



our vision is opportunity,
equity & quality of life for
everyone in our community

In the Gladstone Region, our local early childhood education and care community is working together to make sure every child has the opportunity to thrive, now and into the future. Access to early childhood education and care is essential for children’s health, wellbeing, and lifelong development. Right now, there are 2,070 childcare places across centres in Gladstone, including long daycare, sessional kindergartens and an extended hours kindergarten. This means that some families are still missing out on the support they need, highlighting a clear opportunity to improve fairness and ensure every child can have the best possible start, no matter where they live.

Community-Led Solutions for Lasting Change

Our local Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) centres are the driving force behind the Childcare and Kindy Access project. ECECs have come together to explore the challenges facing families and are identifying practical, community-driven solutions. By working collaboratively, our community can strengthen the systems that support children and create a healthier, future for everyone.

In February 2025, ECEC educators and Allied Health professionals joined together to understand practical steps to improve access to early child development supports for local parents, carers and families, rooted in local knowledge and experience.

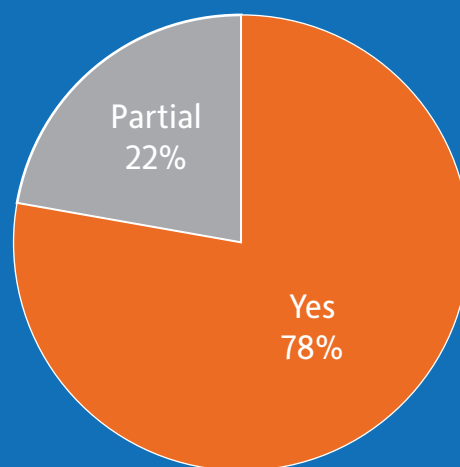
They recognised the importance of updating the data collected from the October 2023 survey to better reflect the current situation and provide more accurate and timely insights. Updated data will help community to respond quickly to changing needs and to focus resources where they will make the greatest difference.

All centres participated in the survey – more than three-quarters of centres responded to the initial survey, with the remaining being captured in follow up check-ins.



Childcare and Kindy Access Project Update

Early Childhood Education and Care Centres Survey Participation



Early Education Services

ECECs are at the heart of supporting children’s development, health and wellbeing from birth to five years old. These experiences lay the foundation for lifelong learning and success. It includes the nurturing environments and learning experiences provided in our local childcare centres, kindergartens, and playgroups.

These early years are a time of rapid growth and discovery. Through play, interaction, and guided learning, children develop essential skills in communication, problem-solving, and social relationships. When we invest in quality early education, we’re investing in the health and fairness of our whole community - creating lasting benefits for everyone, now and into the future.

ECEC Centres in the Gladstone Region	2023	2025
Total number of Centres	25	27
Total number of Childcare/Kindy places	1833	2070

Early Childhood Education and Care Centres in the Gladstone Region

Our region’s early childhood educators and centres provide 2,070 childcare places across long daycare, sessional kindergartens and an extended hours kindergarten. These nurturing environments give children the skills, confidence, and connections they need to thrive. When adjusted to reflect a minimum of three days per week, the total number of child places is 2,981.

This data does not currently include Family daycare and Education Queensland school-based and E-Kindy kindergarten places. For children who live in remote and rural parts of the Gladstone Region, Education Queensland offers 25 hours per fortnight of kindergarten education during school terms, helping to ensure those children can access quality early learning when local programs and places are not accessible.

