

**CAIRNS LIBRARIES – FIRST 5 FOREVER LITERACY PROGRAM
OUTCOMES REPORT 2023-2024**

L&C | 52/4/3-02 | #7410195

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council notes the progress of the First 5 Forever Early Literacy Program.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Nil

Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The tenth year of Cairns Libraries' First 5 Forever (F5F) early and family literacy program has been successfully delivered across all eight library branches, as well as in the community via outreach events and partnerships. This program directly supports families and caregivers to confidently serve as their child's first and most important educator, while also enhancing access to essential resources via public libraries.

In 2022, State Library of Queensland (SLQ) provided Cairns Regional Council (Council) with an updated Service Level Agreement (SLA), confirming funding stability for four years (2022-2026). Cairns Libraries' place-based early literacy program delivered 803 events, engaging 42,670 participants. Key achievements included:

- Delivered 758 onsite programs within 8 libraries, engaging 17,370 families with free, non-booked early literacy sessions.
- Facilitated 45 offsite community outreach programs, reaching 25,300 participants beyond conventional library environments.
- Fostered strategic collaborations and partnerships with state agencies and community organisations to support both onsite and offsite facilitation.
- Implemented highly successful promotional and marketing campaigns, significantly impacting Cairns families.

Methodology

The funding methodology for F5F is designed to ensure that library services across Queensland can deliver consistent and impactful early literacy services. The current methodology for distributing F5F annual funding is included in the SLA and has five key streams of funding:

1. Statewide services
2. Building capability
3. Driving innovation
4. Elevating First Nations
5. Reaching Queensland families

The funding is recalculated annually throughout the agreement using a formula that incorporates data from the Australian Early Development Census and Remoteness Area values provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This ensures equitable funding distribution across Queensland.

In 2020/21, SLQ conducted a review of the Public Library and F5F Funding Methodology. New methodologies commenced from 1 July 2022 stipulating funding be allocated to councils annually over a four-year period. Council's funding allocations for the four-year period (as below):

Allocation	Period	Amount
1	1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023	\$210,913
2	1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024	\$197,650
3	1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025	\$210,913 (Estimated)
4	1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026	\$210,913 (Estimated)

BACKGROUND:

First 5 Forever is an initiative of the Queensland Government, developed and coordinated by SLQ. The initiative is a family literacy program aimed at supporting stronger language and literacy environments for young children aged 0-5 years and their families.

Based on the [2021 Australian Early Development Census](#) the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain(s) nationally is 22%. While Queensland sits at 24.7%, the state has shown significant improvement in early childhood development outcomes with the largest percentage reduction (4.9% between 2009 and 2021) in developmental vulnerability on one or more domains compared to other Australian states and territories. These results indicate that Queensland has made notable progress in improving early childhood development outcomes. However, it is important to note that despite these gains, vulnerability levels for young children in Queensland are still considered too high, and there is room for further improvement.

The continued funding has provided Council with the opportunity to improve local outcomes for children aged 0 - 5 years and their families by:

- Planning and exploring new library programs, services, and partnership opportunities within the local community.
- Increasing library programs and services for families with children aged 0-5 years.
- Incorporating and delivering library staff mentoring and professional development programs to support skill development.

SLQ has indicated that a funding announcement will occur in August 2024.

COMMENT:

Eight hundred and three events were delivered engaging 42,670 attendees (Attachment 1). The following program outcomes have met the F5F guidelines by:

- Expanded programming days have enhanced access to library resources and the First 5 Forever initiative, benefiting more families.
- Pop-Up Library (PUL) sites improve access to library resources and programs reaching those who struggle with central locations.
- Partnerships and networking boost the visibility and impact of the F5F program, integrating it more deeply into the community.
- Marketing and promotion keep the community informed about F5F and Cairns Libraries, driving participation and strengthening connections.
- Ongoing staff training ensures effective delivery of F5F programs, with staff better equipped to meet community needs and provide high-quality services.

