



# What's been happening at the Early Years Centres?

An overview of the evaluation of the Early Years Centre initiative

January 2013



Early Years Centres (EYC) are places where families can go to access a range of early childhood education and care, family and parenting support, and maternal and child health services. EYC staff include family support workers, early childhood educators, and child and maternal health specialists who work together to deliver holistic services for families with children aged pre-birth to eight years. Services are delivered flexibly through a combination of centre-based activities, outreach programs and home visiting.

EYCs and services are located in Browns Plains, Acacia Ridge, Beaudesert, Caboolture, Deception Bay, Morayfield, Narangba, Woodford, Cairns at Bentley Park, Edmonton, Gordonvale, North Gold Coast at Nerang, Labrador, Upper Coomera and, opening in early 2013, Coomera Springs.

EYCs are proudly supported by the Queensland Government. As part of this commitment, the Department of Education, Training and Employment contracted Urbis Pty Ltd to undertake an evaluation of the EYC initiative. This overview is based on the evaluation findings. To view a full summary report and more information about the EYCs, please visit [www.dete.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/families/early-years-centres.html](http://www.dete.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/families/early-years-centres.html).

## A unique approach to early childhood services in Queensland

The EYC initiative offers a unique and innovative approach in trialling a model of service delivery across multiple locations, through different providers with different organisational philosophies, and combining a range of elements that had not been implemented on this scale before in Queensland. Development of the model was informed by the practice and research evidence base, and includes service responses for innovative delivery, such as:

- a balance of universal and targeted services — offering assistance to children and families across a range of supports, according to need, choice and accessibility
- multidisciplinary and integrated delivery — bringing together early childhood education and care, family support and child health services
- a mix of centre-based, satellite, home visiting and outreach services — ensuring services, resources and support are accessible in a range of locations, including formal, informal and home environments.

Each EYC has developed differently to respond to community contexts, necessity and skills base.

## What you told us

*My child has been able to interact with other children, his personal development has grown.*

**EYC parent**

*I have always been very confident, but so many things got me down and having people believe in me got me back on track.*

**EYC parent**

*At times where I haven't known what to do, I have gone to the EYC first and nine times out of 10 they have been able to help me.*

**EYC parent**

*[We've had a] massive growth in relationships ... it's working together that makes the difference. It's now all about the need of the parents.*

**Partner organisation staff member**

*It takes time to accept that you work differently here than in previous roles — it's a process of adaptation.*

**EYC staff member**



**Approachable, helpful, welcoming**



## How are children and families benefiting?

The evaluation found evidence that developmental, social and behavioural outcomes for children attending the EYCs have improved, and parenting skills have strengthened.

Families reported improvements in their children, particularly in relation to educational and behavioural development. They reported their children were better socialised and able to interact with other children, and had become more confident. They felt the variety of toys and activities had improved their children's capabilities and helped resolve behaviour issues where relevant.

After attending the EYCs for at least six months, the families surveyed reported statistically significant improvements in their own abilities. Specifically, they reported they were more likely to feel good about themselves, the job they were doing as parents and carers, and their children's futures, and have parenting tips they could share with others. They were more able to work out what to do if their children had problems, and found it easier to maintain clear rules and routines in their families. Families said they found it easier to stay calm and manage even when things were stressful, and felt there was more to enjoy than to worry about in their families.

The services thought to be particularly effective at improving outcomes for children include access to kindergarten support and educational development programs, supervised playgroups, access to specialist health services, music, art and dance programs, culturally appropriate programs, drop-in health clinics and home visiting.



*Knowledgeable, friendly, supportive*

## Success factors

What enables the EYCs to be effective?

### Value of universal services

Universal services are open to everyone, and include services like kindergarten, drop-in baby health clinics, toy libraries, playgroups and cooking classes. They are effective in helping families access more targeted assistance when needed. The evaluation found these kinds of services are highly valued by parents, staff and communities alike because they encourage informal engagement and build strengths and connections for families.

### Engaging with diversity

The EYCs demonstrate how to effectively engage and respond to the needs of diverse families and communities. They use a range of evidence-based strategies including:

- outreach and home visiting
- mixing universal and more targeted services
- adapting activities for different groups
- employing staff with specialist skills
- actively engaging with community leaders and networks.

### Community capacity building

The EYCs have contributed new services and are helping to build community capacity. They've done this

by employing a purposeful community development approach that seeks to engage early, contribute positively and enhance existing strengths.

Community capacity is modelled in different ways — through the governance strategy, sectoral engagement, community connections, physical design and use of spaces, and flexible responsive services.

The evaluation suggests the EYCs have contributed to:

- reducing social isolation
- encouraging networks
- providing access to financial assistance and advice
- raising awareness and knowledge regarding other services available in the community.

### Integration, partnerships and multidisciplinary approaches

EYCs demonstrate the benefits and complexities of working together across professions to deliver services that are child-centred and have a holistic family focus. Aspects of the EYCs enabling this include:

- early investment in partnerships and relationships
- effective senior leadership
- joint planning and management with partners and community
- shared values, goals, respect and trust between staff, partners and families.

## Moving forward

While a lot of things are working really well at the EYCs, there are still improvements to be made. Some challenges to overcome include workforce capacity and development, and the many challenges for staff of integrated working, including the requirement to work beyond a traditional clinical focus.

Success has led to a high level of demand for EYC services, which creates challenges in balancing the needs of those who walk in the door, and those who may not. For the EYCs, maintaining the right balance of universal access and targeted assistance, as well as facilitating access to specialist services, is an ongoing challenge.

