

14 January 2026

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry
Email: info@childsafetyinquiry.qld.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Community Hubs Australia, thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Child Safety Commission of Inquiry.

We believe strengthening protective factors around all Queensland children, young people, and families through evidence-based prevention and early interventions at critical transitions and periods of development, deliver better outcomes. The information below details how the National Community Hubs Program supports positive outcomes and presents opportunities for a consolidated approach to delivering improved health, wellbeing, and development outcomes for Queensland children and families.

National Community Hubs Program

The National Community Hubs Program was established in 2011 to give culturally diverse families, mainly women with pre-school aged children, a safe place to connect with each other and their schools. Hubs play an important role in connecting families to essential social services, health care, education and training, and employment opportunities while providing a sense of safety and connection to community. This is the fabric that nurtures a positive, functioning society and helps form a more socially cohesive Australia.

In 2025, our network of 100 hubs across New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and Victoria engaged with 13,775 families. For further information regarding the hubs program, visit <https://www.communityhubsaustralia.org.au/>.

The program's focus on early childhood and intervention

In 2025, CHA conducted a national census to learn more about the people who come to community hubs and the reasons why, finding a remarkable consistency in responses, regardless of location or the cultural diversity of participants¹. The census told us that hubs support parents and pre-school aged children to connect with one another and to access kindergarten and increase their connection to school.

In Queensland, of participants with pre-school aged children, 87% bring their children to the hub, and almost half (49%) of these do not take their children anywhere else. Hubs play a supportive role in helping families understand the benefits of kindergarten as well as helping them be better prepared by organising kindergarten and prep transition activities. In Queensland hubs, 61% of participants told us they speak a language other than English at home and are less likely to enrol their children into three and four-year-old kindergarten compared to the general population.²

It's here that hubs play an important role in facilitating a more seamless transition into prep by engaging parents and pre-school aged children and connecting them to the school. Participants with children at their hub school say that coming to the hub has: helped their child become ready for school (84%); improved their understanding of the school as a parent (81%); enabled them to support their child's education (83%); and 41% of participants come to school activities more often than before.

Hubs also provide an opportunity for parents and carers to access services and support they may otherwise be unable to access. At ██████████ State School's hub in ██████████, the hub leader hosted a weekly playgroup in the local park. By being flexible and meeting existing and new families where they are, engagement in park playgroup further deepened awareness and engagement in the hub and other activities for parents and their young children. Participants, big and small, enjoyed sensory rice play with dinosaurs, trucks and food themes.

Conversations during the playgroup sessions resulted in referrals to the school's Early Childhood Development Program (ECDP) which supports children under five with disabilities or significant needs to build skills for school. The hub leader described that she supported a mother and child with a referral to their ECDP to assist her son's ASD Level 3 diagnosis. Hub leader ██████████ said,

"The mum now attends our two playgroups during the week. She would like her children to be enrolled at ██████████ State School when school ready. The playgroup in the park assisted this lovely mum in making connections and enabling a soft entry to other services to help support her eldest child."

¹ *Community hubs work: Insights from the Hub Census 2025*, Community Hubs Australia, 2025. <https://www.communityhubs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Community-hubs-work-Insights-from-the-Hub-Census-2025.pdf>

² *Early Years Program Survey* (conducted in Queensland hubs on behalf of the Queensland Government's Department of Education), November 2025.

A proven model

The community hubs model has been tested and refined by successive delivery and outcome evaluations which confirm that hubs improve settlement outcomes and social cohesion, build the cultural competence of host schools, and make local services more responsive to the needs of culturally diverse families.

Hubs are based on a proven place-based and people-centred model that builds connections and provides a safe environment, especially for women and children, that is uniquely tailored to the needs of local communities. By embedding hubs in local primary schools – and using existing school infrastructure – hubs help bridge the gap between families and the wider community, connecting families with each other, their schools, local services and support, and provide a gateway to health, wellbeing, and education services.

The success of community hubs is also based on four key outcomes – for children, families, the school, and the broader community. For detailed information on the model and program, please visit our website - <https://communityhubs.org.au/>.

