KYABRA LIMITED HOURS CHILDCARE CENTRE

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

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References
Executive Summary

Introduction
Kyabra community association have run a limited hours child care centre for many years. This report provides an evaluation of the services provided by the limited hours child care centre. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine to what extent attending children showed evidence of growth in important developmental outcomes in the short-term (vocabulary and self-regulation); and to explore current parent perceptions about the benefits of attending the centre and past parent perceptions about the role centre attendance plays in relation to school transition for children.

Methodology
The evaluation methodology employed quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches to measure child development outcomes and parental perceptions.

Quantitative measures assessed children’s development at two time points (Time 1 June 2018; Time 2 October 2018). Measures included:

- Teacher report of child social emotional skills and self-regulation skills using the Early Years Toolbox (EYT) child Self-Regulation and Behaviour Questionnaire (CSBQ) (Howard and Melhuish, 2016)
- Direct assessments of expressive vocabulary using the EYT expressive vocabulary test (Howard & Melhuish, 2016) and visual motor skills using the Design Copy task from the Early Screening Inventory (ESI-R; Harrison, 1990)

A facilitated survey with current parents at Time 1 only, collected information about their recent experiences at Kyabra.

Qualitative interview data was collected with three past families who accessed the service in 2017 to develop narratives about their transition to school experience following Kyabra attendance.

Findings
The findings are presented across three key areas, children, parents and the centre, with the family narratives about their perceptions of attending the service a key source of information.

Children
- At the group level, there were no significant improvements over time in any of the developmental measures.
- At the individual child level there were substantial gains for some children in expressive vocabulary and self-regulation skills. Children who showed the most improvements were those who were identified as at-risk by early measures (using comparisons with Australian norms). These are important factors which influence school transition
- Individual growth trajectories showed the equivalent of **one to two years of growth** through the testing period for these children who were initially at risk.
- A number of children **moved from the at-risk range in relation to self-regulation and behavioural skills, to the normative range** for Australian children in their age group.

**Parents**
- Families primarily **used the service to support their child’s development**, growth and transition to school.
- Around half of the families surveyed **would not send their child to another ECEC setting** such as long day care. **Carer to child ratios** was considered an important factor in this area.
- Families were **highly satisfied** with the Kyabra service.

**The Centre**
- Service is **welcoming of diversity**.
- Service **builds trusting partnerships** through open communication and collaborative decision making.
- Service provides **holistic care** by understanding the whole child and their connections with their family.
- Kyabra is a **learning place**, a place where parents build parental capacity and learn how to assist their children with transitions such as going to school.
- Sense of **community created through connections** for families and children which transcends generations and socio-economic status.
- Connections included **links with other family members** and parenting services provided including **parenting capacity training** and playgroup.
- The community **volunteers and local high school students were strongly valued** by past and present families.

**Recommendations**
- Kyabra should **continue to operate the limited hours service** in its current form.
- Continue to offer a range of **services to support families parenting needs**.
- **Continue with practice of embedding high school work experience** and trainee students in the service.
- Consider **differential pricing structure** based on financial circumstances.
- Strengthen **promotion of the service through positives identified by families**. For example, **community connections** and **play based learning** with a holistic focus on families and children.
1. Introduction

Kyabra Community Association have run a limited hours childcare centre (14 places, 4 hours per day) for many years. The service is accessed by a diverse range of families, many who would not attend any other early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for a number of reasons. Many families attending experience multiple barriers to accessing ECEC and family support services and many children in the area are at risk of poor school transition. The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (2015) data for the local area shows high rates of developmental vulnerability at school entry, particularly in the emotional maturity domain.

The Centre has been a highly valued part of the local community with feedback and anecdotal evidence suggesting that the centre is effective in achieving a number of important outcomes in the area of child development, school readiness, parenting capacity building, and service / social linkages for families. Given changing funding models and increasing instability around future funding for the centre, in 2018 Kyabra have focused on establishing evidence for the effectiveness of the centre in meeting a number of outcomes. This will provide important data upon which to build sustainable future funding partnerships. As part of this focus, Kyabra contracted QUT to conduct a small evaluation project across 2018.

1.1 This evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to focus primarily on short term outcomes for children currently attending the childcare service. The evaluation also explored past parents’ perceptions around parent capacity building and the value and access of ECEC and the Kyabra centre in relation to school transition, and current parents’ perceptions of benefits associated with the centre. A draft logic model informed the research design (see Figure 1).

The main research questions that guided the evaluation were:

   a) Is Kyabra childcare participation associated with improvements in child development in a range of domains over a four month period?
   b) What are parents’ perceptions about the role of childcare attendance in supporting parenting?
   c) What are parents’ perceptions about the role of childcare attendance at this centre in relation to preparing children for school transition?
Figure 1: Draft logic model and associated measures in this evaluation for each aspect
2. Methodology
The project was a mixed method study using quantitative measures of children’s development across two time periods, a one-time facilitated survey with current parents, and qualitative measures to elicit narratives from families who had previously used the Kyabra service.

2.1 Participants
Approximately 38 families currently attending the limited hours childcare service at Kyabra were invited to participate in the evaluation with 17 families consenting. Participating children ranged in age from 24 to 61 months with a mean age of 44 months. There were 10 boys (59%) and seven girls who participated. At the commencement of data collection children had been attending the centre from 2 to 26 months previously, with the modal previous attendance six months.

There were no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander participants in the study. Seven of the 17 families spoke a language other than English at home with these including Cantonese (n = 2), Mandarin (n = 2), Gujarati, Indonesian, and Spanish.

Parents ranged in age from 31 to 56 years with the mean age 38 years. All parents were either married or living with a partner. Two parents had not completed high school but most had completed higher education (Figure 2).

![Figure 2: Parent education level](image-url)
While 41% of parents were not employed, most were working in paid employment in some capacity (Figure 3). Most families gained their main income from salaries with 12% from benefits.

Figure 3: Parent employment status

2.2 Procedure
Families provided consent for the centre childcare educator to assess and make available developmental ratings on children at two time points approximately four months apart (Time 1 June 2018; Time 2 October 2018). Additionally, families provided consent for their children to participate in direct assessment of their oral language and visual-motor skills, also at the two time points. Families were asked to participate in a one-time facilitated survey about their current experiences at Kyabra. Three past families who accessed the Kyabra service in 2017 were contacted and participated in a face to face interview to explore narratives about their transition to school experience following their attendance at the childcare centre.