Onsite Programming

Cairns Libraries plays a crucial role in supporting families by providing free literacy and learning sessions and resources. These sessions help families stay connected to their local library and promote the importance of sharing stories with children. Each F5F session underscores the significance of parental involvement in child development and highlights the value of integrating language and storytelling into everyday life.

As vital community hubs, Cairns Libraries has connected parents, caregivers and children in safe, child-focused spaces, offering free, accessible and interactive experiences. By providing the diverse range of play-based resources, Cairns Libraries is also an essential space for community engagement as staff create welcoming spaces where families feel comfortable. Through the F5F program, team members act as 'active connectors', linking individuals with resources and programs that support early literacy, strengthen the bond between parents and children, and build valuable partnerships with service providers and the early childhood sector (Attachment 2).

Success is further amplified by collaborations with specialists such as First Nations artists, music therapists, and experts in STEAM, art and dance. These partnerships ensure equal access to early literacy opportunities for all Cairns families. Through place-based sessions, Cairns Libraries foster inclusive and accessible settings where families can engage in programs, access information, and meet others.

The effectiveness of the F5F program is also evident through recent initiatives. In October 2023 Cairns Libraries launched a Multicultural Playgroup at Manunda Library in collaboration with Uniting Care and Play Matters QLD, providing a supportive environment for culturally and linguistically diverse families. Additionally, in January 2024 Cairns Libraries relocated the Learn English Through Storytime (LETS) program to City Library in partnership with TAFE QLD Cairns Campus, to further support families in a central location with convenient access to public transportation.

Offsite Programming

Cairns Libraries has significantly enhanced its outreach and community engagement through various offsite programming and PUL initiatives. This approach has expanded

access to library resources and programs for those unable to visit central locations (Attachment 3).

The PUL initiative has enabled Cairns Libraries to forge strong connections with families by visiting schools, early learning centres, community hubs, and Council-hosted events. Among the notable achievements is the PUL at Court House Gallery, which attracted over 2,000 families and enhanced collaborative activities such as Under 8 days with ARC Creative and Story Walks such as Wombat Stew at Cairns Children's Festival. The PUL's presence at community events has been impactful, providing valuable information and hosting sessions at community hubs and early learning centres. This strategy has strengthened library messaging and significantly boosted junior membership, particularly through targeted membership drives.

Additionally, Cairns Libraries has successfully delivered offsite programs in non-traditional settings, focusing on families with children aged 0-5 years. Monthly sessions held at the world-class Tanks Arts Centre have been made possible through the library's restructuring under Creative Life, enabling the libraries to extend their reach beyond the local council area.

Offsite programs, including Storytime in the Park, have removed barriers for families by offering sessions in familiar, community-centred locations. This strategy has broadened the library's reach, inviting families who may not typically visit library spaces to engage with early literacy experiences. Storytime on the Go, in partnership with emergency services and local parks, has further strengthened community connections by providing outdoor, nature-based literacy activities.

Overall, Cairns Libraries has leveraged these innovative offsite programs to effectively support early literacy, foster community engagement, and extend reach to a broader audience.

Networking and Collaborative Partnerships

Cairns Libraries has made significant strides in delivering the F5F early literacy initiative to local families by developing programs in collaboration with local organisations and stakeholders. These initiatives have successfully connected families with library resources, encouraging them to borrow materials that enhance their early learning capabilities.

To advance the F5F initiative, Cairns Libraries forged essential partnerships with schools, Council departments and community organisations. These collaborations have emphasised the connection between library resources and home learning, highlighted the benefits of library membership and reinforced key messages such as 'talk, read, sing, play.' 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 (Attachment 4).

Marketing and Promotion

A range of marketing initiatives were developed and executed to increase program awareness and reach. The campaign featured bus advertisement, Facebook boosted ads, digital displays, Spotify ads, radio ads, and a variety of print media (Attachment 5).

Ongoing general promotion included Facebook posts, website updates and distribution of print media. New marketing and promotional materials for the F5F program included an all-programs poster, an events booklet and program postcards.

