We know that supporting parents to better connect, play and learn with their young children significantly increases their capacity to support their children to engage in school and stay on track. Let’s Start supports Indigenous parents and their children (aged 4–8) at particular risk of learning challenges associated with emotional and behavioural challenges.

THE NEED

- 24% of Aboriginal children aged 4–17 years are at high risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- Northern Territory children score well below the mean on all domains of the Australian Early Development Index, a measure of children’s school readiness. Only one in five children living in very remote Indigenous communities read at the accepted minimum standard.
- Child protection notifications for neglect in the Northern Territory’s Indigenous communities signal an urgent need to identify vulnerable children and to support their parents.
- Only about a third of Aboriginal children complete secondary school, compared with a national average closer to 80%.

Early intervention to improve parenting and reduce child conduct problems can reduce the risk of later psycho-social difficulties and improve school outcomes.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

Let’s Start is Australia’s only group parenting program that provides evidence-based, culturally adapted support to remote Indigenous parents with children in the 4 to 8 year age group who are identified at risk with developmental, social-emotional or behavioural problems.

Community capacity building and transfer of skills to Indigenous community workers along with mentoring and quality assurance are needed to enable an expanded implementation of this highly successful program.

Menzies is seeking funds to establish, at its Centre for Child Development & Education (CDE) in Darwin, a central Parenting Training and Implementation Research Centre (PTIRC) to enable Indigenous health & community workers in community organizations to deliver Let’s Start within their own communities.

By establishing the parenting training centre Menzies will be able to effectively achieve the ongoing transfer of evidence-based early intervention skills to personnel working in the communities. This will build the capacity of five new communities to manage a fully implemented Let’s Start program on a sustainable basis. It is anticipated that this will take three years from the time the program is initially implemented.

The Training and Education Resource Centre will consist of five staff (project leader, 2 x project coordinators, 1 X evaluation coordinator, 1 x trainer) who will support the set-up and implementation of Let’s Start in new communities. This team of trainers will develop community-based workers to implement and manage the project and provide mentorship and on call support as required.

The Let’s Start program will ensure that communities have access to a repository of evidence-based, culturally appropriate education and training resources to support early intervention. After the three year implementation phase, community capacity will be sufficient to sustain the delivery of Let’s Start, with access to training, quality assurance and feedback from the Menzies training team.

PARTNERSHIP IMPACT

The Parenting Training and Implementation Research Centre will:

- Establish Let’s Start in 5 new communities
- Extend Let’s Start to more families in existing communities
- Enable the sustainable expansion of the Let’s Start Program through improved training opportunities for Indigenous early childhood workers in participating organisations and communities.
- Provide mentorship, support and clinical supervision for evidence-based early intervention practices in the Indigenous community sector.
- Streamline costs and maximize efficiencies – building Menzies’ capacity to provide training, supervision and support is the most cost-effective means of ensuring that high quality evidence-based practice can be sustained at the community level within an expanded implementation program.

“We sit together, yarning about children with the other parents. At first I noticed parents feel shame about finding words about their children but now we just go ahead...when we go home we don’t gossip about our families...Let’s Start talk to us a lot and encourage us more and I started putting my head up.” – Let’s Start parent