

HEARING
Children's Voices
IN THE KATHERINE REGION



This project was developed and facilitated by the Katherine Region Communities for Children Facilitating Partner.

An enormous thank you to our partner schools – Clyde Fenton School, Kintore St School, Timber Creek School and Jilkminggan School – and consultant, Justine Davis. This project was made possible by the amazing efforts of the children and the adults that believe in and support them.

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"making our voices strong and loud.."

"so kids can have a happy life"

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Appendix One: Summary of tools used

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1. Overview

The Hearing Children's Voices Project explores a different way of working with children in the Katherine Region. It aims to build the ability of children to have their say in a safe and respectful environment and hold a genuine voice within their community.

The Katherine Region Communities for Children Facilitating Partner (CfC FP) facilitated this project to ensure our work is connected to and guided by what children think is important. We view this project as a foundation for ongoing relationships with schools and communities, to ensure we are able to best support children and families in the Katherine Region.

The Hearing Children's Voices Project took place over 11 months, from March 2018, with the initial direction developed in collaboration with child-related services across the Katherine Region. The Katherine Region CfC FP then partnered with four schools - Clyde Fenton School, Kintore Street School, Jilkminggan School and Timber Creek School - to address three key questions: *what is important to children? how can we help children get the most out of school? and how can children best be heard?*

At each school, children were supported to design questions and conduct interviews with other kids and community members. While unique projects developed at each site, common to all sites was an increased voice of young people; sharing and recording of ideas about what is important to children and how their communities can support them; and a commitment to working together to create the best communities for our children.

2. How to use this report

Many great ideas were raised throughout this project. We hope each of the communities involved can draw on these ideas, to continue conversations with children about what is most important to them and work together to keep creating stronger communities for children.

We also hope that other services find this document a useful resource for achieving genuine engagement with children and communities.



3. Project background

Communities for Children Facilitating Partner (CfC FP) forms part of the Department of Social Services' Families and Children Activity. This activity aims to deliver positive and sustainable outcomes for children and families throughout Australia.

The objectives of the CfC FP initiative are:

- > To improve the health and wellbeing of families and the development of young children, from before birth through to age 12 years, paying special attention to:
 - Healthy young families
 - Supporting families and parents
 - Early learning
 - School transition and engagement
- > To create strong child friendly communities that understand the importance of children and apply this capacity to maximise the health, wellbeing and early development of young children at the local level.



The Katherine Region CfC FP is facilitated by The Smith Family, with the support of the Communities for Children Facilitating Partner Committee (CCC).

This project came about in response to a request from our Committee for greater inclusion of children's perspectives as part of the Katherine Region Communities for Children FP ongoing engagement in the region.



4. Giving children a voice

Children have the right to have a say in matters that affect them, and for their views and opinions to be taken seriously.

(Article 12 – convention on the Rights of the Child)



a. Why it is important

This project sits within a national and international evidence-based framework about the importance and value of giving children a voice. Child participation is one of the core principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which says that children and young people have the right to freely express their views, and that there is an obligation to listen to children's views, and to facilitate their participation in all matters affecting them.



The past 30 years have produced wide-ranging research on the importance of children's participation in decision making, in particular in family, health, and education related issues.¹ At the same time approaches to effective and meaningful participation of children have been well documented and there are extensive, well researched and well tested resources available for services to use to ensure robust engagement and participation of children.²

The design, implementation and outcomes of this project resonate with other work undertaken in the NT³, elsewhere in Australia⁴ and overseas⁵, while providing some new, place-based perspectives into successful processes for consulting with, and listening to, children.

"Our kids voices are just as valuable as anybody else's"

Principal, Kintore Street School

1 Save the Children Participation Working Group (2003); UNICEF and The Save the Children Fund (2011)

2 See Appendix Two: References and resources

3 Anglicare NT (2012); NAPCAN (2016); Office of the Children's Commissioner NT (2018)

4 Harris, P., & Manatakis, H. (2013); Dept. of Child Safety Youth & Women (2018); Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia (2009)

5 Smail, P. (2007); Larkins, C. & Bilson, A. (2016); Madden, S. (2001)

b. Challenges and things to consider

Key to this project was a commitment to working ethically with communities and children. This included considering:

- > the challenges of gaining consent,
- > ensuring we were hearing the genuine voice of children,
- > working at all times with the safety of children as a first principle, and
- > a commitment that the children who participated in the project would benefit from it.

Through the initial planning workshops and throughout the implementation of the project we drew on best practice principles⁶, and used the *Code of Ethics for people working with children & young people in the NT: Our Kids, Safe + Strong* as a strong basis to work from⁷.

c. The need for hearing children's voices in the Katherine Region

The planning workshops confirmed the importance of this project to stakeholders in the Katherine Region. Whilst there have been some initiatives to engage with children in the Northern Territory⁸, this has been limited and this project filled a clearly identified gap. There are a wide variety of child-related services delivered by Government and non-government organisations in the Katherine Region. Involving children's ideas and perspectives in the design and delivery of these services is a valuable and welcomed approach, in line with national and international best practice principles in working with children.



