

TERRITORY FAMILIES, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

# Mid-Year Report on 2021-22 Action Plan



# Goal 1: Communities are engaged, diverse and vibrant places where everyone belongs

## Enable lifelong community participation and connection

From 1 July to 31 December 2021, Territory Families, Housing and Communities developed initiatives to support lifelong community participation and connection. These included:

- the NT Sport and Active Recreation Strategic Plan 2021-25 and the Territory Sports Academy Service Delivery Framework 2022-25
- the Northern Territory Seniors Policy, and the expansion of the Seniors Recognition Scheme eligibility to include senior Territorians who are over 65, hold a temporary visa and a valid Medicare card, and provided greater flexibility for members to spend their \$500 payment
- the launch of the Northern Territory Live Music Strategy
- conducting the 2020-21 Northern Territory Public Libraries – Connected Communities Review, detailing the important work undertaken to work in partnership and support 30 library facilities and 48 remote public Wi-Fi services across the Territory.

Between October and December 2021, we undertook public consultation activities with the community and our stakeholders to inform the development of the Northern Territory Disability Strategy 2021-2031. This included online and face-to-face workshops with people with lived experience of disability, their networks, family and carers, the sector and industry stakeholders and the broader community. Throughout this period, there were 146 community members who participated in face to face activities with over 80 submissions received.

We supported 92 community events for young Territorians and 137 grants supporting the arts and culture sector and community participation.



## Aboriginal science, celestial kinship and astronomy

In October 2021, the first Aboriginal Science Celestial Kinship Astronomy activity was run by Territory Families, Housing and Communities Elder in Residence, Dr Christine Fejo-King in Tennant Creek.

Approximately 30 people of all ages experienced star gazing, Aboriginal science and celestial kinship.

The stargazers used iPads to locate and view the Milky Way galaxy and record observations in the Field Guide for Aboriginal Astronomers developed by Dr Fejo-King and her daughter Jessie.

It was the first in a series of activities being rolled out across the Territory including astronomy, genetics and marine biology.

## **Enable Territorians and communities to shape the Territory's future through investment, local decision making and employment opportunities**

We continued to establish new mechanisms for community influence in our work, through pathways such as the Ministerial Creative Industries Advisory Council, established in October 2021.

The Council was created to promote the economic development and growth of the Northern Territory's creative industries, bringing together creative industries and commercially-focused experience and expertise to provide strategic advice and feedback. The Council will also develop partnerships with businesses and the community. Territory Families, Housing and Communities housing and infrastructure investments support community control and local employment. During the reporting period we continued to invest in Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver services across town camps and homelands, such as housing, municipal and essential services. At 31 December 2021, 20 houses received upgrades, including six in Camel Camp (Utopia) and two in Gurunga (Elliot North). In addition, Aboriginal Housing NT has been granted \$500,000 over two years to provide input and advice towards a new homelands policy.

## **Design thriving places and connected neighbourhoods and communities through robust planning, infrastructure asset management and tenancy support**

Territory Families, Housing and Communities continued to connect our communities through arts, culture and sports programs. To achieve this, we provided funding and support for events that activate public spaces, support volunteers, providing funding to local sporting programs and activities, and invest in the Territory's art galleries and cultural centres. We have also invested in rectification works to various sporting infrastructure, including TIO Stadium and the Palmerston Soccer Complex.

Territory Families, Housing and Communities has continued to invest in the growth of the community housing sector to deliver social and affordable housing, through the delivery of a suite of initiatives to assist Territorians on low to moderate incomes. This included the release of a second request for proposal to deliver additional Specialist Disability Accommodation dwellings in Darwin and Palmerston. We have partnered to provide 41 new affordable homes for key workers in Palmerston and Katherine and have invested in an affordable housing rental subsidy program.

We continued to support programs and volunteers at grassroots level throughout the regions, with the first round of the 2021-22 Grassroots Grant Program opened on 28 July 2021. Through this program \$27,000 was awarded to eight grassroots sports groups to support programs to be actively involved in communities and engaged in public spaces through community activities and events.

Between October and December 2021, a variety of community sport and active recreation activities were supported, including the Northern Territory Community Awards and the International Day of People with a Disability, held at the Charles Darwin University Stadium, Marrara.

## Promote social inclusion and accessibility, and celebrate the value of our diverse communities and their history

From 1 July to 31 December 2021, Territory Families, Housing and Communities supported 50 multicultural events with \$645,100 of funding allocated to the Multicultural Grants Program. This included events such as the Diwali – Festival of Lights in Darwin and the Alice Springs Malayalee Association’s Mega Onam.

