

COMMUNIQUÉ

28 February 2023

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (the Forum) held its first meeting of 2023 in Darwin. The forum was chaired by **Ms Donna Ah Chee**, who welcomed members and observers from the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT).

The **Welcome to Country** was from Larrakia woman **Ms Jeanneen McLennan** who thanked members for coming together and working collaboratively to improve outcomes for Territory children.

During the quarterly review of key outcome indicators for children and young people, the Forum discussed the **continuing decline in school attendance rates across the Northern Territory** as a serious concern. The forum agreed to write to responsible Ministers advising that schools in the NT should be funded based on population and need, not adjusted by attendance.

The **Acting Children's Commissioner, Ms Nicole Hucks** presented on the functions and evolution of the Office of the Children's Commissioner since its establishment more than 15 years ago. The Forum noted there was further work to do to establish the Commission for Children and Young People envisioned by the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.

The Independent Aboriginal Chair of the **Generational Strategy Steering Group, Mr Rob McPhee**, presented the proposed first action plan for the 10 Year Generational Strategy for Children and Families in the Northern Territory. The Forum supported the 15 proposed actions in principle. The first action plan will be finalised and released at a later date. The Forum acknowledged the Strategy and Coordinated Investment Framework would be officially released on 3 March 2023.

Australian Government Ministers the **Hon Linda Burney MP** and the **Hon Amanda Rishworth MP** and Northern Territory Government Ministers the **Hon Kate Worden MLA** and the **Hon Lauren Moss MLA** joined the Forum. The Ministers provided updates on various issues including the *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia* including \$250 million Commonwealth funding, the launch of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children* and the first action plans under *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*, the formation of an Aboriginal advisory board on family and domestic violence, and the progress of developing new child and family centres in the NT.

The Forum acknowledged apologies from the Chief Minister **Hon Natasha Fyles MLA** and Attorney General the **Hon Chansey Paech MLA** who have indicated they will attend at a future meeting.

On the NT Aboriginal Justice Agreement Communications Strategy, the Forum heard about the importance of evidence-based communications and the research underpinning effective communication around justice issues.

The Forum also heard about the progress in family-led decision making in care and protection. **Senior Practitioner Ms Denella Detourbet** told members the current practice framework empowers families and builds their capacity to make their own decisions. **Clinical and Professional Practices Director Ms Julianne Davis** said the framework is not family group conferencing but promotes family making decisions. She said the introduction of the CARE reporting and monitoring system will assist with the eventual evaluation of the framework.

The NT Department of Education Chief Executive Officer **Ms Karen Weston** and **Senior Director Early Years and Primary Teaching and Learning Services Ms Agnes McGrath** provided an overview of NT and National Early Childhood education efforts. The Forum noted the Department of Education is leading the development of a **NT Early Childhood Education Plan**, in partnership with relevant agencies. Australian Government members committed to join the partnership and the Forum agreed to nominate a representative to participate.

The Forum discussed resourcing needs in education, some of the positive data around Year 12 completers and the importance of parent education and engagement.

Members reiterated their support for a closer examination of education engagement and school attendance issues at a later meeting and passed a resolution supporting the fundamental principle of needs based funding for education in the Northern Territory.