In 2016, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute undertook a qualitative study to assess the impact of community hubs on school readiness³. The report demonstrated that children from backgrounds where English is not spoken at home are among the most developmentally vulnerable in the Australian community, with interventions required to ensure they arrive at school ready to learn. The report found that community hubs provide these interventions, making the transition to school smoother for new students, their families and school staff, compared to the experience prior to hub implementation. The report also noted the impact of hubs beyond school readiness, particularly in building the confidence of parents to engage in their child’s schooling and in undertaking their own vocational training. Critically, the report concluded that hubs don’t just help families become ready for school - they also help schools respond to the needs of a changing demographic which is particularly important in communities of high migration.

Hubs in Queensland

Community hubs were first established in Queensland in 2014, at primary schools in Ipswich and Logan. A decade later, there are 24 hubs in schools in Brisbane (5 hubs), Ipswich (5 hubs), Logan (5 hubs), Rockhampton (3 hubs), Toowoomba (3 hubs), and Townsville (3 hubs). In 2025, these hubs engaged with 2,753 Queensland families.

Hubs deliver activities and classes that adapt as circumstances and local community needs change over time, from activities encouraging conversation and connection including sewing and parenting programs, to playgroup, kindergarten and prep transition activities, as well as more formal training designed to build work-ready skills. This flexible approach ensures hubs remain relevant, delivering positive outcomes for participants.

³ Exploring the impact of community hubs on school readiness, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, 2017. https://www.communityhubs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Community_hubs_school_readiness_full-report-v1.1.pdf

While hubs are not service providers, they connect people with existing services in their local community. These service providers may facilitate programs, offer individual counselling or clinical support, donate funding or resources, or provide other services or opportunities for hub families. In 2025, hubs in Queensland made 3,225 referrals to services including financial counselling, emergency aid, family support, maternal and child health, and domestic and family violence.

Local partnerships, of which there were 177 in 2025, are often sourced through the support agencies that play a critical role as part of the hub model. In Queensland, Communify Qld, Multicultural Australia, SSI, and The Smith Family provide guidance and support to host schools as well as connecting hubs with program and services organisations to meet the needs of the hub's local community. Without these partnerships, hubs would not exist.

Social return on investment of community hubs

In 2023, Deloitte Access Economics undertook a comprehensive social return on investment (SROI) evaluation of the national community hubs program. They found that the community hubs program generated \$65.7 million in social benefits – a return of \$3.50 for every dollar invested. The social benefits included improved social cohesion, jobs creation, development outcomes for children, and the opportunities that come from volunteering. For more information, please see the full evaluation - <https://www.communityhubs.org.au/news-events/deloittes-social-return-on-investment-evaluation-2023/>.

Early intervention and prevention

With more than a decade of experience hosting hubs in Queensland, we understand how an early intervention and prevention approach works best to support children, young people, and families.

According to Deloitte's SROI evaluation mentioned above, the value of improved development outcomes for children by providing children with early access to playgroup, child health nurses and other development supports through the support of a hub generated \$7.3 million in social benefits in 2023 (11.1% of social impact).

Our approach to early intervention and prevention covers:

- *Being place-based in primary schools.* Embedding community hubs in primary schools better supports school readiness and connects families to their local school communities. When children start school ready to learn, the impact is positive for the children, their families, the school, and local community. Hubs also welcome extended members of the family and community groups, including older siblings, carers, and grandparents.

Each hub is managed by the primary school in which it is based, using existing infrastructure and facilities. Decisions about the way the hub operates and the programs and activities it offers are made at the local level, providing flexibility for hub leaders, who are employed by their schools, to develop the space and program offerings that best address the needs of their host school and local community.

Hub leader ██████ at ██████ State School in ██████ highlights the impact on hub participants: *"As the hub leader I have observed more parents becoming aware of lunch club*

and when dropping their children at school will come and ask if they could grab a piece of fruit for their child as they didn't have fresh fruit at home. This shows an increase in confidence and feeling safe and supported to ask for help when times are tough. They're becoming more comfortable to ask for support and that is a fantastic outcome."

- *Providing access to other early childhood services.* Many families who come to hubs have yet to access any other early childhood services. This can be due to a lack of knowledge about what services are available and how to access them. Often, hubs are the first time families connect with a service to support their children, including maternal health nurses. It's often from these conversations other needs of the family are unearthed as the hub leader builds trust with the parents and their children over time.

Hubs offer engaging early childhood activities held in the hub itself including playgroup, a cornerstone of the hubs program that provides instant connection between children and their parents. Playgroup also provides an opportunity for hub leaders to share information and refer families to services they need, including maternal and child health, early intervention, community health services, emergency aid and preschool services. In addition, community hubs work with partner organisations to deliver early childhood activities within the familiar, safe environment of the hub.