2.3 Measures
2.3.1 Child Assessments

Social-emotional skills including self-regulation skills was measured through teacher report on three subscales of the Early Years Toolbox (EYT) child Self-Regulation and Behaviour Questionnaire (CSBQ) (Howard & Melhuish, 2016). The CSBQ is a 33-item educator-report (or parent-report) questionnaire that yields subscales of Cognitive Self-Regulation,

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1 The WHO developed IYCD measure for child development for children under three years was also collected by educator report. However, given the age of the children in the final sample (all except one child were over three years), the data has not been reported here.
Behavioural Self-Regulation, and Emotional Self-Regulation, as well as Sociability, Prosocial Behaviour, Externalizing Problems, and Internalizing Problems. Each item requires the respondent to evaluate the general frequency of target behaviours, on a scale from 1 (not true) to 5 (very true). The measure is validated with children from two years of age and has published Australian norms (Howard & Melhuish, 2016). Adequate internal reliability was achieved for Cognitive Self-Regulation ($\alpha = .76$ at Time 1, .84 at Time 2); Behavioural Self-Regulation ($\alpha = .92$ at Time 1, .90 at Time 2), Sociability ($\alpha = .88$ at Time 1, .85 at Time 2); Prosocial Behaviour ($\alpha = .90$ at Time 1, .93 at Time 2), and Externalizing Problems ($\alpha = .73$ at Time 1, .89 at Time 2).

Expressive Vocabulary was assessed through the Early Years Toolbox (EYT) expressive vocabulary test (Howard & Melhuish, 2016). Using an iPad, children were shown a stimulus and asked to verbally respond by identifying and producing the target vocabulary word. The examiner recorded each child’s response into the iPad. The test is designed to reduce frustration by incorporating a stop rule once a child has recorded six incorrect items (Howard & Melhuish, 2016).

Visual-motor skills was assessed using the Design Copy task from the Early Screening Inventory (ESI-R; Harrison, 1990). The task requires children to use a pencil to copy geometric shapes pictured on cards such as a square or circle. The measure has been found to be highly predictive of children’s later academic outcomes.

2.3.2 Data collection from parents

Facilitated survey: A one-time facilitated survey was conducted with current Kyabra families that consented to be part of the study. The survey was conducted at the Kyabra centre at a convenient time as the families dropped off or picked up their children. A visiting researcher sat with the families and asked a series of questions. One family was unable to meet with the researcher at the centre and consented to the survey being conducted over the telephone. All parents were asked survey questions from a schedule that was designed to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data, with both single response and open ended questions being asked.

The aim of the survey was to collect descriptive data about parents’ perceptions of the child and parental benefits associated with attending the centre, as well as identifying reasons for choosing the centre. For this reason, the survey schedule included questions that explored families’ experiences attending Kyabra including past care experiences, other services accessed and the value of the service in relation to family wellbeing. The survey also elicited demographic information along with the participants’ overall views and experiences at the centre.

Face to Face Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three families who participated in the Kyabra childcare service in 2017. All three families had children attend Kyabra in 2017 with two children transitioning from Kyabra to a school setting and the third child transitioning to another educational setting in the area. The aim of the parent
interviews was to understand parent perceptions and experiences about their child’s attendance at Kyabra, and the role Kyabra had in preparing their child for school transition. An interview protocol was established and used as a guide to elicit participant stories. The semi-structured interviews consisted of two main components including 1) questions focused on the child and 2) questions focused on the parent experience. Throughout these sections, the interview questions were flexible enough to enable participants to explore topics of interest dependent on their responses, to revisit situations and experiences at Kyabra, and to reflect on how this informed the transition to school for their child. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour in length.

A narrative approach was employed allowing participants to share their perceptions and experiences of Kyabra in relation to school transition for their child. Narratives provide a way for participants to reflect in their own time and tell their story in their own way (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). Story events or people’s narratives are shaped by a range of influences and may change as time passes and upon reflection of what they perceived their experiences to be at that point in time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In essence, the use of narrative inquiry enables people to tell their stories about their life experiences. The stories provide understanding of lived experiences through daily lives and how these stories are shaped over time, and contribute to future experiences (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). An important element in narratives is that they contain information that is situational such as, time and place, together with personal and social interactions. Temporality, including the inclusion of transitions and time, is an important element in narrative inquiry as it contributes to the exploration of lived experience. Place is also an important dimension of narrative inquiry including the physical spaces and locations where the narrative takes place.

2.4 Data Analysis

2.4.1 Children: Developmental measures
Due to the small sample size, statistic reporting focuses primarily on a selection of individual children. For these children, descriptive analyses for developmental measures are reported and compared to published Australian norms where possible. Trajectories over the four months are charted against and compared to published norms where possible to examine individual growth over time.

2.4.2 Parent survey data: Quantitative data
Descriptive statistics for the once-off current parent facilitated survey are produced and used to describe the perspectives of current families in relation to their experience with the childcare centre.

2.4.3 Parent survey data: Qualitative data
The analyses of parents’ responses from the open ended questions in the facilitated survey involved a constant comparative recoding process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This was an iterative and inductive process beginning with open coding to develop categories in a first round of data reduction, followed by further recoding and data reduction to identify a set of
core categories that summarises the themes that are common across the data (Fram, 2013). The process began with a first reading of the data overall with segments of the data sorted into initial categories. Notes were taken to identify the connections between categories and the reasoning behind the chosen categories. This was followed by further recoding and data reduction through the use of participant tables. Several categories were able to be collapsed into one category. When data saturation (Glaser, 2001) was reached with no new categories presenting, a core set of themes was identified for each of the main open ended questions asked. The themes are presented with illustrative quotes and used in the presentation of the findings against each of the four main qualitative areas of the survey which included, past services accessed, why families chose Kyabra, other services they had considered and families overall experiences at Kyabra.