The Gladstone Region

Bailai, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang, and Taribelang Bunda Country

Legend

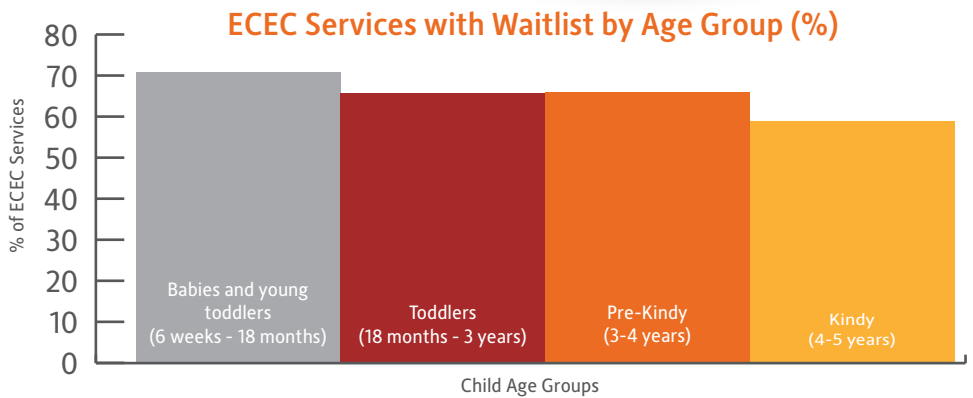
- Total number of childcare places in a location/region.
- Number of ECEC centres as one of:
 - Long daycare
 - Sessional kindergarten
 - Extended hours kindergarten



July 2025

Waitlists

The percentage of ECEC centres with waitlists decreases from 71% in the younger age groups (6 weeks - 18 months) to 59% in the Kindy groups (4-5 years). Some of the waitlists were due to parents being unable to access their preferred days as well as differences in staffing ratios.



Licensed vs Actual Child Places

The actual number of child places may be different to a centre’s licensed capacity.



‘Licensed Child Places’ is the maximum number of child places based on physical space. It is usually the number determined by ACECQA registration.



‘Actual Child Places’ is the real-time number of places that can be offered based on variables such as available staffing and other factors. This can be less than the number of licensed places.



Babies (6 weeks) – Toddlers (3 years)

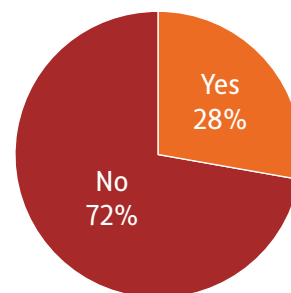
28% of responding centres reported no difference between the number of approved licensed places and actual places for children aged 6 weeks–3 years. Of the 72% that reported a difference, it was a considered decision based on:

- ability to attract and retain diploma or above qualified educators
- desire to keep capacity for additional emergency places
- need for designated sleeping areas, especially for babies.

85% of responding centres reported no difference between the number of approved physical ECEC places and actual ECEC places for children aged 6 weeks – 3 years. Of the 15% that recorded a difference, the ability to attract and retain Diploma or above qualified educators is the lead causal factor for the difference.

Centre Operating at Full Licensed Capacity (Licensed vs Actual Child Places)

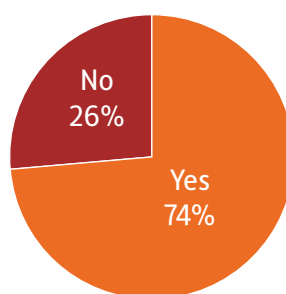
Babies (6 weeks) – Toddlers (3 years)



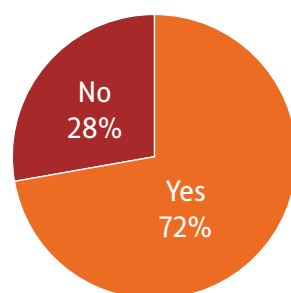
Long Day Care, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten (3-5 years)

Approximately 70% of respondents reported no difference between the number of approved licensed places and actual places for 3–5 year old children. The remaining centres reported a difference between approved and actual places, referencing staffing constraints as the biggest contributor. In this older age group, the staffing ratio of 1:11 allows 2 educators for 22 children; this means that reaching the room licensed capacity of 24 requires three staff members to meet ratio requirements.