Through the same reporting period, there were 13 initiatives supported by Territory Families, Housing and Communities to enhance gender equity and diversity. This included the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence (25 November to 10 December each year), with a \$5000 grant provided to Desert Knowledge Australia for a social media campaign and panel discussion event. ‘Preventing violence against Aboriginal women and children’ panel discussion was held in partnership with the Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit.

Progress continued on planning and development of the infrastructure that enables us to display and celebrate the Territory’s cultural collections through the release of design tenders and consultation with local stakeholders for the National Aboriginal Art Gallery and State Square Art Gallery.

To expand and preserve our heritage listed sites through Heritage Grants, seven grants totalling \$100,000 were awarded between 1 July and 31 December 2021 to support the conservation of historical buildings and objects, including funding for conservation work to the Royal Flying Doctors Residence and Communication Base in Alice Springs.

Celebrating the value of our diverse history, Library & Archives NT curated the *Black, Red and Yellow: Unity and Identity* exhibition at the Northern Territory Library celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first raising of the Aboriginal flag, which tracked the journey of the flag from a symbol of protest to a national icon.

## Puyu Wanti in Papunya

Supporting local sport is a great way to empower and motivate community engagement on country and in community. In November and December 2021, Territory Families, Housing and Communities partnered with the Northern Territory Football League, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, MacDonnell Regional Council Youth Services, Central Australian Youth Link Up Service, Ngurratjuta, Outback Stores and community leaders in Papunya to run an eight-week summer sport competition.

Puyu Wanti included softball, football, a colour smash fun run, barber shop and cook-up in community. The Youth Outreach and Re-Engagement Hub set up the barber shop, providing young people with haircuts while the Northern Territory Football League provided a community cook up each Thursday night, with educational sessions such as ‘food/fuel we put into our bodies’.



# Goal 2: All Territorians are safe, and can access services to enhance their lives

## Equip individuals, families and communities with the resources to improve their circumstances and lead enjoyable lives

We are committed to supporting families and keeping their children safe, and our investment and reforms in family support are working with more families trusting the services we deliver.

In the reporting period, we provided in-home support to our clients by streamlining and strengthening our preventative and early intervention services, including targeted family and tenancy support and through behaviour change programs. This included the Strengthening Families program, with 424 Family Support cases representing individuals and families willing to work with us on a voluntary basis to address their needs to prevent escalation to tertiary services.

In addition, the Family and Children Enquires and Support phone line received 600 phone calls from 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021. Community members could speak to professionals and be connected to non-government services in their area.

Territory Families, Housing and Communities remains instrumental in supporting children to access specialist assessment services, leading to diagnosis to support children in care to access National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services. At 31 December 2021, nearly 100 children accessed early connections to support children younger than seven and their families through a consistent early childhood approach. There were 4,587 active NDIS participants with approved plans in place, and 818 active providers in the Northern Territory in the reporting period.

There continued to be an increase in membership for Territorians to the Northern Territory Seniors Recognition Scheme and the Northern Territory Concession Scheme. The Northern Territory Seniors Recognition Scheme increased by more than 750 members and the Northern Territory Concession Scheme grew by over 400 new members compared to the same time last year.

## Respond when risks to individual or community safety are identified

Territory Families, Housing and Communities continue to support reforms focused on early intervention, prevention and family responsibility through:

- providing early family support and intervention to families before crisis occurs through expanding the range and scope of family and parenting support services provided by the non-government sector
- legislating an entitlement for support to 22 years of age for out of home care leavers to be supported to transition to adulthood.

Territory Families, Housing and Communities also funded a number of providers to offer safety and support to vulnerable community members, including:

- Darwin Community Legal Service to deliver the Older Persons Strategic Advocacy Project, which aims to reduce and educate about Elder Abuse
- 29 Women's Safe Houses across the Northern Territory
- Aboriginal-led organisations and Aboriginal-led partnerships awarded five-year Family Support Services grants to keep children safe, and at home with their families.

In June 2021 the Emergency Management Welfare Group responded to COVID-19 outbreaks across the Northern Territory.

The Welfare Group provided lockdown and isolation support services to the community and specialist responses to high risk populations such as residents of town camps and people experiencing homelessness. The Welfare Group also worked closely with our partners to put their COVID-19 action plans into effect, and ensured support was provided to children, foster and kinship carers in communities experiencing COVID-19.