2.4.4 Parent interview data
The analyses of parents’ narratives drew from the interview transcripts. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and critical narrative analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014) was used to analyse the data and families’ perspectives on their time at Kyabra and transition from Kyabra to school. The initial coding began with a full reading of each interview transcript. Initial coding involved looking for critical moments with codes applied to represent these moments in time (Willinski, 2018). Notations were made and elements of the narrative identified with relation to time, events including personal and social events, key people and relationships, places and transition to school specific information. A matrix for each participant with illustrative quotes for each of these categories was used to enable the narrative sequence to be coherent (Willinski, 2018). These key parts of the narrative were then broken down and sequenced together to form a narrative structure for each participant. The narrative structure forms the foundation for the three narratives and uses illustrative quotes throughout the stories.
3. Findings

3.1 Describing children’s developmental status compared to Australian norms

Descriptive examination of scores on some measures, compared with published Australian norms for children of the same age, provides a picture of the participating children’s developmental status at Time 1 data collection.

In relation to expressive vocabulary which we directly assessed at Time 1:

- 4 (27%) of the 15 children assessed (2 children declined to participate), were at or below the 25th percentile of normed Australian scores for their age group. Two of these four children were from a non-English speaking background.

In relation to educator report on children’s behavioural and self-regulatory development, a total of 6 (35%) children of the 17 assessed showed Time 1 scores in potentially risky ranges compared to Australian normed data. A number of these children showed risks in more than one social-emotional skill area:

- 1 child was slightly high (80th percentile) in externalizing behaviour problems and also low in sociability (20th percentile) and behavioural self-regulation (10th percentile), and very low in prosocial skills (5th percentile)
- 2 children were slightly low (20th percentile) in sociability
- 1 child was very low (5th percentile) in sociability
- 1 child was slightly low in cognitive self-regulation skills (20th percentile)
- 1 child was low in behavioral regulation skills (10th percentile)

3.2 Examining developmental change over time

At the group level, there were no significant improvements over time in any of the developmental measures (t-tests and non-parametric tests with a p value of < .05).

However, at the individual child level, there were substantial improvements evident for some children in important developmental areas known to influence positive school transitions. Individual growth trajectories are demonstrated in Boxes 1 to 5 below. These trajectories illustrated that these children who were initially considered at risk had achieved the equivalent of one to two years of growth through the four month testing period.
Box 1: Jack

Jack is a 61-month-old boy who attends the centre two days per week and has been attending for approximately three years. He was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy when 18-months old. Jack used to attend a Long Day Care centre but moved to Kyabra as the family had been recommended that a higher level of support for Jack would be available at Kyabra, compared to a Long Day Care Centre.

At Time 1 data collection Jack had vocabulary scores well below the 25th percentile compared to Australian children in his age group. During the four month data collection period, Jack made significant improvements in the area of expressive vocabulary. For example, Jack made a five-point gain in expressive vocabulary, which equates to approximately one year of growth on this measure. At Time 2 his vocabulary scores were approaching the 50th percentile (see figure below).

Jack’s mother reported that the centre was very effective in all areas of supporting Jack’s development and supporting her as a parent. She particularly felt that having local high school students involved in the centre added to this level of support and effectiveness. She indicated she would not return to Long Day Care.

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2 All names in this report are pseudonyms
Box 2: Simon

Simon is a 42-month-old boy from a non-English speaking background who attends the centre two days per week and has been attending for approximately six months. Simon is currently being assessed for auditory impairment. Simon had previously attended playgroups and his parents chose Kyabra as they wanted a stepped, gradual approach to preparing for school. At Time 1 data collection Simon had a vocabulary score well below the 25th percentile compared to other Australian children his age. In the four month data collection period, Simon made significant improvements in the area of expressive vocabulary. For example, Simon made a six-point gain in expressive vocabulary, which equates to over one year of growth on this measure. At Time 2 his vocabulary scores were just above the 25th percentile. Simon’s mother reported that she found the centre very effective in supporting all areas of Simon’s development.

Simon also showed important improvements in teacher-reported externalizing behaviour (a decrease in the blue line below), behavioural self-regulation (an increase in the orange line below), and cognitive self-regulation (slight increase in the grey line below). While none of Simon’s Time 1 scores were in the risky ranges, this growth in self-regulatory skills prior to school entry will provide an important boost to his school transition.
**Box 3: Donald**

Donald is a 47-month-old boy who has a non-English background. He attends the centre for two days per week and has been attending for approximately six months. His grandmother commented that she had not used any other early childhood services for Donald as he was “too naughty”. Her perception of Donald’s behaviour was also reflected in the teacher report at Time 1 in which Donald showed slightly high externalizing behaviours, was low on sociability, low on behavioural self-regulation and very low on prosocial skills, compared to other Australian children his age. Donald was also in the bottom 25th percentile of expressive vocabulary scores.

Over the four month period, Donald showed **substantial improvements** in teacher-reported externalizing behaviour (decrease in blue line below), sociability (orange line), behavioural self-regulation (grey line), and prosocial skills (yellow line). While Donald’s Time 1 data on these measures placed him in risk categories according to Australian norms, his Time 2 data showed that he had moved to close to average for externalizing behaviour, had moved from low to slightly low on behavioural self-regulation skills, and moved from very low to slightly low on prosocial skills. Donald’s scores remained in the low range in sociability despite some improvements. Donald did not show any improvements in vocabulary as measured by our selected assessment.
Box 4: Emma

Emma is a 38-month-old female who attends the centre for two days per week and has been attending for approximately six months. Emma has never attended any other early childhood education and care due to her parents’ choice of not wanting a “full day care system”. They send Emma to the centre to support her social interaction and transition to a kindergarten. Emma had very strong vocabulary scores at Time 1 but showed low scores on sociability. Across the four month, period Emma showed substantial improvements in vocabulary, visual-motor skills, sociability, cognitive self-regulation, and prosocial skills. While at Time 1 Emma’s sociability score placed her in a low group compared to Australian norms, her Time 2 score placed her in the close to average range. Emma’s mother reported that she found the centre very effective in supporting Emma’s development in all areas and that she “likes the dirt and playground. It’s more like what a centre was like when I was a child. No fake grass.”
Box 5: Harry

Harry is a 42-month-old boy who attends the centre two days a week and has attended for approximately six months following a recommendation by a family friend. Harry began in the lowest 25\textsuperscript{th} percentile in expressive vocabulary and was very low on sociability. Substantial improvements in both of these skills were shown with Harry’s Time 2 vocabulary score moving to over the 50\textsuperscript{th} percentile for age. In the four month data collection period Harry made significant gains in expressive vocabulary, showing a 10-point gain over the testing period. This substantial gain equates to almost two years of growth over the four month testing period. Harry’s sociability score moved from the very low range to the low range over the four month period. Harry’s mother reported that the centre was very effective in supporting all areas of Harry’s development.
3.3 Current parents’ perception of the benefits of the centre