Long Day Care, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten (3-5 years)



Long Day Care Kindergarten (4-5 years)

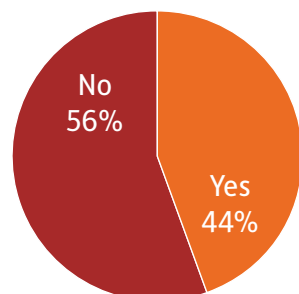


Sessional Kindergarten (4-5 years)

44% of respondents reported no difference between the number of approved licensed places and actual places for 4–5 year olds.

56% of centres reported a difference between approved and actual places, referencing the capacity being calculated as under-roof compared to room size area and staffing constraints as the largest contributors.

Sessional Kindergarten (4-5 years)

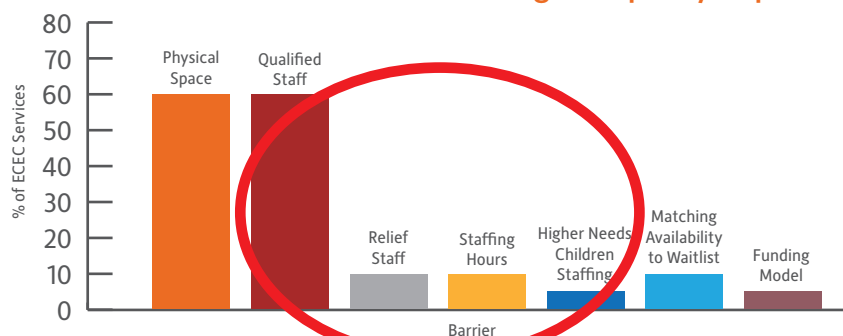


Barriers to Offering More Places

Availability of qualified staff (Diploma level and above), as well as centre constraints, are reported as challenges for over 60% of centres. The red circle shows the combination of staffing related constraints reported.

The limited availability of local allied health professionals including speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and behavioural or inclusion specialists presents challenges in supporting our children, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen regional service networks. Additionally, staffing constraints and limited time for regular planning are seen as areas where further support could enhance the delivery of high-quality, responsive care.

Identified Barriers Contributing to Capacity Gap





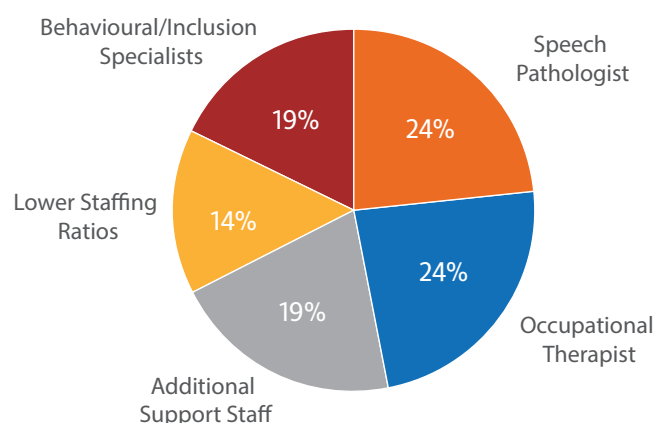
Supporting Children's Development Through In-Centre Expertise

Educators across the Gladstone Region identified that when they have the right support, they can create learning spaces where every child can thrive. Collectively, the data highlighted that additional staffing is a key enabler of impactful in-centre support, identified by around one-third of centres. This insight reflects the understanding of how responsive, well-resourced environments can nurture children's development and wellbeing. When educators have the time and support they need, they can create the kinds of learning spaces where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