Professional Development and Training

A key objective of the program is to support the professional growth of staff. Ongoing training and support were provided to all and included online conferences, seminars and events, on-the-job training, peer coaching and mentoring (Attachment 6).

First 5 Forever Innovation Grant 2022-2023

Learn English Through Storytime is a cross-sector initiative designed for families from First Nations, CALD, migrant or refugee backgrounds. Twenty-seven events were delivered, engaging 419 participants - focussing on building social cohesion, enhancing family literacy skills and fostering a sense of belonging. The program has empowered parents to be their child's first and most important teacher. All First 5 Forever innovation grant funds have been fully spent and acquitted.

OPTIONS:

Option 1: (Recommended)

That Council notes the progress of the First 5 Forever Early Literacy Program.

Option 2:

That Council seeks further information regarding the First 5 Forever Early Literacy Program.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

The sustainability of the F5F program relies on Queensland Government funding administered on an annual basis. Discontinued funding is a potential risk for the program however, SLQ regularly reports on progress thus mitigating the level of this risk.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

In 2023/24 Council received F5F grant funding of \$197,650. As per the SLA, any unspent funds at the end of the financial year cannot be carried over to the next. The funds have been fully acquitted.

Program Revenue & Expenditure 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024:

First 5 Forever Program - Revenue & Expenditures 1 July 2019 - 30 June 2024							
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	ITD
Operating Income							
SLQ F5F Program Grand Funding	61,509	123,018	123,018	125,018	210,913	197,650	
Total Income	61,509	123,018	123,018	125,018	210,913	197,650	841,126
Operating Expenses							
Employee Costs	17,217	44,309	108,268	86,459	108,774	107,374	
External Services	2,457	1,307	27,432	34,416	59,258	69,833	
Marketing & Promotions	-	14,341	33,237	50,159	43,915	25,835	
Supplies & Resources	301	2,299	5,799	4,499	-	3,700	
Total Expenses	19,975	62,256	174,736	175,533	211,947	206,742	851,189
Unexpended Funds carried forward	41,534	60,762	(51,718)	(50,515)	(1,034)	(9,092)	(10,063)
						CHECK	(10,063)

First 5 Forever Innovation Grant - Revenue & Expenditures 1 July 2022 - 30 June 2024			
	2022/23	2023/24	ITD
Operating Income			
SLQ F5F Innovation Grant	15,000	15,000	
Total Income	15,000	15,000	30,000
Operating Expenses			
Supplies & Resources	10,636	14,284	
External Services		1,327	
Marketing & Promotions	767	3,061	
Total Expenses	11,403	18,672	30,075
Unexpended Funds carried forward	3,597	(3,672)	(75)

Future program budget remains on track with expenditure committed to:

- Program development and delivery
- Targeted marketing campaigns
- Employee costs
- Employee professional development.

Community and Cultural Heritage:

The delivery of local F5F programming is critical in providing experiences that empower families and caregivers to actively participate in their child's early literacy development. Cairns Libraries F5F program has been steadily expanding its impact through several strategic actions including:

- Partnerships and collaborations
- Community initiatives
- Program diversification
- Family and caregiver involvement
- Marketing and promotion
- Evaluation and feedback.

This impact reflects Cairns Libraries' commitment to addressing local needs and ensuring initiatives resonate with the diverse interests and challenges of the community.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

Corporate Plan:

Focus 4: Community and Culture:

Providing spaces and programs for the wellbeing of the community.

Libraries Strategic Plan:

Goal 1: Connecting the Community:

Deliver engaging and innovative early childhood programs and activities under the F5F Program.