## Connect individuals to coordinated services that respond to their holistic needs

We worked to actively connect individuals to services and respond holistically to their needs, such as investing in programs that enable young people to address their offending behaviours, including:

- The Back on Track program, providing alternatives to detention and pathways to divert young people away from the youth justice system. At 31 December 2021 there were 79 young people in the program
- Youth Outreach and Re-Engagement Teams, who provided support to young offenders in the community and young people at-risk of entering the youth justice system. Between October and December 2021, 28 new voluntary youth outreach cases were opened, and 284 new statutory cases were opened.

The Multi-Agency Child and Community Safety Teams brought together community members with cultural authority, locally based heads of government agencies and non-government organisations to identify issues, create action plans for children, family and community safety, and carry out actions collaboratively. We continued to establish Multi-Agency Child and Community Safety teams. At 31 December 2021, meetings had taken place in 28 communities across the Territory.

The number of children in out-of-home care continues to decline in the Northern Territory, down 33 children since 30 June 2021, with 90 per cent of children in care Aboriginal. We continued to support kinship carers to enhance the Aboriginal family and foster care system, ensuring that Aboriginal children and young people are connected to family, culture, language, community and country. Of the 844 Aboriginal children in care, 227 children were in kinship care at 31 December 2021.



### Therapy dogs

**You would have heard the saying that man's best friend is their dog, and that was certainly the outcome for young people in the Darwin Supported Bail Accommodation Facility.**

**Our partner organisation, Saltbush Social Enterprises, is using therapy dogs to help residents relax, overcome anxiety and learning to moderate their behaviours in a non-threatening environment.**

## Provide safe places for individuals and families that enhance opportunities to thrive

In 2021, we regionalised the Public Housing Safety Officer teams to provide greater on-ground responsiveness to antisocial behaviour and provide more safety for people in their homes and in the community. From 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021 there were a total of 4,756 antisocial behaviour complaints across the Territory in urban areas (excluding town camps). Of those, we responded to 97 per cent within the required timeframes.

Housing is integral to the safety and security of Territorians and during this reporting period, 90 new households were assisted into public housing. Our occupancy rate for urban public housing was 97 per cent. Also, construction commenced on the capital works program for 21 new dwellings in the Greater Darwin area, Katherine and Tennant Creek.

The work to reduce homelessness and domestic, family and sexual violence continued, with 2,351\* clients provided with crisis accommodation service, and funding provided to 29 Women's Safe Houses across the Territory. During the recent COVID-19 lockdowns, lock-outs and lock-ins, targeted supports for domestic and family violence specialist services were put in place, including flexible support packages, sourcing alternative accommodation and the provision of emergency protective equipment.

Providing safe places included upgrades to remote houses through town camps housing and infrastructure upgrades, with 52 homes receiving upgrades between July and December 2021.

At 31 December 2021, there were 61 children in residential care, supported through our partnership with Intensive Therapeutic Residential Care Service providers CASPA and Life Without Barriers. This model focused on recovery from trauma and providing supports to children and young people with complex mental health, disability, and emotional and behavioural issues.

\* Data to 30 September 2021

## Kids in care get cooking

During November 2021, young people in Intensive Therapeutic Residential Care, together with CASPA in Katherine jumped at the opportunity to support their local community through the COVID-19 lockdown periods in the Big Rivers region.

These young people cooked up a feast for those in need, making 60 hot meals and commenced planning their next initiative to give back by making Christmas hampers for local families.



# Goal 3: Our people are valued, empowered and have opportunities to develop and contribute to our agency

## Attract, recruit and retain a skilled, diverse and inclusive workforce that is reflective of the community we serve

Territory Families, Housing and Communities engaged in continuous recruitment to find the right people for the right job in the agency. At 31 December 2021, we had 1301.9 full time equivalent staff, delivering high-quality and client-centred services in our urban, remote and very remote communities. Aboriginal staff made up 17 percent of our workforce, with 11 per cent of our leadership roles held by Aboriginal staff during this period.

In September 2021, the Honourable Kate Worden announced the expansion of the existing Territory Families, Housing and Communities remote service delivery footprint to 11 remote communities to establish service delivery hubs. The service hubs will enable engagement and support for community members, children and families in remote communities. Our continued focus on place based service delivery in remote communities creates even more opportunities for Territory Families, Housing and Communities to recruit staff who want to live and work in their communities to deliver improved social outcomes for our clients.