Last year, Queensland hubs connected families with 55 early childhood organisations including Anglicare, Child and Family Health Services, Children's Health Queensland, and ParentsNext.

Knowing where to find support is life changing for many families. An example from ██████████ State School hub in ██████████ was shared by ██████████ the hub leader, who noted a mother was stressed and exhausted after caring for her child with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorders (ASD). After speaking with the mother, it became clear that she had not applied for NDIS support, despite being eligible. The hub leader supported the mother to complete the application, with the mother sharing she felt more optimistic about the future for her son.

"I noticed one of my participants was quite distressed. The mother was asked by child services to attend a parenting program. This was challenging for the mother to accept, however thankfully, a program was being offered in the community hub – Circle of Security. This alleviated the mother's angst as it enabled her to come to a familiar, safe environment and seek the support she needed to care for her children."

The Circle of Security program continues to run in many of our hubs today.

In another example, the hubs at ██████████ College and ██████████ State School in ██████████ organised oral health hygiene checks for children in the playgroup, along with parent education around how families can support their children's oral health and the importance of consistent oral health routines. Providing this outreach service in the hub enabled families to access this support in a culturally safe space tailored to meet the different health literacy levels and diverse needs of the community. This initiative was made possible through

partnerships with Griffith University, Queensland Health, Queensland University of Technology, and SSI.

- *Providing a seamless transition to kindergarten and school.* Hubs support parents and pre-school aged children to access kindergarten with 87% of Queensland hub participants with pre-school aged children bringing their children to the hub. As mentioned previously, hubs play a supportive role in helping these families understand the benefits of kindergarten, as well as helping them be better prepared by organising excursions to kindergarten for both parents and children to become familiar with, as well as running prep transition activities ahead of the new school year.

In 2025, almost every (22) Queensland hubs supported parents and their children by running kindergarten and prep transition activities, referring families to preschool services, or both. For example, the five hubs in Logan continue to play an active role in prep transition programs. As an example, the hub at ██████████ State School facilitated the Kindy Connections program that involves six childcare centres. These weekly sessions ran throughout the term helped ease the child's anxiety around starting school and helped build friends and confidence in navigating the school environment. Regular routines, like greeting the school chickens, visiting the prep playground, and exploring the library, helped children feel familiar and ready for their transition into primary school. As Principal, Kevin said,

"The hub has been a great support in running the Kindy Connections program for the school. They have been great working with the local childcare centres and welcoming them into the school. The aim of this program is to help kindy kids transition into primary school and the hub is doing this successfully. The program is vital to ensuring children are ready and prepared for school."

- *Connection to culture and community.* Engagement and connection are at the heart of every community hub. Our hubs seek to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse families, particularly women with young children but also fathers and other family members, connecting them with each other, their host schools, local support services, and the wider community.

According to our national census, 89% of hub respondents in Queensland reported that coming to the hub has helped them feel part of their community, with 80% saying the hub has helped them feel less lonely. As ██████████ Principal from ██████████ State School in ██████████ noted,

"The resonating thing for me is around connection. Connections to all of our peoples - new people arriving to Australia and people within our country. It's about opportunity overcoming disadvantage and the hub is pivotal for that, for us – it runs a lot of programs that really have a significant impact. For the women in our community, it has empowered them. And for our fathers and grandfathers, it has provided that connection and has overcome barriers."

- *Building English language competency.* Developing English language competency is an important area of focus for many hub participants, irrespective of cultural background.

Confidence, feelings of empowerment, and the social connectedness of participants completely transform once language barriers are overcome. English language skills enable parents to better support their child's needs and education, engage in social activities, gain new qualifications and skills, and access opportunities for volunteering and employment.

For women from culturally diverse backgrounds, additional barriers can also prevent them from obtaining work, including language and culture, a lack of recognition for qualifications and experience obtained in their country of birth, and a lack of professional or social networks on which to call. Hubs empower women by helping to build their confidence as they pursue further study or look for work or volunteering opportunities.

Language can also be a major barrier to accessing early childhood education and care. For those who are new to Australia, access to formal English language classes can be challenging, due to competing priorities when starting life in a new country however, community hubs offer a safe place to learn and practise English when participants are ready. Depending on community need, hub participants can access conversational English programs that build confidence and competency, or more formal learning opportunities, such as the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), which some hubs offer onsite.

