



Phone: (08) 89710 196
Fax: (08) 89721 012
Email: kics@bigpond.com
www.kics.org.au

Postal Address
PO Box 1601
Katherine NT 0851

Office Location
2/14 Pearce Street
Katherine South NT 0850

ABN: 54 811 702 709

24 April 2019

Dear Honourable Senator Scullion,

Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS) is a remote, mobile playgroup and parent information service funded through the Prime Minister & Cabinet (PMC) Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). KICS has operated in the greater Katherine region for the past 30 years bringing the joy of play based learning to children and families who are socially and geographically isolated and have no or limited access to services. KICS is an Incorporated Association governed by a Board of Management and we have 4 full time employees as Playgroup facilitators, 2 part time office staff including the Coordinator and casual staff from time to time for specific events. In order to bring the joy of play based learning to children who are socially and geographically isolated KICS has 2 Toyota Landcruisers and each tows a purpose-built trailer full of toys and resources. Each team travels approx. 48,000km per year, mostly over gravel roads which may or may not have been graded.

In the 2017/2018 financial year KICS received \$370,000 funding through our BBF contract and \$99,000 through our IAS contract for the delivery of the KICS supported playgroup to socially and geographically isolated children living remotely. In the 2018/2019 KICS received \$370,000 through our first IAS contract (rolled over from BBF with zero increase) and \$0 from the second IAS contract. To offset this \$99,000 deficit in our funding, KICS asked our funding manager to bring forward a payment of \$33,000 from the 2019/2020 financial year. We still have a \$66,000 deficit in funding this financial year. KICS sourced additional funding of \$38,000 for a new purpose built trailer and are still utilising a 2013 vehicle with 240,000km on the odometer and a 2015 vehicle with 150,000km on the odometer. The safety of our staff is of concern to the KICS Board. KICS has repeatedly requested new vehicles but has had a change of 4 PMC funding managers in the past 6 months.

I refer to the recent Australian Early Development Census National Report 2018 published in March 2019. Research shows that investing time, effort and resources in children's early years, when their brains are developing rapidly, benefits children and the whole community. Early developmental gains support children through their school years and beyond. Early childhood development is increasingly recognised as a key predictor of future outcomes for children. Research has shown that investing time, effort and resources in the early years of a child's life has significant impacts on their behaviour, learning, health and wellbeing, as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Supporting early childhood development thus lays the basis for children to grow up with the skills to succeed, bringing benefits for them and the community as a whole. The report has 5 domains and I note:

Physical health and well-being There has been a steadily increasing gap in the percentage of children living in Very Remote Australia who are developmentally vulnerable on this domain, compared to children living in major cities from 12.3% in 2012 to 14.6% in 2018.

Social Competence The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on this domain in Very Remote Australia decreased from 24% in 2015 to 22.4% in 2018, whilst the percentage living in Major Cities remained unchanged at 9.3%, resulting in a narrowing of the gap but remaining wider than the baseline.

Emotional maturity In 2018, children living in Very Remote Australia were at least twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable on the emotional maturity domain than children living in Major Cities. This gap has narrowed since 2015 when the difference was nearly three times.

Language and cognitive skills The NT had a significant decrease in vulnerability from 21.5% in 2015 to 19.6% in 2018. Children living in Very Remote Australia were more than five times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on the language and cognitive skills domain than children living in Major Cities in 2018, a gap that has been steadily increasing since 2012. The gap is the most marked on this domain.

Communication and general knowledge In 2018, children living in Very Remote Australia were nearly three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on this domain than children living in Major Cities, a gap that has been widening since 2012.

Children living in Very Remote areas in Australia in 2018 were more than twice as likely as those living in Major Cities to be developmentally vulnerable on one or two domains (45.5 and 20.8%). They were also three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (30.3 and 10.2%). Following an increase in 2015, the percentage of children who live in Remote or Very Remote are who were developmentally vulnerable on one or more or two or more domains decreased in 2018, albeit not back to 2012 levels. This gap had been widening since baseline, but has now narrowed slightly.

Which brings us back to Katherine Isolated Children's Service. KICS is a remote, mobile playgroup and parent information service that travels to communities and stations to bring the joy of play based learning to children and families who are socially and geographically isolated. As a mobile supported playgroup service, the KICS teams travel to remote families in their own community or property, where they can come together in a common space to share experiences of child rearing, child development and share in their children's early learning journey. KICS playgroups are set up outdoors in a familiar environment so as to be inviting and accessible to families with young children and as such reduce barriers to participation. KICS visits over 30 pastoral stations, over 20 Indigenous communities and 3 small townships on rotation, aiming for 2 visits a term or 8-10 visits a year; a full list is attached of KICS venues and please note that of the 50+ KICS venues, only 10 have a FaFT educator. In 2018 KICS had 3125 children attend playgroup, 2370 (76%) of whom identified as Indigenous. KICS offer value for money through our ability to travel to children who cannot access FaFT sites because of their remote location.

Our current contracts both end in December where they will be rolled into one, at this point in time we have an interest in the outcome of the announced election and are hoping that Early Childhood services and KICS especially are on the political radar because our service, whilst fun for all concerned, does actually have social and developmental benefits supported by research. The new contract has implications for whether or not both full-time teams return and whether the staffing and service provision is restructured; so it is a period of uncertainty for KICS and its 4 full-time and 2 part-time staff. The KICS Board of Management and I would like to see KICS continue with two full time teams delivering 8-9 playgroups per week at different venues and visiting over 50 venues to bring the joy of play based learning to remote children and families. Please let me know if remote children and families can count on your support.

Kind regards,

Amanda Tootell
KICS Coordinator

Signature

Name Linda Blackwood

Position Public Officer

Signature

Name Katie Payne

Position

Katherine Isolated Children's Service Venues list 2019

Pastoral Stations	Indigenous Communities	Townships
1. Alexandria Station	1. Amanbidgi	1. Elliott*
2. Alroy Downs	2. Barunga*	2. Mataranka*
3. Amungee Mungee	3. Beswick / Wugularr*	3. Timber Creek
4. Aroona Station	4. Bulla Camp	
5. Auvergne Station	5. Bulman	
6. Brunette Downs	6. Campbell Springs	
7. Bullo River Station	7. Corella Creek	
8. Camfield Station	8. Jilkminggan*	
9. Calvert Hills Station	9. Kalkaringi*	
10. Carpentaria Station	10. Lajamanu*	
11. El Questro Station	11. Manyallaluk	
12. Eva Downs	12. Marlinja	
13. Hayfield Station	13. Marilyn	
14. Helen Springs Station	14. Minyerri*	
15. Hi-Way Inn Daly Waters	15. Myatt	
16. Inverway Station	16. Ngukurr*	
17. Kalala Station	17. Numbulwar*	
18. Larrizona Station	18. Pigeon Hole Community	
19. Legune Station	19. Robinson River	
20. Limbunya Station	20. Urapunga	
21. Margaret Downs	21. Yarralin	
22. Mathieson Station		
23. McArthur River Station		
24. Moolooloo Station		
25. Moroak Station		
26. Mountain Valley Station		
27. Nelson Springs		
28. Newcastle Waters Station		
29. Newry Station		
30. Pigeon Hole Station		
31. Sophie Downs		
32. Sturt Plains		
33. Suplejack Station		
34. Ucharonidge Station		
35. Victoria River Downs		
36. Willeroo Station		
37. Zebra Rock Mine		
		*10 FaFT sites