

# RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

## Getting the best start for remote Indigenous children

Associate Professor Caroline Jones of the MARCS Institute and an international team\* of researchers, in partnership with Sunrise Health Service and The Smith Family, have received funding through the Australian Research Council's Linkage Project scheme to investigate the effects of the LiTTLe Program (Learning to Talk, Talking to Learn), an early childhood language program for Aboriginal children and caregivers in remote communities of the eastern Katherine Region, Northern Territory.

'Language development is a fundamental first step in a child's education. How does this happen? Through social interaction with family members and other caregivers,' Associate Professor Jones explains. 'But it's harder for children with hearing loss. In this project we're tracking the impacts of the LiTTLe Program, an early childhood program which was specifically designed to help boost oral language development in home language among Indigenous children in the Katherine NT eastside region. Many of these children experience chronic middle ear infections from the first year of life onwards, which affects language development. The LiTTLe Program was designed to offer parents practical strategies for supporting their children's language and ear health in this context.'

The focus of the project, the LiTTLe Program (Learning to Talk, Talking to Learn), was a parent-implemented early childhood program run by Sunrise Health Service<sup>1</sup> with funds from Ian Thorpe Fountain for Youth and Communities for Children (2012-14) facilitated by The Smith Family.<sup>2</sup> The research team includes local Indigenous community members who will interview local adults to find out their perspectives on the activities and messages in the program, especially those concerning ear health and language development. The team will also compare language and school readiness outcomes among children who have had different levels of participation in the program.

As Raelene Wing, Child Health Coordinator at Sunrise Health Service says, 'Health and education go together. Good health sets children up for success at school, and in life.' The project sets out to find out more about how local



service providers can support aural health, language development and school readiness in locally appropriate ways.

**Project Title:** Learning to talk, talking to learn: Effects of an early childhood language program in remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities

**Funding has been set at:** \$183,000

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Supported by: Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal Corporation  
The Smith Family

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<sup>2</sup>Katherine Communities for Children Facilitating Partner is funded by the Australian Government and facilitated by The Smith Family.