When asked about the extent to which participation at the centre conferred a number of potential benefits for their families, parents’ mean ratings (Figure 4) indicated the highest endorsed benefits were in the areas of supporting child development and supporting school transition, followed by benefits related to parental confidence and connection with other services. With high scores in the areas of child development, the data suggests families found the centre most effective in supporting the needs of their child rather than being beneficial in supporting their own needs. For example, the lowest scores indicate families used the services least of all to support their own wellbeing or engage in work commitments. Although, other findings in this evaluation suggested that ‘work’ may not have been a goal or a need for a number of parents involved in this study, with more than half of the families commenting they would not use any other service if they were not attending Kyabra and would stay at home themselves or have a family member take care of their child. Hence, families do not appear to use this service to fulfil workforce participation but rather consider the service to be most effective and beneficial when it comes to supporting their child’s development and preparation for school. The data suggests that families have an understanding of the importance of attending an Early Childhood Education Centre (ECEC) and demonstrates families trust in sending their children to Kyabra to support their child’s developmental goals and transition to school.
Figure 4: Mean benefit ratings provided by parents in relation to benefits of the centre
3.4 Current parents’ experiences of Kyabra

3.4.1 Past services accessed
As part of the facilitated survey, parents were asked what other early childhood services they had accessed before attending Kyabra. Five families responded saying they had accessed other childcare or early childhood services before attending Kyabra. Services accessed included childcare centres and playgroups, with no families identifying the use of family day care services. Reasons for families not using other services included, *not necessary, stay at home mums* and child *not of age*. One family commented they had moved to Kyabra from a long day care service because it was more affordable.

3.4.2 Why families chose Kyabra
Parents interviewed in the survey suggested they chose Kyabra for a variety of reasons, these included the *Feeling, Recommendation, Services, Location and School Readiness*. Each of these areas will be explored in this section with illustrative examples given.

**Feeling:** Families commented they felt Kyabra was a people based centre with more people like them. For these reasons, families felt more comfortable here rather than at other services. They felt Kyabra was not institutionalised or clinical like other settings.

*Felt comfortable here...Likes caring of people and attentiveness. More than normal childcare, this is people based.*

*Other mums more like me...not institutionalised, more social and other mums.*

*Nice small centre – intimate*

*Not clinical. Has soul.*

**Recommendation:** Many families were recommended by other family members. There was a sense that this centre is generational and that when one family member came here, other members of their family came here.

*My sister came here*

*Recommended*

*Daughter came before*

*My mum was associated with it. Mum used it for my younger siblings 15-16 years ago*

*Recommended by a friend*

*Recommendation of brother*

**Services:** The biggest reason families sent their child to Kyabra was because of the services they provided. In particular, families liked the shorter days which they felt were better suited to their child’s age group. Families commented because of the community involvement and the students that assisted at the centre, there is a higher ratio of adults or carers to children. For this reason, families felt their child was better supported in
comparision to other services. This was particularly important for one family whose child had special needs.

- There are more eyes and mixed ages.
- Likes focus on routine and discipline...- also not looking for FT.
- ...affordable, shorter hours which is better for his age.
- Short day. Kids don’t get tired
- Child has cerebral palsy, recommended, more support in comparison to a normal day care
- Transition to kindy, social interaction
- Nice small centre – intimate
- Didn’t want full day care system. Transition to kindy, social interaction

**Location**: The location of the service was identified as being suitable for a small group of families as it was close to home.

**School Readiness**: A small group of families commented they attended Kyabra because of its focus on getting their child ready for the next step. In particular, families liked the focus on routines and discipline and the social interaction that the service provided.

- Likes focus on routine and discipline.
- Want to go step by step to school. He has also attended playgroup

### 3.4.3 Other Services families might consider

Of the 17 families interviewed just over half suggested they would send their child to another service if they were not attending Kyabra. However, of these families, they also suggested that it was not out of necessity that they would send their children as most of the families commented they were stay at home parents or had other family members that could support them and take care of their child if they were unable to do so.

### 3.4.4 Overall Experiences

As part of the survey, parents were asked to talk about their overall experiences attending Kyabra. Four main categories emerged from the data including Services, Community, Enjoyment and Child Development. These categories will be explored in this section.

**Services (Ratios, Cost, Size, Hours, Excursions, Communication, facilities, and access to activities)**: Overall families remarked that the services Kyabra provided were of a benefit to them. Families commented that whilst Kyabra was affordable, they would be happy to pay a little bit more for extra additional service.

- Service is very cheap, I would be happy to pay a little bit extra for additional service.
In particular, one parent was interested in knowing more about their child’s learning. However, another family commented that communication was high and that they enjoyed getting the newsletters and photos from the centre each day.

   I want to know more about my child’s learning.

   Excited about newsletters emailed in the afternoon. Love seeing photos.

Families commented that the ratio of carers to children was high and this was a benefit of attending Kyabra. Likewise, the small groups were an advantage to families and they felt the services and activities the centre provided to children helped support their child’s development.

   High Child to Educator Ratio.

   Having students here to help

   More adults to help take care of the children. Avenues LDC not enough adults

   Brings out creativeness. Building things

   Providing access to activities - paint / creative

Community (Staff/Students, Diversity, and Excursions): Families commented they enjoyed the community involvement at the centre, in particular having the high school students there each day, the links with the local school and attending the playgroup program provided at the local school.

   …Community involvement which benefits the children...

   …Having students here to help

   Diversity of the centre. Volunteers from school are very good at being involved and hands on. Feels like a family

   Link with local communities. Link with the school.

Enjoyment: Overall, of the families surveyed, nine families commented how much they liked, or enjoyed the service. Comments included that it was wonderful, they loved it, happy with the place. There was a real sense of enjoyment from the service.

   It's been wonderful.

   Really positive - XXX loves his 'little school' days and really looks forward to them. He would come every day if could.

   We love it. Value everyone’s help. Having students here to help

   Excited about newsletters emailed in the afternoon. Love seeing photos

   Good here - more like a family because the group is small.