⁶ Interagency working group on Children's Participation (2007); Save the Children UK (2005); Johnson, V., Hart R. & Colwell J. (2014)

⁷ NAPCAN, NTCOSS & SNAICC (n.d)

⁸ See footnote 3.

5. Hearing Children's Voices in the Katherine Region

a. Aim

The Hearing Children's Voices Project aimed to develop a child-centred, place-based engagement framework to learn about what is important to children in the Katherine Region.

b. What we did

The Children's Voices Project evolved throughout its delivery, from March 2018 to January 2019. The initial direction was shaped through two stakeholder workshops, which enabled valuable perspectives and input from child-related services across the Katherine Region.



These workshops developed an engagement framework, which recommended, we:

- > Work directly with schools in order to engage children in a safe and comfortable environment
- > Work with small number of schools to allow enough time and resources for meaningful engagement
- > Provide a variety of opportunities for children to express themselves
- > Ensure the project benefits the community
- > Share what we learn back with the community
- > Share what we learn with other services in the Katherine Region

We partnered with four schools in the Katherine Region, focusing on three key

questions - *what is important to children? how can we help children get the most out of school? and how can children best be heard?* These four schools were excited about the potential of this project, and the diversity of sites enabled us to see the engagement framework applied in different school and community contexts. The framework was designed to be adaptable to the wants and needs of each partner school and its students, resulting in unique projects at each school. This process has provided a basis for ongoing engagement between The Smith Family and schools in our Region.

c. Partner schools

- > **Clyde Fenton School** is a P-6 Primary School based in Katherine. Approximately 210 students attend the school from Katherine, Binjari, Rockhole and Kalano. It has a well-established Leadership Group that meets weekly, with support from the Leadership Teacher.
- > **Kintore Street School** is based in Katherine and caters for students from P-12, with physical and intellectual impairments. Approximately 50 students attend the school from Katherine, Binjari, Rockhole and Kalano.
- > **Jilkminggan School** is located in the community of Jilkminggan, 1.5 hours South East of Katherine. The population of Jilkminggan is approximately 350, with 76 students (P-12) attending the school. The main language spoken is Eastside Kriol, while the main language group is Mangarrayi.
- > **Timber Creek School** is located in the community of Timber Creek, 3 hours West of Katherine. The community is a regional service centre for local Indigenous communities, cattle stations and tourists. The population of Timber Creek is approximately 700, with 48 students (P-9) attending the school.

The main language groups are Ngarinyman and Ngaliwurru, with West Kriol also a spoken language of this community.



6. School projects

Clyde Fenton School

Students identified the main problems faced by students at their school and initiated lunchtime activities to reduce bullying and help kids who were feeling lonely.

Project team: The Clyde Fenton School Leadership Group - 23 nominated students from Year 4, 5 & 6. This group meets weekly with the Leadership Teacher, to work on projects to improve the experience of students at the school.

Sessions: Six sessions over two terms, with supporting work led by the Leadership Teacher in between The Smith Family visits. Each session was 45 minutes, held during the Leadership Group's weekly meeting.

What we did:

- > The Smith Family and students got to know each other through relationship building activities, including students drawing pictures to represent what is important to them and something they dream for.
- > Students were asked to plan and deliver a project creating positive change in the school.
- > We explored different research tools used to help people share ideas, including drawing pictures, taking photographs and getting creative with surveys.
- > To identify problems and potential solutions at the school, the students chose to interview other students, developing different questions for each year level. Teachers were also asked to complete a written survey.
- > After analysing the answers, students decided to focus on the issues of bullying and loneliness. In response, they initiated and led a variety of indoor and outdoor lunchtime activities.
- > Students evaluated the success of the activities and believed they had helped reduce bullying and loneliness at their school. They observed students taking part who have previously been alone at lunchtimes and 'bullies' themselves joining in as well!

What students are saying at Clyde Fenton School

What is important to children?



BEING CREATIVE
Art Music

BEING ACTIVE
Sport

FEELING SAFE & RESPECTED

HAVING FUN

SCHOOL & LEARNING

FAMILY & FRIENDS

Not bullying or swearing
Feeling safe at school
Good behaviour

Fun
Playing

Maths
School

Family
Friends

BEING HEALTHY
Food

How can we make school better?