To support the ongoing recruitment and retention of skilled staff, Territory Families, Housing and Communities continued to progress work on our Workforce Development Strategy.

## Our work environment is safe and supportive and staff have a voice

Territory Families, Housing and Communities has an established Employee Consultative Committee to provide an avenue for staff to discuss views or opinions on workplace issues impacting employees or service delivery. The committee met on five occasions between 1 July and 31 December 2021, including travelling to Katherine for the annual regional meeting. This meeting coincided with the Territory Families, Housing and Communities Foster and Kinship Carer Excellence Awards in Katherine and saw over 80 foster carers and young people in attendance. The Foster and Kinship Carer Excellence Awards provided an opportunity for our staff to thank carers for their outstanding achievement and thank them for their dedication and commitment to support children and young people in care and for the work they do in strengthening our communities.

Territory Families, Housing and Communities developed and implemented a Work Health and Safety governance structure, with Worksite Committees reporting to the Work Health and Safety Steering Committee, to monitor the safety of our work environments. This ensures all staff have representation and a voice to raise concerns.



## Invest in our workforce to grow and develop their capabilities

Territory Families, Housing and Communities remains agile and responsive to the changing needs of our workforce. In December 2021, the Life Cycle of a Tenancy training program for new Housing Officers was introduced with 16 staff members attending. The training program is delivered over several weeks and covers the entire continuum of accessing, living and leaving a public housing tenancy. It is designed to holistically support new employees to perform their roles, and includes specialist professional training based on contemporary need.

There is a recognised client cross over between public housing, youth justice and child protection, and this training has been developed to provide our housing staff with the skill set to recognise and support this. To achieve this, the training program includes Cross Cultural Awareness and Engagement, Maybo Conflict Management and Physical Intervention skills, Domestic and Family Violence, Mental Health First Aid, Suicide Awareness, Alcohol and Other Drugs including Volatile Substance Abuse and Emotional Intelligence and Resilience. Territory Families, Housing and Communities will continue to implement this training program in 2022.

Investing in our workforce training across such a large geographical area means providing learning and development training on-line. Learning Moments are designed to promote and embed a learning culture and allow flexibility to access training into smaller learning moments to fit into a busy schedule outside of a formal classroom setting.

Our partnership with Charles Darwin University continued to provide staff with learning and training pathways to pursue their career of choice. Formal training is complemented by opportunities for staff to put their learning into practice with placements and vocational employee opportunities during end of year semester break.

We maintained many pathways for people to join our workforce, including through Vocational Education and Training courses. From 1 July to 31 December 2021, there were 96 enrolments for Certificate IV in Youth Justice, as well as 44 enrolments for the Diploma of Child Youth and Family Intervention.



## Provide staff with diverse opportunities and celebrate the efforts of our people

Territory Families, Housing and Communities values the learning and development of our staff. Some of that learning comes from secondments for specific roles in other agencies. Further learning comes from staff working for Territory Families, Housing and Communities but located in other agencies, such as the Territory Intelligence Co-Ordination Centre, the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice and the Department of Corporate and Digital Development.

During the second half of the financial year, the Northern Territory continued to implement community lockdowns, lock-ins and lock-outs in an attempt to control the spread of COVID-19. Enacting the Territory Families, Housing and Communities functional responsibility of Welfare Group, we stood up regional Emergency Management Teams in Greater Darwin, East Arnhem, Big Rivers, Top End and Central Australia. These teams provided opportunities for staff to experience work in emergency response roles in both regional and remote settings, and expand their skills through providing frontline service and assistance to members of the community experiencing vulnerability due to COVID-19.

We continued to celebrate success across the agency, and in December 2021, Saxon Messer-Knight was presented with a Certificate of Recognition for the completion of the GetSet in the NT Program, coordinated by the Department of Education, and obtained a Certificate III in Business. Saxon undertook all four of his rotations of the program with Territory Families, Housing and Communities, rotating through Sport, Recreation and Strategic Infrastructure, Executive Services and NT Concessions and Recognition Unit in Casuarina.



