

FIRST STEPS COUNT INC CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE

Taree, Manning Valley, NSW

Key Points of FSC operations:

1. Co-ordinated early childhood service provision in a one-stop-shop purpose built community facility which is community driven and community owned

Community consultation has continued over 5 years of planning including with the Aboriginal community in order to give all children the best possible start in life in one of the most disadvantaged areas in Australia.

Countless children are presently denied access to needed services because service providers operate in isolation and distances between them make access for families well nigh impossible. Unfortunately many families are unfairly labelled non-attenders and services are actively denied them. This stigma and resulting lack of service provision affects children's entire lives and costs society in more ways than the obvious monetary realm.

The centre will also identify and resolve gaps in service delivery by actively working in partnership with families and services.

The project is a model for alleviation of the adverse effects of disadvantage on children especially poor educational outcomes which can result in a multiplicity of ongoing (and costly) social ills.

2. Sustainability assured for both service provision and environmentally friendly building and landscaping

Ongoing funding is guaranteed via rental fees from:

- the resident service provider Child Care Services Taree & Districts (CCST&D) which operates federally funded programs including Communities for Children
- Interchanging consultancy room hire by health and allied services and early childhood service organisations
- Workshops, Playgroups, Conference room hire
- Environmentally sustainable building and landscaping adhering to the 'Living Building Challenge'

3. Significant private funding and in kind support are major contributors to establishment of First Steps Count

Major contributions from Architects Without Frontiers (AWF) and Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF) have enabled lodgement of the DA with Greater Taree City Council.

Council's provision of land for construction of the First Steps Count facility and business and community contributions both financial and in kind are significant and ensure continued community involvement.

4. Enhanced opportunities for 'closing the gap' with Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians working together in service provision, teaching and community engagement

The Centre provides a unique opportunity for improving the educational outcomes and general wellbeing of Aboriginal children and their families with both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal commitment and involvement in the design and development of the facility, service provision and community engagement.

Teaching /Mentoring by Elders will be a feature of FSC operations

Partnerships with early childhood organisations and agencies both government and non government and the Manning Gardens Public School in FSC precinct ensure that all children have the best possible start in life.

The First Steps Count!