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE, CREATIVE & HAVE FUN

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO FEEL SAFE & RESPECTED

Being more strict on bad behaviour
No bullying, teasing or fighting

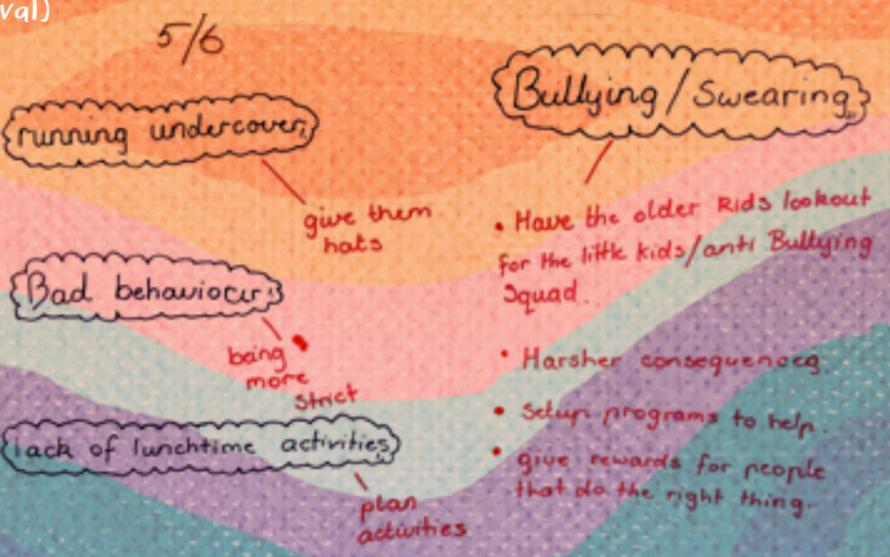
More sports equipment (eg. skipping ropes, footballs, basketballs, swings on the oval)

Posters to stop bullying
Listen to others
Nicer people

More lunchtime activities

Harsher consequence for bullying and swearing
Give rewards for people that do the right thing
Give students hats to stop them running in the undercover area
Set up programs to help with bullying and swearing
Have the older kids look out for little kids (anti-bullying squad)

More time at lunch
Paint monkey bars



Do you like the length for lunch?

Do you have friends to play with at lunch

Do you think there is enough equipment?

Do you feel safe at school?

No
Yes

No
Yes

No
Yes

No
Yes

What teachers are saying at Clyde Fenton School

What is important to children?

SCHOOL & LEARNING

Opportunity to learn
Given help they need during lessons/class

FEELING SAFE & RESPECTED

Being rewarded for good work
Safe and have friends
Knowing adults are here to help

BEING CREATIVE

Programs outside of class

How can we make school better?

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO FEEL SAFE & RESPECTED

Kids help each other through peer support program to stop bullying
Students vote to decide on activities offered at lunch and after school

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE, CREATIVE & HAVE FUN

Activities outside of school and at lunch

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO LEARN

Activities for younger students
Teach art and Information and Communications Technology

Kintore Street School

Students saw their ideas put into action - presenting to the School Holiday Committee at the Katherine Government Centre and successfully receiving funding for a Family Pool Day!

Project team: 10 senior students

Sessions: Nine sessions over two terms, with some additional work led by Kintore Street teachers in-between visits. Each session was 30 minutes, with the Smith Family joining the students for 15 minutes of recess activities beforehand.

What we did:

- > The Smith Family and students got to know each other through relationship building activities, including students drawing pictures to represent what makes them happy and something they dream for at school.
- > Students were asked to plan a school holiday activity for the upcoming school holidays.
- > The students gathered ideas by interviewing each other and drawing pictures representing what they would like to do in the school holidays.
- > They each voted for their two favourite ideas and a Pool Day was chosen as the overall favourite activity.
- > The students planned the details of the event and presented their idea at the School Holiday Committee meeting. They successfully received funding for the event!
- > The Smith Family, Kintore Street and YMCA worked together to put on a Family Pool Day during the January school holidays. 13 Children and 9 adults attended – all having a great time on the commando course and eating hot dogs!
- > Students evaluated the event. Each of the kids enjoyed different aspects of the process, from voting to designing a poster, and having fun on the day. They were all excited to plan another event!

What students are saying at Kintore Street School

What makes children happy?

NATURE

- Animals
- Camping
- Trees
- Flowers
- Gardening
- Park



BEING ACTIVE

- Gymnastics
- Swimming
- Fishing
- Basketball
- Soccer
- Slate park
- Trampoline
- Quad bike riding
- Circus
- Boxing
- Cricket

FAMILY & FRIENDS

- Visiting elderly
- Friends



BEING CREATIVE

- Concert
- Lego
- Music
- Looking
- Dancing
- Art
- Singing
- Writing stories
- Drawing
- Books
- Clay decorating



FEELING SAFE & RESPECTED

- Rewards
- Feeling safe
- Sleeping in



SCHOOL & LEARNING

- Design and Technology
- Learning Work
- Maths
- Science
- Teachers
- Visitors at school
- The bus trip to school
- Laptop
- IPads



How can we make school better?



SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE & HAVE FUN

- No uniform
- Lava
- More gardens and plants
- Red back spiders
- Gymnastics room
- Playground
- Treehouse
- Climbing structure
- Basketball court
- Pool
- Basketball
- Football oval and soccer field
- Pool fun day with pool



SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE CREATIVE

- Looking class
- Reading room
- New stage
- Recording studio



YMCA Swimming Day

January 23rd 2019 Water

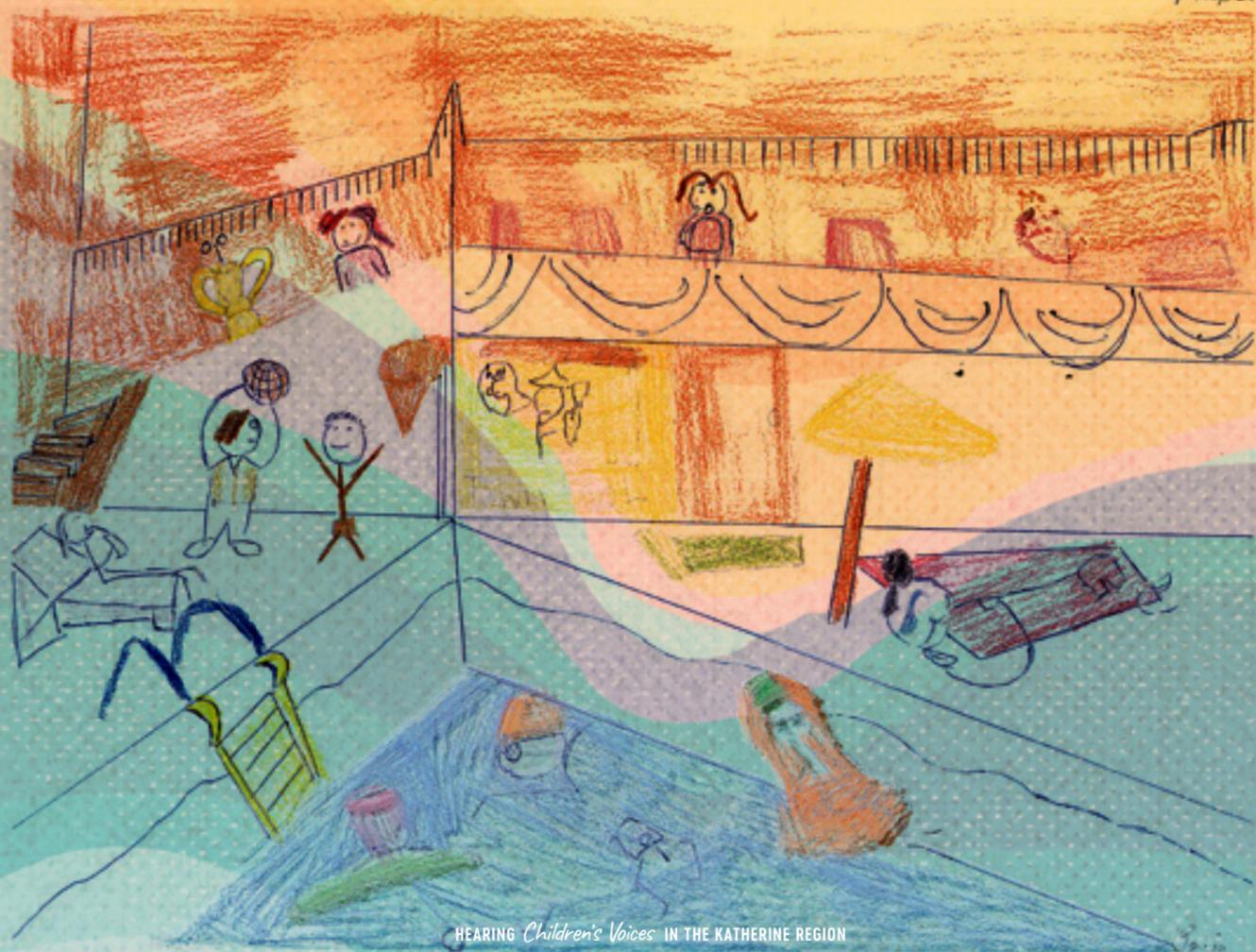
Bus pick up (Ring 89721364)

2pm - 5pm

Hot
Dogs



mabel



Jilkminggan School

Students completed interviews and surveys with other students and local service providers, to find out what is important to children and how we can make Jilkminggan better for them. They then prepared a report summarising their findings and presented it to the Principal to include in the School Action Plan.

Project team: Nine students from Year 5 & 6 Werrg Class

Sessions: 11 sessions, delivered over six visits to Jilkminggan. Each session was 45 minutes - 1 hour.