   Happy with place. Kids enjoy once they are here
Child development: Families were happy with how the service assisted in the development of their child by allowing them to become more confident, develop their social skills with other children and the service also encouraged children to bring out their creative side.

- Is more confident
- ... more chance to learn English with other adults. All ages - so she can learn from older Children. Children can learn from each other when different ages.
- Good for social skills. Surprising - I was expecting it to be difficult for him. No issues
- Brings out creativeness. Building things

3.5 Transition from Kyabra to school: Experiences of three families

The following narratives are from three parents whose children attended Kyabra and transitioned to school or to another program. The experiences of their children attending Kyabra in the year prior to transitioning to school are the focus of the narratives, however a broader focus on their experiences more generally of attending Kyabra also feature in their accounts. The narratives describe Kyabra as a learning place, a place where parents build parental capacity and learn how to assist their children with transitions such as going to school. The narratives document how three families have been impacted positively through engagement with Kyabra staff and the Kyabra environment.

There is a sense of community that permeates these narratives. The welcoming feel of the service expands outside of its walls into the wider community, facilitating connection for families and children. These community connections transcend generations and socio-economic status. The park beside Kyabra is noted by all three parents in their narrative accounts as a place of significance. The park represents the impact Kyabra has on bringing people together and building connections between children and families.

- We have a massive play in the park. Like it’s a community. Like our kids go to Kyabra, so our kids play together.

While the focus of the narratives revolved around the transition that their child made to school, the narratives reflect the parents wanting to share their experience of Kyabra as a whole. With regards to facilitating positive transition to school, there were a number of elements that were evident across the narratives that facilitated successful transitions for their children. These included collaborative decision making, trusting partnerships, respect for diversity, getting to know families and children in depth, and a recognition that supporting parents in their roles as first teachers is crucial to positive outcomes for children.

3.5.1 Helen - Learning Together at Kyabra

Helen lives with her mother, husband and their only child, Paul. Helen was attracted to sending her son to Kyabra due to the limited hours structure and the cost of the program. The cost enabled her as a stay at home mother to afford the fees for her child and to facilitate her preference that Paul attend a shorter hours program.
It was really, really enjoyable, because the first is very short time only for four hours then. So easy to pass then. But in the long day time care they have nap time, which he did not like at all. And also maybe too long.

Kyabra is housed near a park which features heavily in Helen’s story. Daily after the Kyabra session, Helen and her son would meet other parents and children in the park. This play was important for Helen and for Paul as it provided further opportunities for Helen to connect with other parents and for Paul to engage with children. Kyabra has enabled community links for Helen and her child through engagement at the park next door and provided a community meeting place to visit.

I think seems a very good choice. Yeah, I think especially the situation. Like I do not work, but if people work then of course they cannot because they’re only for four hours. But for our situation then I do not work then I have the time then let him go there for four hours. Then he can play and learn something the same time. And also I like the location of childcare centre as well. Because it next to a little park. So after the school then because it finish at one then Paul will play there at least about one hour. Then a lot children will play there then I just let him play there for one sometimes two hours then.

Combined with her son attending Kyabra, Helen was enabled through Kyabra to attend in a volunteer capacity one day a week in her son’s classroom. This time spent at the site has contributed to the trusting relationships Helen has built with the Kyabra staff. The volunteer opportunities at Kyabra also extend to high school students with Helen observing and noting that Kyabra supports many people to volunteer and be part of the Kyabra community.

I think that all the teacher they are very friendly. And very qualified and also the good thing is I like they invited high school students who are studying childcare certificate. Yeah, they are very good as well for simple first I really appreciate they let me stay there for one day for the volunteer job. Then yeah I have the opportunity to know about Paul and know about the children and know how they deal with the problem and teach the children. And other thing is they very open, always say to us if you have any concern or anything you want to talk about you can talk to them as well.

For Helen, who moved to Australia from China, the opportunity to participate in the program one day a week provided an opportunity to build her parenting skills and understanding of child rearing, school transition and other processes in an Australian context.

For example how to talk to children. Because maybe I’m come from China then when I was little I can see other family, our parents are very strict. Since the parents and grandparents they are the boss of house. They will talk to you do not do it such such. But since I work there (Kyabra) then I realise you not really, everyone even you talk to your child you have to talk.
And also I like the one in the free course as well. Kyabra running a lot of free course but seems two course is very suitable for me.

Helen speaks of Kyabra as a place where she learnt alongside her child, building her capacity as a parent. Engagement with Kyabra enabled Helen to learn about the cultural tools around child rearing in Australia that she didn’t understand at first, as she was raised in an international context. Through her time at Kyabra, Helen learnt about the importance of play for young children’s development. She learnt how to talk with her child based on the modelling from the Kyabra teachers that she could watch on her volunteer days. Helen also learnt how to support her child’s behaviour positively. The teachers encouraged Helen to watch them in their teaching to reinforce the importance of interactions and language with young children. Helen was invited to attend parent training sessions including the Circle of Security which she found very useful.

Seems I think all of them they are very helpful. For example, playing. Before, because in China we get used to always sit down to learn something. That is core way we learn something. But in here when you are playing then you will learn something through the playing. Then the teacher will tell me you don’t think they are only learning. And also when I just start work there then some time when Paul was in trouble then I will get in first. Then the teacher always tell me sit back please, because we are teacher. You just observe the situation and watch us how to deal with it.

The opportunity for Helen to learn with her child at Kyabra has transformed her understanding of play and learning. The information she has learnt at Kyabra has informed the way she talks with her son, her view of childhood and how she parents. Kyabra offered a space to practise new skills in an open and accepting environment. The relationships fostered between Helen and the teachers focused on building Helen’s parenting confidence and capacities and showed value in her contribution, by enabling her to volunteer in the centre one day a week.

These key learning experiences and the time Helen spent as a volunteer at Kyabra supported her understanding when the teachers encouraged her child to spend one more year at Kyabra before transitioning to school. The teachers worked with Helen and her son in the year following these discussions to ensure he was prepared for school holistically, including socially and academically.

Helen talks proudly about how Paul has transitioned to school from Kyabra. She reinforces the extra year at Kyabra was very valuable for her son.

