

Community story

Libraries Supporting the early years

First 5 Forever and the AEDC

First 5 Forever is an initiative of the Queensland Government, coordinated by State Library of Queensland and delivered in partnership with local government.

The First 5 Forever program began in 2015 in Queensland public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres in response to the 2012 AEDC data, which highlighted that a significant portion of Queensland children were developmentally vulnerable in language and cognitive skills (school-based). First 5 Forever has continued to grow and evolve over the last ten years creating opportunities for families and caregivers to help build healthy children's brains and bodies through free, fun, playful experiences at their local library. The program enhances nurturing and secure relationships between parents/carers and young children through the promotion of talking, reading, singing and playing in the early years.

First 5 Forever is primarily about connection: connecting families to each other through experiences designed for children and adults to enjoy together; connecting families to information, resources, and support to help lay a strong foundation for children's learning; and connecting families to their community through child-friendly spaces and experiences that create a sense of belonging and build social connections.

Two Local Government Areas creating change using the AEDC

Library services in two diverse Queensland communities - Logan City and Cairns - have been using data from successive AEDC cycles to inform program design and implement partnerships for long-term impact.

About the Logan community

The Logan Community is situated approximately 24 kilometres from the Brisbane Central Business District (CBD). According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 data, there were 18,625 children aged 0-5 years in Logan. The community is culturally and linguistically diverse with languages other than English spoken including Samoan, Punjabi, Mandarin, Arabic and Hindi. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 4.2 per cent of the population.

Logan City Council has nine libraries in the local government area: Beenleigh, Greenbank, Jimboomba, Logan Central, Logan Hyperdome, Underwood (North Logan), Logan Village, Browns Plains (Logan West) and Marsden.

Logan Together

Logan City Council and the First 5 Forever team are partner organisations of Logan Together - a community-led, place-based collective impact movement committed to promoting the wellbeing of children in Logan aged 0 to 8 years. The library team engages with local early childhood education services and schools, particularly those delivering playgroups, family support agencies and relevant government bodies helping to deliver on the shared goal that Logan's children are happy, healthy and thriving.

While delivering First 5 Forever program content, Early Years Library Services Coordinator for Logan City Council and their team work proactively with early childhood services, schools, family support agencies and relevant government bodies to make sure children and families get the most out of the program and the support available to them.

For over a decade, Logan City Council and First 5 Forever in Logan have been using AEDC data to inform their priorities in terms of in-library and community outreach programs. As part of the *Logan Together Community Collective Plan*, these programs support alignment across community services, organisations and policy change. Through Logan Together and early years networks, strong relationships with families and a shared understanding of the data, enabled coordinated, community-informed action.

'In the early stages, we were getting to know the data and what it meant for our community. Then through connecting with families and listening to them, our work formed around how we could provide the kind of support that would truly meet their needs.' Early Years Library Services Coordinator

The cultural diversity of the Logan community has meant that a 'one size fits all' approach to programming has never been an option. Cultural responsiveness and community-led design with an arts base have been important elements in finding ways to engage a range of families. Amid a host of universal and targeted program offerings, the Tui n Friends collaboration has been a particular success story.

Tui n Friends is an arts collective that brings the vibrancy of Pacific Island culture into First 5 Forever sessions with music, movement, language and storytelling. The sessions are delivered in libraries and community venues, creating welcoming spaces where families from diverse backgrounds can connect and engage in learning experiences. The First 5 Forever pillars: Talk, Read, Sing and Play are offered in a culturally rich and engaging format. For Pacific families particularly, Tui n Friends affirms a sense of cultural identity and pride and fosters intergenerational connections.

The Logan Libraries First 5 Forever program continues to grow its relationship with the Department of Education and Children's Health Queensland, united by a shared commitment to support secure parent-child relationships, promoting early literacy and embedding brain building activity into everyday routines.