What we did:

- > The Smith Family and the students got to know each other through relationship building activities, including a student-led tour around Jilkminggan, featuring sites that are important to them.
- > We explored different research tools used to help people share ideas, including drawing pictures, taking photographs and getting creative with surveys.
- > Students used various research tools to find out what other kids in the school think is important to them and what they might like to change at school or in their community.
- > Students interviewed service providers, asking about their role in the community, what they believe is important to children and ideas for how we could make Jilkminggan better for children and families. They completed a total of 18 interviews, talking to the office (Roper Gulf Regional Council), crèche, school and shop.
- > Students prepared a report summarising their findings and were excited to present it to people in community who can help make change, including the School Principal who is currently working on the School Action Plan!

What students are saying at Jilkminggan School

What is important to children?

What service providers are saying in Jilkminggan

What is important for children?

BEING ACTIVE
Basketball Football
Playing soccer
Swimming Fishing
Going to the Crossing

FAMILY & FRIENDS
Family Friends
Being friendly
Family at school
Playing together

HAVING FUN
Playing Fun
Playground

BEING CREATIVE
Writing
Reading books
Drawing Colouring
Painting

BEING HEALTHY
Brushing teeth
Eating at school
Eating bush tucker
The shop Lunchtime
Meditation time

NATURE
Trees
Flowers

SCHOOL & LEARNING
School Learning
Doing work
Maths English
'Reading eggs'
Learning how to write my name

FEELING SAFE & RESPECTED
Being spoken to in a gentle, kind way
No fighting
No bullying

BEING ACTIVE
After school activities
Sport
Playing footy, basketball, dodgeball
Fishing Exercise

BEING HEALTHY
Good food
Getting a good sleep
To be healthy and happy
Growing up the right way

SCHOOL & LEARNING
Learning and education
To learn and help their reading and have more skills to go into transition
School Good teachers
Kids should come to school every day, so they can get a job

FEELING SAFE & RESPECTED
Everyone gets to feel safe and get to come to school
Being mindful to each other
Look after children – take them fishing to keep them away from grog
Don't swim with crocodiles
Safe places to play
Safe homes

FAMILY, FRIENDS & CULTURE
Family
Friends
Parents need to help them get up and go to school
Parents involved in after school activities – take kids fishing, disco
Cultural things

HAVING FUN
Playtime
Fun
After school entertainment (eg. discos)

What would make Jilkminggan better for children and families?



What service providers are saying in Jilkminggan

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE, CREATIVE & HAVE FUN

IN THE COMMUNITY

- Waterpark
- Slippery slide
- Swimming pool
- Playground
- Swings
- Entertainment Centre – a place where kids can go and do activities together, have fun and be safe
- Things to keep kids busy and happy during the weekends and after school
- More regular Sports and Rec

AT SCHOOL

- More activities – sports, swimming, fishing (eg. used to have swimming days at Elsey Station)
- More excursions to other community schools
- Playground and swings

IMPROVED COMMUNITY FACILITIES & RESOURCING

IN THE COMMUNITY

- More jobs for parents to make life better
- Cleaner houses and have less people living together
- Proper mobile networks for adults/families
- Better access to services eg. psychologists
- Excursions to Darwin and Katherine to bring new stuff back to the community

AT SCHOOL

- More staff to help with more activities
- Smaller classes and more teachers
- Inspiring teachers
- Having lots of different things to do – going out bush, camp
- More facilities for sport



SUPPORT CHILDREN TO LEARN

IN THE COMMUNITY

- More family involved in school
- Work together as a community and school to make a stronger school

AT SCHOOL

- More children attending school every day
- Having school start later for the bigger kids
- Cultural stuff and fun stuff in the school
- Kids to go to school, where they are safe and so they can learn and find a job when they graduate

SUPPORTIVE FAMILY & CULTURAL ROLE MODELS

IN THE COMMUNITY

- Good parenting will keep the children happy – it starts in the home
- Families getting more involved in cultural side of things
- More cultural activities after school (eg. down at the Crossing)
- Community needs to be responsible for their kids before/after school hours

AT SCHOOL

- More families to come in and help kids learn language
- Cultural stuff in the school
- More family involved in school
- Families following through with behaviour strategies at home
- More engagement from parents

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO FEEL SAFE & RESPECTED

IN THE COMMUNITY

- Keep children safe and secure
- Stop community fighting
- Being more tough on kids – making them go home at night
- Kids not walking around after 4pm
- If adults want to drink they can go out of town, so kids can get a good sleep
- An Indigenous police presence to look after things in the community so kids can have a good sleep at night
- Stop the drugs and alcohol
- Policy to stop underage kids driving around with no licence
- Facebook not good – should be a certain age when kids are able to own a phone
- No loud music

AT SCHOOL

- All the kids getting along
- Adults sitting and talking with the kids about what interests them
- No bullying
- Respect people at school and we do the same for children
- Children looking after the stuff in the school, because they destroy too much stuff

What service providers are saying in Jilkminggan

SCHOOL

Teaching them how to stand up, be strong

Teachers should get the kids to run assembly from Year 5 so they can get over shyness/shame job

Students talking to the teachers to figure out what works

Get kids on the microphone to sing songs in class. Stand up in front of everyone and build their confidence to talk.

