



Summary of Annual Reporting

1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024

For over 10 years, State Library of Queensland in partnership with local government have contributed to the development of children's brains through the delivery of place-based First 5 Forever programs that encourage talking, reading, singing, and playing in libraries across Queensland.

From the very moment a life begins, a child's experiences and environments will shape their learning, development, and wellbeing *now, and for their whole life.*

In its first decade, the internationally recognised First 5 Forever program has had a profound impact in building children's brains and bodies through free, fun, playful experiences at local libraries with over 6 million child, parent, and caregiver interactions with the program over this time.

Public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) are important and trusted place-based, family centred spaces that provide free playful environments, experiences and resources to support Queensland families on their child's journey through the first 5 years.

Through First 5 Forever, parents and caregivers are supported in their role in developing their child's health and wellbeing. This report provides a snapshot of the deliverables for First 5 Forever and highlights the trends and progress of the program across Queensland and the state-wide initiatives delivered.

Snapshot

75
public libraries
and IKCs
providing services
in Queensland
participated in
First 5 Forever

31,187
First 5 Forever
programs delivered
8% increase YoY

895,232
attendances
at First 5 Forever
15% increase YoY

27,589
onsite First 5 Forever
sessions
12% increase YoY

3,888
outreach activities
12% increase YoY

3,714
partner sessions
49% increase YoY

1,188
attendances at
professional development
8 workshops, 15 webinars,
4 First 5 Forever
online learning modules
delivered

19,194
Facebook followers
reaching 5,212,110 users;
1,894 content shares

500+
members
of Facebook First 5 Forever
Professional Network

717
Instagram followers
reaching 791,580 users;
12,025 content shares

174,886
page views
of the First 5 Forever website

28,914
edm subscribers
99% increase since
2022–2023

Driving innovation and leadership

In 2023–2024, State Library has undertaken several state-wide initiatives to support public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres to promote and advocate for early years program delivery in their community. Initiatives include the development of the First 5 Forever Early Years Story, the First 5 Forever inaugural ambassador was announced, and *A Board Book for Every Little Queenslander* campaign has continued.

The First 5 Forever Early Years Story

Queensland libraries foster early childhood development through First 5 Forever by providing nurturing relationships, health-focused environments, play-based learning, inclusive communities, cultural connections, and access to essential resources.

Highlights include baby milestones at Cassowary Coast, an interactive ocean exhibit in Bundaberg, inclusive sessions in Cairns, and outreach initiatives in Maranoa. In August 2024, all councils received Early Years Story resources to strengthen advocacy and support for young children statewide.

Libraries are the cornerstones of communities offering place-based spaces, supportive staff, helpful resources, and innovative programs and partnerships that support children in the early years to get a great start to life. They are places of learning and enjoyment, connectors to local services and a place to build a sense of community.

Throughout 2023–2024, State Library in partnership with the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership developed a First 5 Forever Early Years Story.

Our Early Years Story is based on B4 Early Years Coalition work in Tasmania and ARACY's evidence-based wellbeing framework, The Nest, that outlines 6 interconnected domains of wellbeing children need to thrive, and that the development of the whole child is supported by environments and experiences in the early years.



Providing children with the best start in the early years

Libraries across Queensland are already providing the environments and experiences to shape little lives and build and protect little brains through:

1 Nurturing and secure relationships

First 5 Forever fosters nurturing and secure relationships by encouraging caregivers, as the child's first teacher, to talk and share stories with their children helping to build caring and responsive relationships.

Snapshot: Cassowary Coast Regional Council

A baby took their first steps during a *Baby Bounce* session and spoke their first words at *Storytime* in Innisfail Library, highlighting the profound impact of library-led First 5 Forever programs on child development.

Snapshot: Isaac Regional Council

Introduced *Daddy and Me Storytime* to strengthen father-child connections and promote active male caregiver involvement in early childhood development and bonding.



2 Experiences and environments that promote health and wellbeing

Libraries provide free access to spaces, information, books and resources to help parents, carers and communities learn more about children's health and wellbeing.



Snapshot: Murweh Shire Council

Created a number of new partnerships and guest presenters for storytime such as dietitians, physiotherapists, speech pathologists, children's health nurses, Remote Area & Family Services (RAFS).

