



24 June 2019

Statement: Minister's announcement a great outcome for children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage

Northside welcomes the announcement today by the Deputy Chief Minister and Education Minister Yvette Berry that provides further details on the ACT Government's commitment to roll out access to free early childhood education (ECE) for three-year-olds.

We commend the ACT Government for committing funding to free access to ECE for three-year-olds, at a time when the Federal Government has only committed funding for access to four-year-olds until 2020. Ms Berry is to be commended for showing leadership in the national education policy landscape.

In particular, Northside welcomes the Ms Berry's announcement that up to 400 places will be made available from 2020 for children experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, vulnerability or disadvantage. The focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is of particular importance, given the concerning over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the ACT's child protection, youth justice, and criminal justice systems.

Northside's CEO, Bruce Papps: "Northside has strongly advocated at the Territory and Federal level for greater access to high-quality early education for all children, but particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We've seen how important this is in practice through our partnership with CIT Yurauna, which sees Indigenous children from birth to school age accessing early education while their parents study a qualification."

Quality, culturally-competent ECE environments can provide an antidote to adversity and vulnerability. A recent Australian National University analysis of the impact of ECE and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children pointed to evidence that ECE has a "positive effect on developmental outcomes in the longer term" and makes a recommendation to policy-makers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific ECE programs should be trialled and invested in.

Northside welcomes the ACT Government's commitment to ensuring that ECE provided to Indigenous children is culturally safe.

Bruce Papps: "Our experience at the Yurauna Early Childhood Centre has demonstrated the important of cultural safety when delivering early education. We have listened carefully to Indigenous leaders at CIT Yurauna, as well as working to form strong and respectful relationships with families. We know that without that guidance and knowledge, children's outcomes would not be as positive. We look forward to hearing how the ACT Government will continue to consult, listen and be led by the Indigenous community on ensuring culturally safe approaches to ECE."

Northside has also maintained a strong commitment to the quality provision of ECE under Australia's National Quality Framework and continues to advocate that providers in the ACT should meet the minimum quality requirements of the National Quality Standards. We look forward to collaborating with the ACT Government on ensuring that all ECE services in the ACT can be supported to meet or exceed those requirements.

Northside is committed to continuing to work closely with the ACT Government on strengthening, embedding and expanding children's access to high-quality ECE from birth. We look forward to seeing the Early Childhood Strategy and working with Ms Berry and the Education Department on its implementation.

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