Being taught at school for strategies against bullying

COMMUNITY

Roper Gulf Council could engage the students in meetings (not just the older students)

Youth Group or student representative body
— so kids can have a say about what activities they want etc. and could attend community meetings representing what kids want/need

More opportunity for kids to learn more about their culture — speaking to Elders to teach them about their own language

Adults encouraging talk — not to be shame

Adults to talk with kids about their feelings

How can children have a stronger voice in Jilkminggan?

CHILDREN

Children to help each other

Keep talking and tell their parents, family, teachers and principal what they want

Educate your parents to listen to you

To be a strong voice they need to be at school to learn more things about everything

Go to school every day. Do your education and get confident, get strong and get what you want. Education comes first.

Timber Creek School

Students completed interviews and surveys with other students and local service providers, to find out what is important to children and how we can make Timber Creek better for them. They then prepared a report summarising their findings and presented it to the school community at the End of Year Concert.

Project team: The Brolga Class - 12 students in Year 4 & 5.

Sessions: 13 sessions, delivered over four visits to Timber Creek. Each session was 45 minutes - 1 hour.

What we did:

- > The Smith Family and students got to know each other through relationship building activities, including students drawing pictures of what is important to them.
- > We explored different research tools used to help people share their ideas, including drawing pictures, taking photographs and getting creative with surveys.
- > Students used various research tools to find out what other kids in the school think is important to them and what they might like to change at school or in their community.
- > Students interviewed service providers, asking about their role in the community, what they believe is important to children and ideas for how we could make Timber Creek better for children and families. They completed a total of 10 interviews, talking to the clinic, Vic-Daly Regional Council, rangers, shop, school and crèche.
- > Students prepared a report summarising their findings, and were excited to present it to the school community at the End of Year Concert!

What students are saying at Timber Creek School

What is important to children?

BEING CREATIVE

Dancing
Drawing
Writing
Singing

BEING ACTIVE

Fishing Two-square Playground
Tennis Hunting
Motorbike riding Football
Flying a kite
Basketball

FEELING SAFE & RESPECTED

Not shouting
Helping people
No fighting Respect
Adults using words they understand
Not teasing or being rude
Not using bad words
No bullying

FAMILY, FRIENDS & CULTURE

Friends Family
Country Pets

HAVING FUN

Playing

SCHOOL & LEARNING

Spelling School
The classroom Reading
Learning

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO FEEL SAFE & RESPECTED

Less bullying

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE

More undercover shade areas
Play area like at Macca's
Trampoline

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE CREATIVE & HAVE FUN

Theatre/cinema
Cooking and baking

What service providers are saying in Timber Creek

What is important for children in Timber Creek and its surrounding communities?

Waterpark
Playing sports
After school and weekend programs

BEING ACTIVE

Indoor sport facilities
Fun activities (e.g. sport and rec)

HAVING FUN

Playing

FAMILY & FRIENDS

Good friends
Happy family
Parents to make sure kids are getting to school

FEELING SAFE & RESPECTED

To feel safe to come to the clinic
To come and talk to health staff on your own and when children hurt themselves
Safety is important
Being croc wise and safety comes first
That children are safe
Routines

BEING CREATIVE

Hobbies and dancing
After school programs

SCHOOL & LEARNING

Good families so kids can come to school and learn
School – getting an education
Doing new things

BEING HEALTHY

Growing big and strong
Yummy food
Not eating too much sugar
Eating vegetables and fruit
Healthy food
Good sleep and good environment

What service providers are saying in Timber Creek

What would make Timber Creek better for children and families?

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO LEARN

IN THE COMMUNITY
More agencies and people that support the school and children

AT SCHOOL

Kids going to school every day
School should provide lots of career options so kids can get a job and look after their families

Keeping kids in school to Year 12

Good teachers
Uniforms



ENTERPRISE

IN THE COMMUNITY
More small businesses

Tourists to work in the dry season

Tour company

SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE, CREATIVE & HAVE FUN

IN THE COMMUNITY
More after school and weekend activities

Somewhere kids can go after school

Different people coming to the community who provide new things (e.g. Corrugated Iron; Timber Creek festival)

School Holiday Programs

A playground at the oval

Swimming lessons

Waterpark sports

Dance classes

AT SCHOOL

New playground equipment

Nature playground

SUPPORTIVE FAMILIES & CULTURAL ROLE MODELS

IN THE COMMUNITY
Activities involving the families together

COMMUNITY

A Junior Ranger Program, which could give confidence to children to have a stronger voice.