Snapshot: Brisbane City Council

Queensland Ballet continued to provide storytime citywide, fostering creative expression, musicality and imagination.



3 Opportunities for play and discovery

When children have the time and space to play, they thrive. Libraries provide family-friendly play-based programs and spaces. When children play with the important adults in their life it is especially powerful for learning and development.

Snapshot: Bundaberg Regional Library

Successfully hosted an Ocean Interactive Exhibition, attracting over 800 attendees and delivering an engaging, themed environment for play and discovery.

The ocean theme provided a dynamic platform for diverse play styles, fostering child-led exploration and hands-on learning experiences.

4 Participating in positive and inclusive communities

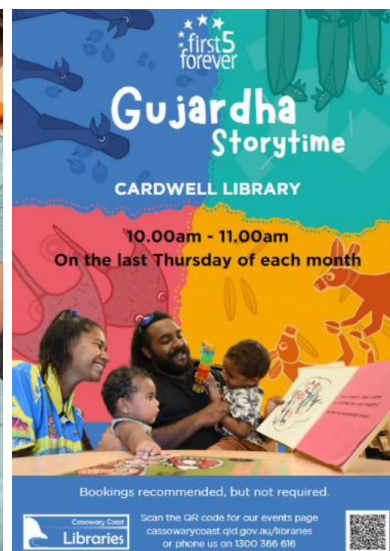
Libraries are champions of childhood, connecting families in safe, child-focused spaces where they can explore and discover more about others and the world around them. Free and fun First 5 Forever sessions in safe, welcoming spaces – connecting to other families.

Snapshot: Cassowary Coast

Cassowary Coast partners with Mamu Health Centre twice a month to deliver Mums and Bubs sessions, enhancing access for new mothers and fostering a supportive environment for families. These sessions provide valuable opportunities for connection, knowledge-sharing, and community engagement, strengthening early childhood support networks.



First Nations themed Gadjardha Storytime held monthly at Cardwell Library



5 A sense of belonging through identity and culture

Libraries are community hubs that encourage children to embrace and celebrate the diversity around them. Inclusive programming and welcoming spaces build curiosity and opportunities for discovery.

Snapshot: Redland City Libraries

Redland City Libraries partnered with Indigenous Insights to deliver immersive First Nations programming, enriching children's and families' cultural understanding through engaging, community-driven experiences. Staff participated in the 'Embedding First Nations Perspectives' workshop, which enhanced their understanding of First Nations history and culture.

Collaboration
with Aunty
Sharron from
Indigenous
Insights



Snapshot: Cairns Libraries

Cairns Libraries collaborated with specialists to provide equitable early learning opportunities through inclusive, place-based programs. The Learn English Through Storytime (LETS) initiative supported 419 participants across 27 events, fostering social cohesion, family learning, and community belonging.



First 5 Forever
Storytime
at the Tanks
Cairns –
Bulkaway
Muruku

6 Material basics and access to services and support

First 5 Forever is free in libraries and connects families with the services and support for children to thrive. First 5 Forever partnerships in libraries connect parents and carers to information and resources to support children and their families in the first 5 years.



Snapshot: Maranoa

Distributed 2,100 take-home kits and 700 baby books, reaching over 4,000 community members. A newly established pop-up space in the Roma Shopping Centre delivers monthly First 5 Forever sessions, expanding access to vital early childhood resources and support for families unable to visit the library.



**Wherever
you are... make
the most of every
day. Talk, read,
sing, play**

Ash Barty

Ashleigh Barty AO First 5 Forever ambassador

On 4 April 2024, State Library welcomed Ashleigh Barty AO as the inaugural First 5 Forever ambassador at a special event attended by Minister for the Arts Leeanne Enoch, State Librarian and CEO Vicki McDonald, and local families. Speakers emphasised the program's vital role in supporting early childhood development across Queensland.

Over the next three years, Ash will work with State Library to help raise awareness of First 5 Forever, and share the importance of talking, reading, singing and playing with children in the first 5 years to support their wellbeing and development now and for their whole life.

State Library announced the First 5 Forever ambassador on Instagram reaching 139,065 people with 3,982 engagements and the Facebook announcement post reached 19,225 people with 637 engagements.

