this data provides high level information and helps set the context for ongoing decision making - noting that there is a complex interface of variables impacting on these results.

Key stakeholders:

The target group for this priority area is service providers, key community stakeholders, children 0 – 12 years and their immediate and extended families. The key stakeholders identified for the priority area are , family and child related support services, early childhood services, Remote Job Community Placements providers, health clinics, schools, DCF and Community Advisory Groups, children and families.

²⁶ Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007. "Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle"-Little Children are Sacred Available at http://www.inquiryntsaac.nt.gov.au/pdf/bipacsa_final_report.pdf

²⁷ Bamblett, M. Bath, H. and Roseby, R. 2010 *Growing them Strong, Together: Promoting the safety and wellbeing of the Northern Territory's Children*, Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory 2010, available at http://www.childprotectioninquiry.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/49779/CPSR_Summary.pdf