CONSULTATION:

Consultation and engagement continue to occur with SLQ.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 - Program attendance and participation 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024

Attachment 2 - Onsite programs and events

Attachment 3 - Offsite programs and events

Attachment 4 – Community Partners and Networks

Attachment 5 – Promotion and marketing

Attachment 6 – Professional development



Kat Mills
A/Executive Manager Creative Life



Destry Puia
Director Lifestyle and Community

Attachment 1: Program attendance and participation 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024

Event/Program	Total sessions delivered	Total number of participants
Onsite in libraries	758	17,370
Offsite	45	25,300
Total	803	42,670

Attachment 2: Onsite programs and events



Baby Rhyme Time sessions



Emma Memma Storytime



National Simultaneous Storytime



Dress Up Storytime Book Week



Halloween Storytime



Play and Discover

Attachment 3: Offsite programs and events



First 5 Forever pop-up library at Trash to Treasure



First 5 Forever pop-up library at Little Big Day Out



First 5 Forever Storytime at Tanks – Dancing and Bulkaway Muruku



First 5 Forever Storytime Steps at Earlville Shopping Centre



First 5 Forever Sing a Song at pop-up library at Court House Gallery



First 5 Forever Story Walk at Cairns Children's Festival



First 5 Forever pop-up library EcoFiesta



First 5 Forever information table at shopping centre outreach

Attachment 4 - Community Partners and Networks

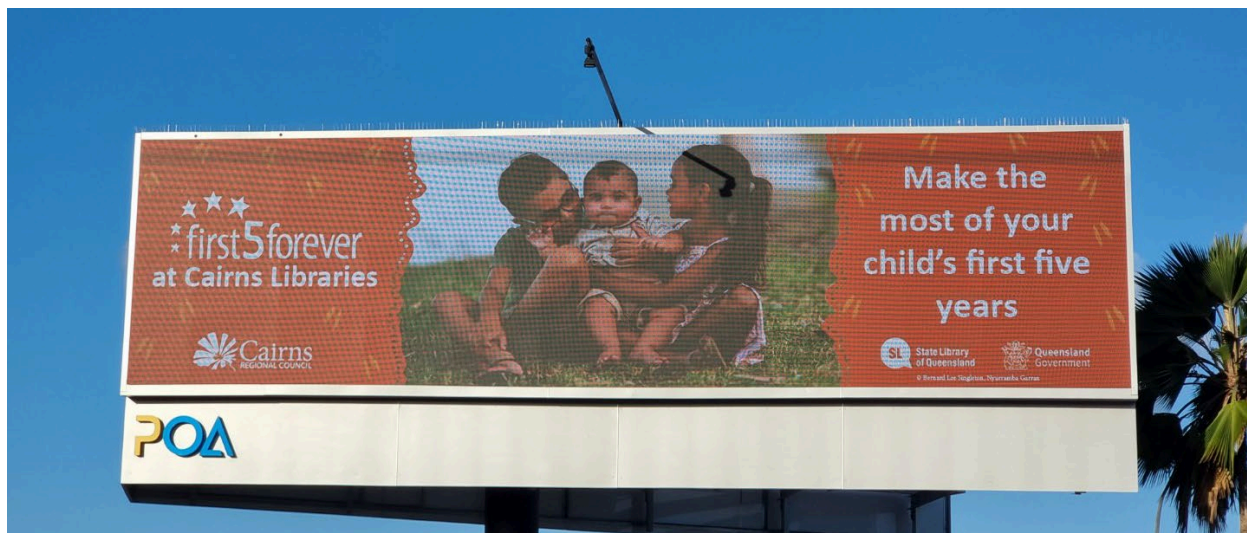
- Uniting Care
- Centacare
- Play Matters
- TAFE QLD Cairns
- Earlville Shopping Town
- Mt Sheridan Plaza
- Queensland Government's KindyLinQ
- CRC Community Development
- CRC Water & Waste
- CRC Creative Life
- SLQ's Indigenous Library Services unit
- Hambledon House
- Benevolent Society
- Cairns Safer Streets
- QLD Health - Community Health new parents' groups
- Local early learning centres
- Local state schools

Attachment 5: Promotion and marketing



First 5 Forever wrap for the library van





First 5 Forever billboards and bus back

Attachment 6: Professional Development



2024 Cairns Early Years Conference



First 5 Forever embedding First Nations in First 5 Forever