It’s no fun and games as playgroup’s funding cut

Jack Price

AN Alice Springs playgroup which helped hundreds of disadvantaged children get ready for primary school has had its funding stripped by the Commonwealth Government, and won’t be able to offer its services in 2018.

The Lutheran Community Care ran a daily two-hour playgroup for the past seven years, providing a free service — including lunch and pick-up/drop-off — to families around town. Known as Kwatja Ethata, the playgroup primarily serviced Aboriginal families, but people of all backgrounds were welcome.

Ruth Cook took her three children to the playgroup, and said it made a huge difference for both the kids and herself.

“It was good coming to playgroup with the kids and teaching them to have routine — getting up in the morning, catching the bus, having healthy fruits, learning to eat, washing their hands, even going to the toilets,” she said.

“I used to love coming here... it was good for me to get out of the house and mix with the other mums, have a yarn. It’s a bit sad it’s closing because coming to this place was a good thing for everyone.”

The playgroup ran activities for up to 30 kids a day, aged zero to four, and there was plenty of parental involvement.

Ms Cook said one of the main benefits of the playgroup was that it picked up families from around the Alice Springs area every day, many of whom did not have vehicles to get their kids involved in such activities.

Lutheran Community Care also sent a team to a different town camp every weekday, running activities for kids who couldn’t make it into town.

Five years ago staff member Leeanne Swan was walking around and asked the co-ordinator to pick her up the next day.

She started taking her kids to playgroup every day and ended up getting a job out of it. She said it made a huge difference to the kids who came through it so much easier.

The kids who came to playgroup were so much more confident when they walked into school — they were really comfortable with other children,” she said. “Our clients are missing out on a lot — we serviced a really big area.”

Sadly, seven of the playgroup’s staff members — all local Aboriginal women — lost their jobs with the funding cut. Lutheran Community Care has plans to start fundraising and will attempt get the playgroup running for a few days a week.

NAIDOC Week set for July

NAIDOC Week celebrations will run this year from July 8-15. The theme “Because of her, we can!” celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Grant applications are open until April 3.

Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion encouraged communities to apply for a grant to host a local celebration, saying, “I encourage all Australian communities to get involved.”

Unpaid carers to benefit

UNPAID carers in the NT are set to benefit from $85.6 million in additional funding for support services. Northern Territory Senator Nigel Scullion said the new support services were providing to their families, the Northern Territory community, and the nation.

“The Coalition Government will provide a range of new services, including peer support, coaching, targeted financial support and crisis support, to target early-intervention and build carers’ skills,” Senator Scullion said.

From October, carers will be able to access services through the National Government’s Carer Gateway website.