### Olgaman Grace Daniels honoured with honorary doctorate

**In recognition of Olgaman Grace Daniels outstanding work as a researcher through the Aboriginal Research Practitioner's Network, Grace was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters Degree by the Charles Darwin University in front of family and friends at Ngukurr.**

**Grace is a remote family and safety support worker, and makes remarkable contributions both within her role in Territory Families, Housing and Communities and as a strong community leader in Ngukurr.**

*Above: Colleagues Kathy Uddlestone (left) and Melinda Thompson with Grace after the ceremony.*

# GOAL 4: Our agency and partners are agile, responsible and focussed on our collective impact for all Territorians

## Foster a performance and evidence culture through transparency, accountability and opportunities to celebrate success

Territory Families, Housing and Communities is a transparent and accountable agency, and we continued to build on measures that enable us to narrate the story of our performance.

From 1 July 2021, our key performance indicators have been refined and expanded to capture our large agency footprint, with additional measures including:

- Young people under community-based supervision
- Territorians accessing specialist homelessness services
- Places and objects on the Northern Territory Heritage Register
- Grants supporting the arts and culture sector
- Sport and active recreation programs supported
- Remote public dwellings managed
- Urban public dwellings managed
- Unique children with substantiations associated with domestic or family violence.

Our performance indicators are reported on regularly to our governance committees, as well as annually in the Territory Families, Housing and Communities Annual Report.

Territory Families, Housing and Communities continued to lead the whole-of-government Child and Youth Development Research Partnership between the Northern Territory Government and the Centre for Child Development and Education within Menzies School of Health Research.

Through this partnership a publication was released on 30 August 2021 to inform improved practice and service. The 'Opportunities for prevention: a data-linkage study to inform a public health response to youth offending in the Northern Territory, Australia' paper identified the need for early intervention programs for children known to the child protection system as a key method for preventing youth offending.

## Develop legislation, policies and processes that are contemporary and enable best practice

Throughout the reporting period, Territory Families, Housing and Communities:

- introduced the Territory Families Legislation Amendment Bill, intended to improve cross agency coordination and information sharing for the safety and wellbeing of children; enable a data access scheme; provide support to expectant mothers whose babies have been assessed to be at risk of significant harm when born; and increasing the age young people are supported in out-of-home care to 22 years old.
- continued to deliver quality and evidence based services with Signs of Safety now in the third year of implementation, and Youth Justice staff trained in the sister practice framework, Signs of Success.
- integrated policy, complaints and compliance teams, as well as commenced the co-location of place based service delivery.
- released the updated Allocation and Commencement of a Tenancy Policy to better addresses issues of antisocial behaviour in public housing by providing avenues for early intervention and prevention of behavioural issues.

## Deliver resources that support staff to be efficient and extend the reach of our services across the Northern Territory

### Multi-Agency COVID-19 Community Engagement Vaccination

Our partnerships have never been as important as they are now in the current pandemic.

During this time, we have partnered with NT Health and the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet to roll out a multi-agency COVID-19 community engagement vaccination drive to assist public housing tenants and walk-in appointments across the Territory.

During a three-day mobile vaccination clinic in the Big Rivers Region, more than 60 individuals received their first or second dose and more than 30 had their COVID-19 vaccination certificates printed.

Residents at the Shiers Street public housing complex in The Narrows were also visited by Territory Families, Housing and Communities staff to be supported to receive their first or second doses.

Mobile clinics also operated across Alice Springs and Arnhem regions.

## Enhance partnerships to deliver high-quality services to achieve shared outcomes

Territory Families, Housing and Communities continued to grow and enhance our partnerships with Aboriginal organisations to deliver services. We continued to provide funding to Aboriginal organisations to deliver Intensive Family Preservation Services and Intensive Youth Support Services. In November 2021, we awarded \$40 million in five-year grants to service delivery partners that keep children safe and at home with their families through Family Support Services.

We are committed to supporting Aboriginal-led organisations to identify their own aspirations and solutions and these grants will empower local communities to decide what form the services for their families should take. Territory Families, Housing and Communities partner with organisations that know and understand the needs of children and families to provide targeted, culturally safe and intensive support to families in times of need.

Grants have been awarded in Greater Darwin Region, East Arnhem, Barkly, Central, Big Rivers and Top End, where new providers will commence service delivery across 2022.

## Kalkarindji Community and Family Centre opening

In November 2021, the Ngalywany Purrup'ku Child and Family Centre for Kalkarindji and Daguragu was officially opened, operated by the Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation.

The Centre has been more than 18 months in the making, and means there is now six Aboriginal Community Controlled Child and Family Centres contracted across the Territory, including organisations in Katherine, Tennant Creek, Darwin's Northern Suburbs, Kalkarindji, Wadeye and the Alice Springs Town Camps.