Hub leader Michelle at [REDACTED] School in [REDACTED] noted that a mum who had attended English language classes and completed a Certificate III, had since gained work and saved enough money to go home to Sudan to visit her family who she had not seen for 13 years.

"She is a single mum and worked really hard to get to this point. I couldn't tell her enough how proud she should be of herself".

Some hubs also provide access to childminding ensuring parents can focus on their learning of English while their children are cared for in a safe, nurturing environment. Other community hubs offer mother and child English activities, encouraging parents and children to learn together.

- *Vocational opportunities.* Hubs create vocational opportunities for parents to volunteer and develop work-ready skills so they can gain employment and better support their families. Many women in particular face challenges in returning to the workforce, especially after spending time at home caring for young children.

At [REDACTED] hub in Ipswich, a young mother from Ethiopia who brought her son to playgroup, is a great example of the impact of volunteering. After her son started school, she volunteered at the hub helping with playgroup and homework club. She later gained a diploma in early education and care and is now employed at the kindergarten, located next to the hub.

Our national hub census also showed that 37% of Queensland respondents with pre-school aged children would like to be working more than they are now. The inability to increase their hours of paid work, impacts earning potential and creates a barrier for many families trying

to access education and care, especially single parents or those on a single income. In 2025, hub participants found 117 jobs as a result of spending time in a hub.

Hubs provide pathways to employment, which in turn, increases the number of culturally diverse people available to work, especially in the education and care sector. At Fernbrooke State School in Ipswich, Strategix, a registered training provider, offered a 10-week Certificate III in School Based Education Support course that provided participants with essential skills to support roles in the classroom. For many participants returning to the workforce for the first time after having children, this enables foundational skills to be built in a part-time or casual employment role, with opportunities for work placements offered through local schools in the area.

Protective factors that could be supported through the work of the Commission of Inquiry

The key protective factors in keeping children and young people on positive trajectories are boosted by families being connected to a community hub. These factors include:

- *Access to maternal and family health care.* Bringing health services into the familiar environment of a hub provides support to parents and their pre-school aged children as well as for their children who are attending the school. This reduces the likelihood that children will miss school. Access to clinicians within the hub also means children requiring further review and follow-up are more likely to attend appointments.

As part of the Queensland Government's *'Putting Queensland Kids First'* Child and Family Health Services initiative, in 2025, child health nurses were allocated to our three hubs in Rockhampton at Lakes Creek, Mt Archer, and Waraburra. Every hub was allocated a nurse who had the opportunity to connect with families in the hub, building trust with parents and carers on their child's specific needs.

As a result of the pilot, in 2026, Mt Archer State School will run a weekly health clinic in the hub while the other schools will start drop-in health clinics and information sessions for parents as part of their hub's timetable of activity. Other hubs in Queensland offer families access to health and social care including sessions with speech and occupational therapists.

- *Access to parenting support to help nurture the development of parenting skills.* In 2025, Fernbrooke State School in Ipswich ran HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters) where mentors attended playgroup to engage parents in early learning strategies. HIPPY provides a structured home-based educational framework, targeting literacy, numeracy, language development, and physical skills, empowering parents to actively support their child's learning journey at home. Collectively, these partnerships have strengthened the school's capacity to foster early intervention, improve developmental outcomes, and ensure that children start at Fernbrooke State School with the skills and confidence they need to thrive.
- *Informal and formal training for participants that increases skills, builds confidence, and raises awareness of critical safety issues that impact all families.* At Woodridge State School in Logan, a cyber safety course co-designed by TAFE Queensland and hub leaders (with the

support of the Department of Home Affairs' AMEP Innovative Funding) has kept children and families safe online. The course teaches parents how to monitor their child's online activities and be vigilant for online scams. The gentle and supportive nature of the program's delivery in the hub created a learning environment for parents to talk openly and ask questions. As the TAFE Queensland facilitator noted,

"The majority of the parents [in the course] have emerging skills in English. We have seen real growth in parents' understanding the risks of the digital world and beginning to learn strategies to monitor and manage their children's online activities."