In August 2024, 40,800 ambassador promotional resources, including posters, flyers, and tennis stress balls, were distributed across the public library network, alongside strategies to enhance community engagement.

Since 2015, First 5 Forever has reinforced the vital role of public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres as trusted, family-centred spaces. These free, play-based environments provide experiences and resources that support Queensland families in nurturing their child's development during the crucial first 5 years.



Elevating First Nations

In 2023–2024, councils strengthened First Nations programming, partnerships, and outreach to enhance accessibility and awareness of First 5 Forever.

8,000 community engagement resources were developed and distributed to IKCs and public libraries including: Nyurramba Garran designed teardrop banners, calico bags, postcards, tattoos, shirts and Ash Barty First 5 Forever ambassador posters designed for First Nations audiences. Children and Families Senior Program Officer began monthly 'Yarn Up' community of practice meetings with IKC coordinators and the Cairns First Nations engagement team to share learnings and support the delivery of First 5 Forever through IKCs.

Highlights include Brisbane's Jarjum Storytime and Walking on Country events, Gladstone's Our Country Playtime, and Gold Coast's cultural integration in family sessions. Mareeba expanded its outreach with Mulungu Aboriginal Corporation, while Townsville partnered with health services and playgroups, including sessions at a women's correctional centre.

These initiatives foster inclusion and engagement with First Nations families across Queensland.



Cairns Libraries
celebrating
NAIDOC week

Building capability

In 2023–2024, councils prioritised staff training, with 1,188 attendances at State Library professional development sessions, including webinars, face-to-face workshops, and online modules. Topics covered early literacy, First Nations storytelling, risk in programming, and community engagement.

Workshops in regional areas supported libraries in enhancing spaces, programming, and partnerships. Councils strengthened connections with Early Years Networks and educators to support holistic child development.

Councils also report building connections with Early Years Networks and Early Childhood Educators to raise awareness of First 5 Forever and share information. These connections enable a deeper understanding of the needs of the whole child, placing children at the centre of the work libraries do.

Brisbane City Council continues to deliver First 5 Forever training sessions for all new staff. Content includes strategies, practical tips and resources available in libraries to ensure ongoing best practice delivery of early literacy programs in libraries.



First 5 Forever
training in
Hughenden



Reaching all Queensland families

In 2023–2024, Queensland libraries delivered 31,187 First 5 Forever sessions, with attendance reaching 895,232—an increase from the previous year of over 115,000. Offsite programming and outreach expanded, enhancing accessibility for families. While online session delivery declined, engagement grew by 46%. Libraries continue to prioritise inclusive, play-based experiences in diverse community settings.

Queensland libraries continue to build and strengthen partnerships to meet community needs. Councils reported significant increases in program delivery, attendance, and outreach, with innovative approaches such as remote property visits, multicultural playgroups, and collaborations with health, education, and cultural organisations. Notable increases include Brisbane's 20% rise in attendance, Gold Coast's 43% growth, and Mackay's 107% increase in program delivery.

Councils are also enhancing accessibility for vulnerable families through initiatives like book distribution, refugee support, and outreach to caravan parks and shelters. Creative programming, such as zoo storytimes and digital learning for young children, further expands engagement across diverse communities.

The 2023–2024 reporting period saw libraries continuing to expand their offsite and outreach activities, enabling a flexible approach to programming as they welcomed families to the library, or to community spaces including halls, parks and swimming pools. Innovative and diverse approaches to First 5 Forever programs are reported as libraries prioritise inclusion and play based experiences, both on and offsite.

*Play Time
@ the Park,
Arch Dunn
Memorial Park,
Home Hill
(Burdekin Library)*



*Messy Play
at Childers
showgrounds*





Gold Coast
Outreach Titans
NAIDOC

Libraries continue to prioritise building new partnerships and strengthening existing ones to meet the needs and interests of their communities, as evidenced by this summary:

