Lutheran Community Care’s (LCC) Kwatja Eilatha playgroup has given hundreds of disadvantaged children in Alice Springs a positive start in life, making a difference to the wellbeing of many families.

For 10 years, the playgroup has focused on getting children ready for primary school and encouraged parents to interact with them through structured activities, as well as supporting their learning and development.
However, in late 2017, LCC learnt that funding for this ministry had been stripped by the Federal Government, forcing it to stop running the program in 2018. This has been devastating for LCC, its team in Central Australia and for families who attended the free service.

Held five days a week at Alice Springs Lutheran Church, the playgroup targeted Indigenous children, from babies under 12 months old to four year olds, but people of all backgrounds were welcome. A mobile van also provided sessions to four town camps and one community once a week. Over the years of its operation, LCC's staff worked hard to build up the playgroup to the benefit of many families. All staff in this ministry were Indigenous people and had a deep knowledge of culture and understanding of language of those they serviced. Sadly, eight staff members, all local Aboriginal women, lost their jobs when program funding was cut.

Local knowledge and language were vital factors in providing a comfortable and welcoming environment. Many families also viewed the church as a safe, neutral place to meet, and this connection resulted in a number of playgroup children being baptised at the church.

Another reason the playgroup was so successful was that the program had a bus to pick up and drop off families from around Alice Springs, allowing those without transport to participate. Children were also provided with healthy foods and were taught about daily routine, while parents enjoyed mixing with other parents.

The playgroup's closure has been heartbreaking for many people in Alice Springs, but the Lutheran congregation, the LCA's Finke River Mission and LCC are committed to restoring the ministry to operate two days a week at the church. To do this, LCC has launched a one-off appeal to raise $200,000, so it can continue to reflect God's love in the Alice Springs community. If you would like to help give children in Alice Springs a positive start in life, please contact your LCA district office.

Amelia Dawkins is LCC Communications Officer.