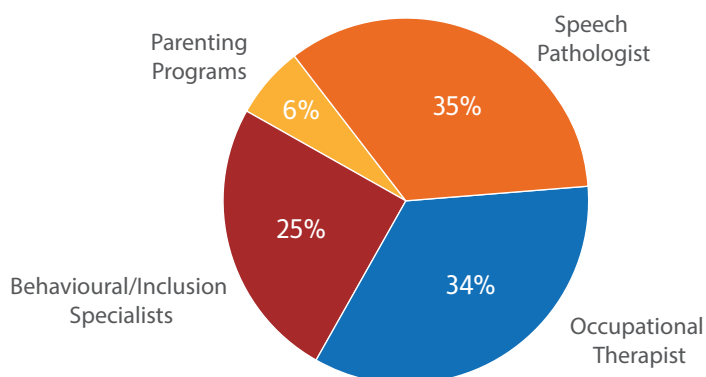
Access to in-centre support from Allied Health professionals, such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and behavioural or inclusion specialists, is widely recognised as a contributor to positive outcomes for children and their families. These partnerships build stronger connections with parents and carers, and provide tailored, strengths-based support that meets each child's unique needs. Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy (OT) were the top in-centre supports recognised as making the biggest difference in supporting early development.

However, our community recognises that there are several barriers that hinder access to in-centre supports, including limited local availability of professionals, staffing shortages, lack of planning time, cost, documentation and eligibility, and challenges in managing demand. Working together to address these barriers is essential to ensuring all children, no matter where they live, can access the support they need, now and into the future.

In-Centre Supports for Biggest Difference to Children's Early Development



In-Centre Supports for Biggest Difference to Parents, Carers and Families





Supporting Skills to Strengthen Early Learning

Centres across the region are actively drawing on available funding to strengthen their teams' knowledge and skills – demonstrating a shared commitment to continuous learning and quality improvement. While the focus has been more on professional development than formal qualification upgrades, many centres are prioritising practical skill-building that supports educators in day-to-day work with children.

% of Centres Receiving Funding

80%

45%

20%



Kindy
Uplift

Kindy
Inclusion

Inclusion
Readiness

Learnings from Additional Data

Capacity vs Staffing Constraints

- Most centres operate at approved capacity.
- Most face challenges due to educator shortages.
- There is a need for targeted workforce strategies.

Waitlists and Access Equity

- Waitlists more common in baby and toddler age groups.
- Families face delays or can't access preferred days.

Workforce Development and Upskilling

- Strong culture of continuous improvement.
- Focus on short-term skill-building.
- Opportunity to balance professional learning with formal qualifications.

Staffing and Planning Time

- Limited relief staff and planning time are barriers.
- Constraints can lead to burnout and reduced quality.
- Addressing these issues could enhance program quality.

Allied Health and Inclusion Supports

- Access to Allied Health professionals is impactful.
- Limited local availability presents a challenge.
- Opportunity to invest in regional service networks for children.

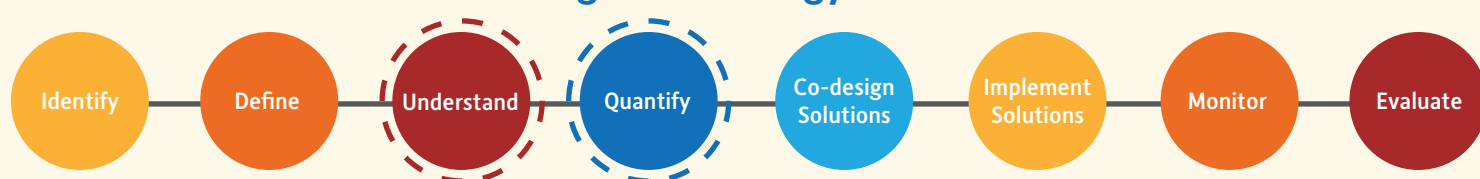
Next Steps

During recent visits to centres, educators consistently identified staffing and in-centre supports as the highest priorities for improving outcomes for children and families.

Building on the momentum, the next step in this project is for community to gather and work together to co-design solutions that strengthen early years systems and respond to identified needs.

Together, our community aims to ensure every child in our region has the opportunity to thrive, now and into the future.

Evidence Based Decision-Making Methodology



Contact

If you would like to be a part of the solution and create positive futures for our community – please contact us!

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