- **Councils across Queensland** reported significant growth in First 5 Forever programs, with increased participation, expanded outreach, and strengthened partnerships.
- **Brisbane** delivered 5,981 sessions with 208,449 attendees, a 20% rise from 2022–23.
- **Gold Coast** saw attendance grow 43% (91,207) and programs increase 48% (2,278).
- **Cairns** delivered 803 outreach events engaging 42,670 attendees.
- **Gladstone** expanded partnerships by 421%, driving a 40% increase in attendance.
- **Logan** reached 50,116 participants through 1,944 events, a 51% growth, and **Mackay** saw a 107% rise in programs.
- Smaller councils also reported strong outcomes, with **Mareeba** increasing partner sessions by 585% and **Quilpie** boosting attendance by 225%.
- Innovative outreach included remote property visits in **Bulloo**, multicultural playgroups in **Cairns**, and pop-up library spaces in **Maranoa**.
- **Councils** leveraged strategic partnerships with community groups, libraries, and cultural organisations to enhance accessibility and engagement, reinforcing First 5 Forever's statewide impact.



National
Simultaneous
Storytime with
Play2Learn

Snapshot: Ipswich City Council

Ipswich City Council's Tales and Trails Project saw 6 highly successful launches and 4 new Tales and Trails.

Council also trialed 4 new programs: Storytime Hip Hop; Storytime at McDonalds; Christmas programs; Sensory Storytime increasing access for families.

Marketing activity: innovative advertising methods undertaken by Queensland libraries to reach a broad audience through visual and print media have included:

- Shopping centre decals and panels.
- Bus wraps; van wraps; billboards; print media.
- 'When Men Read' campaign.



Cairns Libraries marketing and promotion images



Community programs and partnerships: connects families with the services and support they need to provide children with the best start in life. Public libraries worked with the following organisations to support and enrich their communities:

- Assistance Dogs
- Baby Give Back
- Big Little Wins (Rad Dads Logan)
- Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood
- Emergency Services
- Hope in a Suitcase
- Indigenous Insights
- Mamu Health Centre
- Mulungu Aboriginal Corporation
- Play Matters
- Queensland Ballet Storytime (Brisbane)
- Rockhampton Zoo
- Settlement Service International
- Uniting Care
- Waijungbah Jarjums.

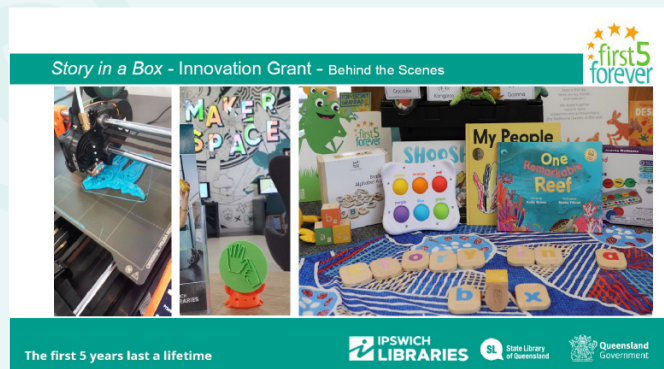
Snapshot: Redland City Council

Redland City Council reports enhancing collaborative partnerships and coordination of networks by partnered sessions to increase reach.

Partner sessions have had a 247% increase while the number of sessions delivered was 694 – a 37% increase. 66 partner sessions were reported which was a 247% increase since 2022–2023 with overall attendance 22,795, a 28% increase.



Redland City Council connecting with Southern Moreton Bay Islands stakeholders



Community engagement: libraries are community hubs where children and families can feel connected and participate in experiences that help young children thrive. Public libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres have provided inclusive resourcing:

- LETS program
- Storyboards and storywalks
- Strolling stories
- Story in a box
- Tails and trails.

All are examples of ways public libraries have supported community engagement.

Program diversity: creates a sense of connection and belonging for families, and opportunities for young children to play building their brains and bodies in fun and free programs. In 2023–2024, the Queensland public library network provided:

- Author talks
- Elder storytelling
- Ballet storytime
- Jarjum storytime
- Splash time
- Science programs
- Puppet workshops
- First Nations artists
- Music therapists
- STEAM, art and dance
- Walking on Country events.



first5 forever At a glance 2023–2024

This reporting period shows growth across the state including a **15% increase** in attendance and **8% increase** in program offerings from the previous financial year.

This is a less significant growth than the previous reporting period (71% increase in attendance and 17% increase in programs) which was a year of libraries settling back into onsite and offsite programming after COVID-19.

State Library
at Musgrave Park
for NAIDOC
Family Fun Day