Yeah, first when they talk to me and I talk to my husband, especially my husband, because he was born and grew up here then he remembers Prep where only playing, did not learn anything. I think in 2016 when he start there from April, I think that year he still nearly just play by himself, still doesn’t want to mix up with other children. But from last year he really want to mix up with other children. And also especially the teacher already get
lot information from on the line. Yeah, then she copy a lot of those information. And also I think about she say, for example in China you start go to primary school from seven. But in here is, if last year when Paul start Prep he was under five.

Supporting Helen and her child through the transition to school was a planned and intentional period where teachers communicated with Helen and provided additional resources such as information to assist her understanding. Combined with advice on delaying entry to school, the teachers at Kyabra fostered a relationship with Helen that enabled her to be part of the program and learn new ways of parenting. The extra information supplied for Helen, as well as the focus on holistic development for Paul, has enabled a positive transition to school. The collaborative relationship fostered between Helen and staff demonstrates that partnerships are crucial for successful school transition. Collaborative decision making around important considerations such as staying a year longer within the program was facilitated through the trusting relationships built over time.

3.5.2 Peter - Kyabra is a Part of our Community
Peter has well-articulated philosophies that underpin his choice for programs that cater for his daughter, Rachael, and he values the opportunity to choose a program that matches his beliefs and values. Peter identifies Kyabra as an organisation that is valued within his local community. He refers to word of mouth in the community being so strong that many families choose to send their children to Kyabra, not out of economic necessity, but out of knowing Kyabra to be the best option for their children.

I think probably the, the thing that she enjoyed the most was the quality of teaching. There were two teachers. And both of them were very, very, very, very caring, very dedicated teachers with a lot of experience. They put a lot of care and a lot of energy into their work. And they were both very, very calm, very settled. I just can’t say enough about the teaching staff. And I think that’s primarily what, what Rachel was interested in. But also, of course, the, the whole ambience, atmosphere, then the friends and whatnot, and the, you know, the structure.

Despite understanding that there are some parents who attend Kyabra for socio-economic reasons, Peter is convinced that the whole organisation is a very important part of his community. To begin their association with Kyabra, Peter and his wife attended playgroup with their daughter. From that initial association, Peter and his wife went on to engage with some parental training programs through Kyabra.

That’s a big part of our story, was that they had a play group and we used to take Rachel there, and then we met Trish and we found out, we actually both went and did Nurtured Heart training at night. You know... So, the whole place, the whole organisation, not just the childcare, is, is a wonderful place. And a very important part of the community here, I think. The second thing, as a testament to that, quite a number of the students at the Kyabra Child Care were parents who were very well off. In some, in the,
in some cases extremely well off. And they brought their children to Kyabra because they felt it was the best care for their child.

Peter talks positively about the quality of the teaching staff at Kyabra. Combined with this, he refers to the high level of care at the service as being an important factor in his child’s experience.

I think it’s, it’s the best that I’ve had any experience. There’s some, you know, some real horror stories out there at some... ...places that we’ve looked at, and oh my god, you know, Kyabra was just the crème de la crème.

Peter’s daughter didn’t transition directly from Kyabra to school but went into another program in the local community. The transition to the other program was supported through feedback from teaching staff about their child’s progress. Peter also commented on the foundational literacy and numeracy opportunities in the program at Kyabra that were balanced with a play-based program.

The lady in charge at that point, she was very much, very pro-active, as in saying well, you know, Rachel’s at this age now, what are you going to be doing? What does she need? You know, can I do extra things for her? I mean, she’s, you know, she was doing things like getting little ABC charts and...the material that the teacher was providing to do with literacy and numeracy, getting her started in those areas.

Kyabra as a service has strong links to the community. Peter and his family recognise the importance Kyabra plays as part of his local community fabric.

I would just love to say that, to emphasise, to reiterate and re-emphasise the fact that my daughter just still misses the place. I’m not sure of the actual, what the, you know, official role of Kyabra as an organisation was, but the word of mouth was so powerful that, you know, people who could have sent their kids anywhere were sending them to Kyabra. Not to save money, because some of them became friends of ours, it wasn’t about that, it was about the, the level of care.

The quality of the teaching staff and the high level of care provided by Kyabra, supported Rachel’s continuity of learning as she transitioned to another program within the community. The holistic program provided by Kyabra combined with the educators’ child developmental knowledge, enabled Rachel to develop positive dispositions for learning. This was evident as educators provided her with resources to facilitate her interest in literacy and numeracy. Peter sees Kyabra as a key provider within his community. One that has not only fostered a love of learning for his child, but has also provided his family with accessible resources and essential training to build their parenting capacity. This holistic level of care has been developed by Kyabra through the high level of quality care and the ways in which Kyabra work in partnership with families through the provision of a range of services within the community.
3.5.3 Karen - They Are Helping Me Raise Two Very Polite, Happy Children

Karen describes herself as a young mum. This is important as Karen credits Kyabra with a non-judgmental and welcoming atmosphere that has supported her to grow in her parenting capacity. Karen has two boys with this story being about her oldest child, Michael, who has transitioned to school. Her youngest child is now attending Kyabra. Karen begins talking about her oldest son, Michael, and how he presented at Kyabra when he first attended. The teachers at Kyabra spent time each day talking with Karen about ways to speak with her son, Michael, and ways to redirect his behaviour.

And when he started there he was a little bit naughty. The two ladies there, they helped me, sort of helped me like how to look after him and how to teach him what’s right and what’s wrong. And within six months he was a different child. Different, completely different. But he just matured so much and he just, his first day he, his first day at Kyabra, or his second day at Kyabra, he picked up a chair and threw it across the classroom because he didn’t want to sit down and have lunch like the rest of the class. I think that was his first day. That’s what he was like at the beginning. And then they just you know went with it, or just, you know you got to be strong, you got to be this is the wrong thing to do and all that. And they taught me what to do, and they taught me everything you know. Like they didn’t keep anything from me. So it was, he changed a lot in Kyabra. That was really good.

The trusting relationship that was fostered between the staff enabled sharing of information each day to build consistency in approach. As well as normalising the behaviour of her child, the teachers supported Karen to learn other ways of interacting with her child. This focus on relationship building enabled some important positive outcomes for Michael, and for Karen.