One of the key initiatives is Yarrabilba Community Place — a hub co-funded by the Department of Education and Children's Health Queensland that brings services and allied health professionals together in one place, making it easier for families to access the support they need. It's also home to a First 5 Forever team. The library's outreach staff are trained in Circle of Security and Bringing Up Great Kids, and their work focuses on addressing the factors reflected in the AEDC data by building strong connections between children, parents, services and the wider community.

'One of our collaborations is through Yarrabilba Community Place, where services for families and allied health professionals are co-located. We (the First 5 Forever team) make it our business to understand their business, so that we can connect people with the services they need. We ensure that our programs are about building connections that will help children thrive within and between families, with us and with the wider community.' Early Years Library Services Coordinator

About the Cairns community

Cairns is in the far north of Queensland and spans a narrow corridor between the Great Dividing Range and the Coral Sea. In 2021, 10.6 per cent of the population identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Languages other than English spoken in the Cairns area include Japanese, Italian, German, Punjabi, Cape York Peninsular and Torres Strait languages. In 2021, there were 11,467 children aged 0-5 years in the Cairns area (ABS 2021).

Cairns Libraries

There are eight libraries in the Cairns area: Earlville, Manunda, Smithfield, Stratford, Babinda, Edmonton, Gordonvale and Cairns City. The onsite First 5 Forever programs that are delivered by the Cairns Libraries team provide diverse language, communication, music, movement and play-based sessions for local families.

'Our onsite First 5 Forever programs are very diverse, catering to different age groups and sensory modalities. Some are language and communication-based, or music and movement oriented and others are play-based.' First Five Forever Project Officer, part of the Cairns Libraries team at Cairns Regional Council.

Initially AEDC community data was used by the team to determine program distribution. After the 2018 census, they observed that developmental vulnerability in the Manunda area was significant, but at the time there were no First 5 Forever activities being delivered in that location. As a result, a weekly session was introduced and the program offerings have now expanded to include Baby Rhyme Time, preschool Storytime sessions and Sing and Play, which is designed to transition into a playgroup session.

Using demographic data has also informed program decisions and library partnerships, resulting in the launch of a multicultural playgroup at the Manunda Library, in collaboration with UnitingCare and Play Matters Queensland. This playgroup has since transitioned into a local Community Hub, where families can access additional services and support, however Cairns Libraries continues to provide literacy and play-based resources as part of its outreach services.

The Cairns Libraries team used the 2024 data to support the programming in their southern corridor area (from Babinda up to Gordonvale and Edmonton). The team have used the AEDC data to advocate for and provide input into the regular sessions run at the Edmonton library spaces. By connecting with organisations such as Communities for Children and Hambledon House, the team have been able to promote local services for families and build a consistent attendance by families at the sessions.

The expansion of Pop-up Library (PUL) sites has improved access to library resources and programs for families who struggle with central locations and occur where the AEDC data confirms that there is additional need. The PUL initiative has enabled Cairns Libraries to forge connections with families by visiting familiar locations such as schools, early learning centres, community hubs, and Council-hosted events, where they can provide valuable information about family services and access to kindergarten as well as early, age-appropriate literacy promotion. The initiative has also broadened the scope of program offerings like *Storytime on the Go*, delivered in partnership with emergency services and local parks, strengthening community connections in the context of outdoor, nature-based literacy activities.

To advance the First 5 Forever program in Cairns, the libraries have created partnerships with schools, Council departments and community organisations. These collaborations emphasise the connection between library resources and home learning, highlighting the benefits of library membership, and reinforcing the key First 5 messages. This cross-sector approach has effectively maximised place-based support for Cairns families, ensuring that all young children have opportunities to develop foundational skills for their learning, growth and wellbeing.

For more information contact

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Since 2002, the Australian Government has worked in partnership with eminent child health research institutes, the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and The Kids Research Institute Australia to deliver the Australian Early Development Census program to communities nationwide. The Australian Government continues to work with its partners and with state and territory governments to implement the AEDC.

For more information
see **First Five Forever**
or visit **aedc.gov.au**