- *Engagement with community.* Hub volunteers come from across the broader community, providing support, learning opportunities, and help hub participants develop new skills and capabilities. A newly arrived participant from ██████████ School's hub in Brisbane came to the hub feeling isolated and disconnected. This woman didn't have any friends or social connections and didn't know where to start in terms of finding support for herself and her young family. One day another mother at the kindergarten was able to recommend the community hub as a safe and welcoming place in the community. This participant joined the English and dance therapy classes. Overtime she grew her friendships, practiced her English, shared her culture through dance and her confidence and sense of belonging blossomed, opening the door to future possibilities. As hub leader, Barareh explains,

"She told us she now feels like she belongs—and that she finally has a place where people know her name and value her presence. With gentle encouragement from the hub leader, she applied for a job—something she had never imagined doing before. She's now feeling much more confident being around people and is beginning to imagine a future where she is not just surviving but thriving."

Working together as partners to improve outcomes for children and young people

Given almost a decade of delivering tangible outcomes to local communities in which Queensland hubs are based, we know this is a model that works. Hubs are responsive to changing needs and priorities of their participants, they are reliable and cost-effective, and welcomed by their communities.

Based on our experience and the expertise of working within schools to provide support and connection to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, we believe that expanding the reach of hubs will deliver health, wellbeing, and development outcomes for children and their families in Queensland.

Without a continuation of funding, Queensland community hubs will close

Community hubs are fully funded by the federal government for the first two years. From year three, each school contributes \$20K, and we ask for a modest contribution of \$10K per hub per annum from the state government. All government funding goes directly to hubs, with the operational costs of Community Hubs Australia and other network costs paid for by the Scanlon Foundation. Support agency funding is variable, depending on the number of hubs in each area, and is funded federally by the Department of Home Affairs.

The Queensland Government’s Department of Education has committed to continue funding 10 hubs in Ipswich and Logan over the next three years, to 30 June 2028. This cost is \$296,439.

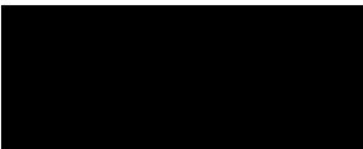
This leaves 14 current hubs unfunded in Brisbane (5 hubs), Rockhampton (3 hubs), Toowoomba (3 hubs), Townsville (3 hubs) and six future hubs committed by the Federal Government in regional Queensland. The hub locations of the 24 hubs in operation in 2025 are listed in Appendix A.

The table below outlines the cost model for the unfunded hubs over the next five years, based on a cost of \$10K per year per hub for the Queensland government, totalling \$880K over five years. This is 9% of the total \$9.4m investment over five years:

Funding type (source)	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31	Total	%
Federal hub/support agency funding (DHA)	\$1,342,085	\$1,400,190	\$1,281,199	\$1,345,259	\$1,412,522	\$6,781,256	72%
State hub funding (Queensland Government)	\$140,000	\$140,000	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$880,000	9%
School contribution	\$280,000	\$280,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$1,760,000	19%
Total	\$1,762,085	\$1,820,190	\$1,881,199	\$1,945,259	\$2,012,522	\$9,421,256	

We are very proud of our Queensland network and value the partnership we have with the Queensland Government. However, without a continuation of funding, the 14 hubs in Queensland will close this year.

I welcome the opportunity to further discuss with the Commission the National Community Hubs Program and our role in strengthening protective factors around all Queensland children, young people and families, especially those in our community who face barriers, as outlined in our response. I also welcome the opportunity to work with you to resolve the funding issue which sees community hubs funded beyond June this year.



Bec Kotow
 Chief Executive Officer
 Community Hubs Australia



Appendix A: Queensland schools with a community hub

LGA	School name
Brisbane	Acacia Ridge State School
Brisbane	Inala State School
Brisbane	Nundah State School
Brisbane	St Brendan's Primary School Moorooka
Brisbane	Runcorn State School ⁴
Ipswich	Fernbrooke State School
Ipswich	Kruger State School
Ipswich	Riverview State School
Ipswich	Vacancy ⁵
Ipswich	Staines Memorial College
Logan	Marsden State School
Logan	St Francis College
Logan	St Paul's Catholic Primary School
Logan	Woodridge North State School
Logan	Woodridge State School
Rockhampton	Lakes Creek State School
Rockhampton	Mount Archer State School
Rockhampton	Waraburra State School
Toowoomba	Darling Heights State School
Toowoomba	Harlaxton State School
Toowoomba	Newtown State School
Townsville	Aitkenvale State School
Townsville	Cranbrook State School
Townsville	Kelso State School

⁴ The community hub at Runcorn State School opens in Term 1, 2026.

⁵ Springfield Lakes State School left the network in December 2025. Recruitment is underway to fill the vacancy.