She sort of just pulled me aside at the end of the, like when I’d come to pick him up or when I’d drop him off and she’ll tell me like this is what we’re going to do. This is what you should do. This is what we are doing. He is responding to this or he’s not responding to that. This is normal, this is not acceptable. And because I was a young, well I am a young mum I didn’t really have, none of my friends have children, other than learning from my mum and from them. That’s all really that I had.

The teachers’ non-judgmental approach supported Karen to feel comfortable enough to try out their ideas and to trust in their approach. After first attending playgroup with Michael, Karen then enquired about the childcare option. She recalls coming to playgroup at Kyabra herself as a child. Listening without judgment and getting to know children and families is important for authentic relationships to grow.

And they didn’t judge me that I didn’t know. Actually they were very very very accepting. And I came to playgroup first. The playgroup that they run here. And then they told me that the childcare was still open. Cause I went

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3 For an audio version of Karen’s story please use this link.
there when I was little so I wasn’t sure if it was still open, cause I know that it’s constantly, they’re constantly fighting to keep it open. So when I found out that it was open I was straight over there that day to go and like can I please put my child in here.

Karen feels strongly that a long day care program was not an option for her and Michael and that the limited hours was a better choice for Michael.

Yeah this is definitely the best place for him. I feel like if he went into a childcare centre, a long day day care, that he would have got lost sort of thing, I feel like they would have just sort of let him get away with everything. Like you know with his, he was a very angry little boy, whereas now he’s a very polite little boy.

A combination of having less children in the group and the shorter hours was important for Karen when making the decision for Michael to attend the Kyabra childcare centre. She also feels this is important for her youngest child who is attending Kyabra currently.

The kids love it. Like I love it. It’s very friendly and warm. And I think it’s good to have something that you know is only four hours. It’s like it’s not for people that need day care for work, you know what I mean, like it’s just for them to socialise. And to sort of get like that help. Help from like the educators sort of thing. Like they know what they’re seeing. And like with my younger son, I know this is meant to be about my older son, but with my younger son we’re currently going through lots of testing and stuff to see if he’s, he’s just a bit delayed. And so they’re helping me at Kyabra. You know this is what he’s like at Kyabra, this is what he’s like here. And they’re helping me with his separation. She’s not like come on you got to drop them and go. She understands the situation that I’m in.

Karen has observed the benefits that the program at Kyabra has had on her and both of her children. She benefits Kyabra with assisting her to raise her children in the way she wants to. The choice of attending the limited hours program has provided Karen with a collaborative approach to parenting her children. Karen felt there was a focus on knowing her child in the program and supporting her in her role as a parent.

And I feel like that because there’s not that many kids there she [the teacher] can focus more on each individual child. Which is awesome. And like he doesn’t need to stay a long time. You know he was away, you know if he had, if either of them had to be in day care for all day I think that they would go a bit crazy. I see my friends that have their kids in day care. The exact same age as my two kids. And they are very loud and very out of control. Like I just feel like they are raising, they’re helping me raise very two very polite, happy children.

Karen, her sister and brother all attended Kyabra as children around 30 years ago. Their association with Kyabra is long and features as a transformative part of Karen’s parenting
story. Karen’s Godmother also went to Kyabra as a child, and Karen tells many other stories of people in her network who have connections to Kyabra. Karen tells a story about meeting one of the dads at pick up time at Kyabra and remembering they went to Kyabra together as children. Karen’s own mother still has a long-lasting friendship forged from picking up her children and becoming best friends with another Kyabra mother. These stories attest to an intergenerational connection between Kyabra and the wider community. Generations are connected through their memories of Kyabra and these families choose to send their children there to experience this sense of community.

My sister attended, I attended, and my brother attended. 27 years ago she [sister] started at Kyabra. And then I obviously went with her when I was old enough. And then my brother went when he was old enough. And actually my older son, oh, their godmother she went there also. And her two sisters and brother. All four, like all four, the kids in her family went there also, so. So it’s, I know people that have been there. And there’s also another boy that was in Michael’s, in my son’s class, his dad went with me also. And so when we used to drop off it was like hey we used to play here and now our kids play here. And like sometimes the grandparents would pick them up. And my mum, my mum and his mum are still best friends till this day. They’re still very good friends.

This connection spreads across the parents with Karen recounting that other parents she has met through the centre, have become her friends, creating a parenting support network for Karen.

I saw her [another Kyabra mother] the other day, she came over for coffee. So they, and they become friends also. I think the parents become friends through there as well, cause it’s not like a structured sort of centre, like you drop them off, you sign them in, you leave. Like whereas this is like they’re all there in that little area, it’s not a spread out thing, so you feel a lot closer.

Karen credits Kyabra with preparing her child academically and socially for his transition to school. She has seen the benefits of her child’s engagement in the Kyabra program for herself and recounts a story that occurred on an orientation to prep day that she and Michael attended.

All the kids that were going to be in his class all met. Yeah, so they all met at the class to meet their teacher like everybody. And they, all the kids were on the carpet in front of the teacher talking. And they’re all, like she’s asking them questions you know what are this and what are that, and all the kids are screaming and yelling over the answers. And this one (points to her son) is just sitting there with his hand up, quietly. And I felt like all the other kids they’d all been in childcare centres where they’d have to be the loudest, they have to be in your face, whereas he was just sitting there, back straight, arm up, waiting. It was a bit sad the teacher didn’t pick him. The teacher, because all the other kids were just rah rah and he just... And like
we went up to the teacher afterwards and said he had a question for you. And she was I’m sorry I didn’t, there were so many loud. And she said you were such a good boy being patient. 100% I didn’t teach him that. Definitely. Like when do you have to sit at home, cross your legs and put your hand up straight to talk to mummy. You don’t do that. That is 100% Kyabra. There’s no question about it. Like I didn’t teach him that at all.

The teachers at Kyabra helped Karen explicitly with her son’s transition to school. They informed her of the kinds of things he would need to learn to do to ensure a positive transition to school.

Oh, they just helped me like that he, you know he needs to learn how to cut, he needs to learn this to go to school, he needs to learn. They just told me what he needed to know before he went to school. Like they were teaching. They were just saying to transition into school he needs to be able to do this, he needs to be able to do this and he needs to be able to do this. He could read, he could write and he knew all his letters, he knew all his numbers, he knew everything leaving Kyabra. Like he was very good. When he had his interview for Prep they were shocked with how well he, like how smart he was.