More things like the Hearing Children's Voices Project.

Talking to Elders/older people and reading books with the community.

By asking what they want.

By coming along to the Local Authority Meeting.

By adults asking them what they want and what they enjoy doing (e.g. for Sport and Rec).

SCHOOL

Going to school and getting confident.

To make sure your ears are healthy so you can hear what is being taught in school.

If the Clinic and School work together, we would have healthy kids every day. We could do cooking classes at school with the nutritionist.

Finding an advocate e.g. Principal, Teacher, School Council to help with issues.

If kids continue to go to school and get an education they will have a strong voice and become leaders for their community.

CHILDREN

Kids can support each other - back each other up and let adults know what you want.

Don't be rude, but say what you think.



How can children have a stronger voice in Timber Creek?

AT SCHOOL Elders to come into school

More mums and dads to come to school to know what kids are doing

Elders to organise camps for kids to pass on stories



7. Project outcomes

Overall, the project aim was achieved: children were given agency to express themselves, and to develop and implement projects in their own communities. The project also gave schools and the broader community greater insight into the needs and wants of children and their families, and gave Katherine Region Communities for Children FP tools for genuine engagement and partnerships for future work.

Across all sites, project outcomes included:

a. For the children

- > Children learnt about how service delivery works in their community and who to talk to if they have ideas or issues
- > Children gained skills and confidence in communicating their thoughts with adults within their community
- > Children experienced their ideas being valued and acted upon, encouraging them to continue to use their voice
- > Children experienced the value of listening to the views of others and developed skills in responding to these views to achieve the best outcome for all

“They felt proud of themselves”

Head Teacher, Kintore Street school

“The students were inspired and engaged in leadership... and were excited to be involved in change”

Principal, Jilkminggan School

“The process was good for the kids – a good outcome for them, to see it actually happen”

Head Teacher, Kintore Street School

“[We learnt about] making our voices strong and loud”

Brolga Class, Timber Creek School

b. For the schools and broader community

- > Communities and services have an increased understanding of the value of listening to children
- > Children and service providers were given the opportunity to engage openly to discuss common goals
- > Service providers were able to respond directly to the ideas of children
- > Communities were able to see the value in child-led projects
- > Foundations were established for ongoing relationships between children and service providers

“The community gained insight into what the students are involved in at school and... their understanding of life and school”

Principal, Timber Creek School

“We were happy to see students and families attending the Pool Day that wouldn't normally access community events”

Principal, Kintore Street School

“[We learnt] ways kids can have a happy life”

Werrg class, Jilkminggan School

c. For the Katherine Region Communities for Children Facilitating Partner initiative

- > Foundations were established for strong relationships between The Katherine Region CfC FP and schools
- > Genuine engagement with children and communities in the Katherine Region
- > Greater awareness of CfC FP within the Katherine Region
- > The Katherine Region CfC FP is better informed to support children and families within the project's partner communities

“It was good to have The Smith Family come in as a connection to the community”

Head Teacher, Kintore Street School

“The Smith Family [being] involved gave the students a feeling that the project had importance and validity”

Leadership Teacher, Clyde Fenton

8. What we learnt

a. Emerging themes and ideas

Throughout this project, children were given the opportunity to express what is important to them in many different ways, including drawing, taking photographs or conducting interviews with each other. This process resulted in a large amount of information in various formats. While a conscious effort was made to remain unbiased in interpreting and summarising these answers, the Project Team would like to acknowledge the inherent challenges in this area. The ideas presented in this report should not be viewed as a conclusive set of results, but a start of a powerful conversation, which we urge each community to continue.



With this in mind, we did see many common themes emerge throughout the project. When asked about what is important to them, children across all four sites shared ideas around being active, being creative, learning and school, family and friends, feeling safe and respected, and having fun! Ideas around being healthy, enjoying nature, and taking part in cultural activities, such as fishing and hunting, were also shared in many of the schools.



Ideas to make school better commonly focused on more opportunities for children to be active, creative and have fun. For example, children suggested new play or sports equipment, cooking classes and more undercover shade areas. The majority of students also wanted to see less bullying and fighting at school.

In Jilkmingan and Timber Creek, where adults in the community were also asked for their ideas around creating stronger communities for children, the same themes arose. The most common ideas from service providers to make their community better for children and families included more involvement from families in the schools and more active, creative and cultural activities for children outside of school hours.

