



MEDIA RELEASE

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CHILDREN FIRST ALLIANCE WELCOMES ACT GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO EARLY EDUCATION FOR THREE YEAR OLDS

DATE: Tuesday 31 July 2018

A network of not-for-profit Early Childhood Education and Care providers has welcomed the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government's announcement that it will develop a plan for the extension of universal access of early education to three year old children in the ACT.

Currently four year old children have access to 15 hours of free preschool per week in the ACT under a partnership agreement between the Australian and ACT Governments. Today's commitment by the ACT Government will see a plan developed for the extension of universal access to early childhood education for three year old children, which will better align the ACT with international best practice.

Amanda Tobler, CEO Community Services #1, and Co-Chair of the Children First Alliance said, "The ACT Government should be congratulated for leading the way in planning for the introduction of free universal access of early childhood education to three year old children. Introducing this policy in full will have a transformative effect on children in the ACT and particularly on children experiencing disadvantage, not only in their early years, but throughout their lives."

The Children First Alliance also welcomed the announcement that a phased implementation of universal access to early education for three year old children would prioritise children in the ACT who are experiencing the most disadvantage.

Amanda Tobler, CEO Community Services #1, and Co-Chair of the Children First Alliance said, "We see first-hand the impact that early childhood education has on children experiencing disadvantage. Providing universal access to quality early education for two years before school will provide the greatest benefits for children experiencing disadvantage. For these children one year of preschool is often not enough to close the achievement gaps".

One in five children in the ACT are developmentally vulnerable on at least one measure when starting school. While the rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is

double this, with two in five children being developmentally vulnerable on at least one measure when starting school.

Amanda Tobler, CEO Community Services #1, and Co-Chair of the Children First Alliance said, "Extending universal access of early education to three year old children is the most effective way to ensure that children have the best start in life. The evidence is clear that two or more years in a high quality early education environment has the biggest impact on a child's intellectual development, early literacy skills, social and emotional wellbeing."

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Co-Chair Amanda Tobler, CEO Community Services #1 is available for interview.

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About the Children First Alliance: The ACT Children First Alliance (the Alliance) is a network of longstanding not-for-profit providers of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT. The Alliance was established to develop and communicate a shared vision for ECEC in the ACT and to ensure that all children have access to ECEC. The Alliance has ten members: Anglicare NSW South, NSW West and ACT, Belconnen Community Services, Communities@Work, Community Services #1, Goodstart Early Learning ACT, MOCCA, Northside Community Service, Woden Community Service, YMCA Canberra, and YWCA Canberra. The ten members have 46 early learning centres with 3,543 places for children.

For more information about the Alliance visit: www.childrenfirstalliance.org