The long lasting and intergenerational connections forged through Kyabra have supported Karen in her parenting journey in a positive and supportive way. Karen has been supported to grow through Kyabra’s focus on relationship building and providing a non-judgmental environment that supports children and their families. The targeted learning experiences and information for Karen as a parent ensured Karen’s son had a positive start to school.

My husband loves Kyabra. He hardly ever, he’s never, like he only comes like when they do their Christmas concerts at the end of the year. Oh my God it’s amazing to see my little boy up there, like doing his little role in their little concert. Which is amazing. When my husband came to that he was just like oh my God it’s just so, like all the parents got together and it was just nice. It’s just you feel welcomed.

A strong sense of partnership and collaboration permeates through Karen’s story. This partnership with Kyabra has enriched her parenting capacity and empowered her with the tools to ensure a smooth transition to school for her son. Karen attests that Kyabra is building a strong sense of community, whereby she is not only supported by the educators at Kyabra but has also formed a parenting support network that are sharing the parenting journey with her. Reciprocal relationships that have been forged on mutual respect and trust between Karen and Kyabra enhanced her son’s learning experience and ensured he had a successful transition to school.
4. Summary and recommendations

This mixed method evaluation of the Kyabra limited hours childcare centre, conducted over a four month period has addressed some important evaluative questions for the service and illuminated some key evidence for the organization.

4.1 Improvements in child development and learning

Over a four month period a number of children, including those who were identified as at-risk by early measures, made substantial gains in important developmental areas. This is evidenced by the individual growth trajectories showing in some cases the equivalent of more than one year of growth over the four month period. For a number of children their developmental skills moved from the at-risk range to the normative range for Australian children in their age group. This growth is significant, given there is evidence to suggest a quarter of children commencing formal schooling arrive with deficits in communication, social skills, emotional well-being or lacking in their physical health (Fox & Geddes, 2016). The substantial increases found in vocabulary and self-regulation and other social-emotional skills is particularly important given these skills have been identified as key factors that confer academic resilience to children following school entry (Williams & Berthelsen, 2016). That is, it is strong skills in these areas that will support positive learning trajectories at school for children, regardless of other socio-economic risk factors they may experience, and regardless of the nature of the school they attend. Parents appeared highly aware of the developmental and learning benefits attendance had for their children, strongly endorsing these child benefits in their survey responses.

4.2 Increased access to early childhood education and care to those who might otherwise not attend

As the Queensland and indeed Australian governments seek to increase participation in early childhood education and care for three year olds (Fox & Geddes, 2016), an important finding here relates to the choices parents make for their family and child. In this evaluation, in which the mean age of children was just under four years, around half of the surveyed parents would not send their child to any other ECEC if Kyabra was not available. Related to this, a number of families had intentionally moved from other ECEC settings such as long day care to Kyabra. While the reasons for these parental decisions differed across families the key points of differences to other services related to parenting and early childhood philosophies of families, the unique support needs of children, a desire for a sense of community which families felt was not offered at other services, and for some parents, a perceived view that long day care could not accommodate their child. Additionally, there was strong evidence to suggest families understood the importance of attendance in supporting their child’s development and transition to school and that Kyabra effectively enhanced their child’s development at an individual level. Regardless of the reason, all parents in the study appeared to have found what they were seeking in the Kyabra service and were highly satisfied with their child’s participation.
4.3 The nature of the service provided and the community setting is key to achieving outcomes

As evidenced in this evaluation, Kyabra attracts a range of families from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and appears to effectively engage them in a community-based service. Parental accounts made it consistently clear that the philosophy of the service is welcoming of diversity, accepting of families and that trust is built between the service and families. This trust has withstood the test of time and changing staff as evidenced by multi-generational attendance by families at the service.

For most families, the limited hours nature of the service was a key deciding factor related to both parenting and early childhood philosophies held by families and financial concerns. Many families specifically sought limited hours childcare combined with the specific supports and style of program offered by Kyabra. Specifically, the nature of the centre in terms of being embedded as a part of a broader Kyabra community (parents, children, service providers) is highly important to families. This community builds social capital for families and provides multiple support options including playgroups and parenting training. A number of parents were also aware of the play based nature of the program as suitable for a holistic focus on early child development. Centre educators appear to provide very intentional, explicit, and considered individualised support to families and children, and this is done in a transparent way made possible by the trusting relationships developed. The knowledge of the educators on how to embed learning for young children in a play based approach was mentioned by parents. Parents noted the holistic focus on their child’s development was supported through play opportunities and further supported with intentional approaches to model strategies for parents. This modelling was important for parents to understand what is developmentally appropriate for their child and how to respond to typical challenges associated with the parenting of young children.

4.4 Limitations

While providing important evidence for the Kyabra service, this project has some limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the project design is limited by a small sample size and lack of a control or comparison group. This means that gains in developmental measures made over the four months for children cannot be attributed only to attendance at the centre given maturational processes are also at play. However, given the steep rate of change for some children and the corroborating evidence from parental accounts, there is reason to believe that Kyabra attendance has supported and stimulated some of this change.

A second limitation is that less than half of the families attending the centre at the time of study recruitment consented to being involved. It may be that those that consented are not representative of all families attending the centre. For example, those who consented may be from more highly educated backgrounds with higher levels of comfort working with visiting researchers. It may be that with a more diverse sample different findings would have emerged. However, it is also important to note that despite the large portion of tertiary educated parents in this study, typically associated with higher developmental skills
in children, participating children still presented with a range of developmental areas in need of support prior to school entry, with many at ‘risky’ levels.

4.5 Recommendations
A number of recommendations can be made as a consequence of this evaluation. These include:

- Kyabra should continue to operate the limited hours service in its current form as this is meeting the particular needs of families who might not otherwise attend any ECEC – thus conferring potential risk for their children in terms of future learning and school transition.
- Kyabra should continue to offer a range of services to support families parenting needs. Including offering parental programs and inviting families to be a part of their daily program.
- Kyabra should continue with the practice of embedding high school work experience and trainee students in the service as this is generally highly valued by attending families.
- Kyabra could consider a differential pricing structure based on family financial circumstances, as at least one family noted a willingness to pay more for the service. This could contribute to financial sustainability.
- Kyabra could strengthen the promotion of its services using the positives of the program identified by parents such as enhanced community connections and play based limited hours care that has a holistic focus on children and families.
References