Starting a Youth Group; attending Local Authority meetings; gaining knowledge and confidence at school; and collaboration across the community were just some of the ideas for how children could have a stronger voice within their community. Each of these ideas demonstrates recognition that children know what is important to them and can be leaders for positive change in their lives. The best way to empower children with a strong and genuine voice is to provide them with safe, meaningful and ongoing opportunities to use this voice.

b. Working well with children and communities

This project is part of a broad body of work, which seeks to place the voices of children where they belong - at the centre. We built on, and learned from, the work done by many others, in Australia and overseas. We also worked from a place-based approach and used tools that worked for our own communities.

Successful features of our approach include:

- > A generous amount of time dedicated to gain consent from each of the participating communities, and ongoing discussions of how the project would best be delivered within each community
- > Building strong relationships with students through multiple visits to each school and spending time with students during recess and lunch times
- > Support from teachers - preparing the students before each session and promoting enthusiasm for the project

- > Flexibility in the project design and implementation to allow unique projects to evolve in each school
- > Aligning with the school curriculum and activities already happening at school
- > Minimal resources required - able to be delivered in any community on a low budget
- > Having a focused project where kids have investment in the outcome. This was particularly strong in Clyde Fenton and Kintore Street School Projects.

“I loved the way the project gave all students opportunities to take a lead role, so some of our quieter less confident students still had important roles to play”

Leadership Teacher, Clyde Fenton

Ideas for improvement include:

- > Complete the project at each school over a single term, to help maintain momentum
- > Develop a more focused task around interviewing community members, giving students greater investment in and ability to lead the project
- > Include greater engagement with families
- > Ensure we have committed resources and support with local languages
- > Work more closely with classroom teachers and school staff to maximise their support for the project, during and in between visits
- > Continue to develop strategies to address barriers to hearing children’s genuine voices

9. What now?



The Hearing Children’s Voices project has helped the Katherine Region Communities for Children FP establish strong relationships with schools, and enabled meaningful engagement with children families and communities in the Katherine Region.

We look forward to continuing our work with our partner schools to see what is possible when children have the agency to identify what is important and how we can work to support their aspirations. We also hope to establish new partnerships to find out what is important to children in other communities in the Katherine Region, and work with them in achieving their priorities. This work will contribute to our future strategic planning for CfC FP and child-centric service delivery in the Katherine region.

Appendix One: Summary of tools used

Throughout the project we used many different activities and tools, inspired from a range of resources, including:

- > *The Magic 6: Participatory Action and Learning Experiences with Roma Youth* (C. Larkins & A. Bilson, 2016)
- > *So You want to Consult with Children? A toolkit of good practice* (Save The Children Working Group, 2003)
- > *Participation: Spice it up! Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations* (Carol Shephard, 2002)
- > *Participation: Young Spice! Fun participation Activities for the Under 11s* (Phill Burton, Jo Stephens & Chris Dow, 2010)

Children interviewing community members

Child-led interviews are a valuable tool to strengthen relationships between children and community members, and promote collaborative problem-solving. Having the captive attention of an adult helps to build the children's confidence in using their voice. Community members can also gain a unique insight on their community from the perspective of the children. This tool can be of particular value to community-based service providers. Being able to hear the views of children can assist with planning, service delivery, and evaluation in the community.

Coloured cards

A visual survey where children are given coloured cards representing different ideas (eg. yes and no) and use them to vote. This can be a good tool to get a quick feel from the group about their ideas, and gives everyone an equal opportunity to share their view. More thorough discussion can be achieved by giving the opportunity for individuals to explain why they answered the way they did.

Community tour and mapping

Child led community tours and working with children to map their community are effective tools in connecting with and engaging with children to learn about what is important to them and to explore their hopes for themselves and their community. This is also a great activity to build rapport with children, with most kids excited to show you around and talk about things familiar to them.



Discussion line or groups

An active voting tool where children can indicate their views by positioning themselves along a line wherever they feel they fit in relation to a particular question. For example, one end might represent strongly agree and the other, strongly disagree. Alternatively, different areas of the room might represent different answers, so children can move to the area which best represents their thoughts and feelings. You can then invite the children to talk about why they chose to stand where they did.

Drawing

Asking children to draw pictures relating to the question you are exploring can be an effective way for children to express themselves. This activity gives children time to think about the question in a calm and creative way. The children might like to explain what they have drawn and why, giving more insight into their thoughts and providing a less intimidating way for them to share their ideas.



Kids interviewing kids

Working with children to train them as peer interviewers is a great way to get them thinking about each other and what they as a group want or need. Children know best how to ask questions and interpret the answers of their peers.

Photography

Children are asked to take a photo representing something that is special to them, makes them happy or that they might like to change. This can be an especially useful tool for children who are shy or feel uncomfortable about drawing, allowing their unique perspectives become visible and easy to share with others.

Picture timeline

Evaluation tool where children create a timeline using pictures and photographs representing each phase of the project. This helps them reflect on what they did, and creates a discussion point for what worked/didn't work and what they enjoyed/didn't enjoy.



Appendix Two: References and resources

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