



Summary of Annual Reporting

1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025

In 2025, First 5 Forever proudly marked its 10th anniversary—a decade of talking, singing, reading, and playing to support the growth and development of children under 5 years old.

Through free, playful, and engaging programs delivered in libraries and Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) across Queensland, First 5 Forever has built strong foundations for children's brains and bodies while empowering parents and caregivers to nurture their little ones' health, development and wellbeing.

The program continues to make a significant impact, with thousands of families benefiting from the meaningful interactions and supportive environments provided by libraries and IKCs.

First 5 Forever achieved remarkable growth across State Library digital platforms in 2024–25, significantly expanding its reach and strengthening connections with families and professionals across Queensland. Leveraging targeted engagement strategies and the impactful ambassador assets featuring Ash Barty AO, the program has enhanced its ability to support early childhood development statewide.

In 2024–25, State Library delivered a diverse range of professional development opportunities including webinars, regional workshops and updated online training modules. These initiatives enhanced the skills of library staff across Queensland, particularly in regional and remote areas, ensuring they are well-equipped to deliver high-quality, inclusive First 5 Forever programs that support families and young children.

Every interaction— no matter how big or small—*matters*

Each one contributes to a child's wellbeing and development. Public libraries remain at the heart of these interactions, offering safe, welcoming spaces where families can connect, learn, and grow together.

The impact of borrowing picture books from the library goes beyond numbers—to nurturing a love of reading that can last a lifetime and help to lay strong foundations for future learning.

Picture books give children access to a diverse range of stories, characters, cultures, and ideas that spark imagination and curiosity, and having them accessible in the home models their value and the important role of storytelling. When parents and caregivers engage in shared reading with their child, they model the joy and value of books, inviting moments of connection and shared discovery that become a powerful reference for little minds. Importantly, shared reading supports brain development as children learn about the world around them and their place in it.

In 2024–2025, **early years books borrowed**, including audio and video items, **accounted for 19% of the total collection usage of libraries**. That's **4,779,326 opportunities** for connection, learning and early language development in homes across Queensland.

As First 5 Forever enters its second decade, it remains steadfast in its mission to support Queensland families and foster brighter futures for the youngest members of our communities.

Queensland libraries supporting early childhood development through First 5 Forever

Queensland libraries continue to play a critical role in fostering early childhood development through First 5 Forever. By providing programs and spaces for nurturing relationships, play-based learning opportunities, inclusive communities, cultural connections, and access to essential resources, libraries are creating strong foundations for young children and their families. Key highlights and trends from the 2024–25 data include:

- **Strong family engagement:** Play-based and interactive sessions, such as chatter play, nature play and creative play programs, have seen high levels of participation and engagement from families, demonstrating the value of these activities in fostering early learning, and family connection and wellbeing.
- **High attendance at core early years programs:** Traditional library programs, including Rhyme Time, Toddler Time, and Storytime, continue to be well-attended and receive positive feedback from families, highlighting their importance in supporting early literacy and language development.
- **Effective outreach to underserved communities:** Libraries have successfully expanded their reach to remote and underserved communities through targeted outreach efforts and partnerships, ensuring equitable access to early childhood development programs.
- **Diverse and inclusive programming:** The delivery of diverse programs has enhanced inclusion and created a greater impact within communities, catering to the unique needs of families from diverse cultural and social backgrounds across Queensland.
- **Community partnerships driving localisation:** Collaborations with specialists and community organisations have brought local expertise into library programs, enriching the content and ensuring it is tailored to the specific needs of each community.
- **Success of offsite programs:** Offsite programs and outreach initiatives have often attracted higher attendance, underscoring the importance of meeting families in their own environments and making library services more accessible.

Despite these successes, libraries faced several challenges throughout the year. These included staff shortages, resource limitations, space constraints due to overcrowding during library programs, and the need to raise public awareness about the availability of free events and resources.

Overall, the First 5 Forever initiative continues to demonstrate its effectiveness in supporting early childhood development and fostering strong community connections across Queensland.

By addressing challenges and building on successful strategies, libraries remain at the forefront of creating inclusive, engaging, and impactful programs for young children and their families.

Colourful Parks
Week, Chinchilla,
Western Downs



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.

The First 5 Forever initiative continues to support caregivers in their role as a child's first and most important teacher by encouraging them to talk, read and share stories with their children. These interactions help build strong, caring and responsive relationships that are essential for a child's early development. Libraries across Queensland have implemented innovative programs to strengthen these connections and provide meaningful support to families.

Mount Isa City Council has introduced a passport system to encourage families to return to library programs regularly. Children receive a free book after attending 10 sessions, reinforcing the importance of consistent engagement in early learning activities. Additionally, new families are welcomed with a pack containing information and resources to support their journey in fostering their child's development.

Longreach Regional Council has launched the *Tea and Tots* program in collaboration with Outback Futures. This initiative specifically targets young mothers who may feel isolated or uncertain after the completion of the compulsory six-week postnatal check-ups. By providing a supportive environment for mothers to connect, share experiences and learn about early childhood development, the program helps to build confidence and strengthen the bond between caregivers and their children.



In Richmond, the library has partnered with the *Me and My Mum Hub* since July 2024 to deliver First 5 Forever programs.

This partnership has significantly extended the reach of the initiative, enabling more families to access resources and participate in activities that promote nurturing relationships and early learning.

These programs demonstrate how First 5 Forever fosters secure and responsive relationships by empowering caregivers to actively engage in their child's development. Through creative initiatives and strategic partnerships, libraries are creating supportive environments where families can thrive and children can build strong foundations for lifelong learning.

2 Experiences and environments that promote health and wellbeing

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

Pop-up libraries and outdoor events in parks have continued to thrive across Queensland, providing children and families with opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors while engaging in educational and recreational activities. These programs have been successfully delivered in various locations, including Cook, Livingstone, Rockhampton, Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Fraser Coast, Gladstone, Isaac (featuring the new *Move and Groove at the Park* initiative), Mount Isa and Redlands.

Strong connections with Child Health clinics, including partnerships with First Nations health providers, have been maintained across multiple regions. These include Fraser Coast, Cassowary Coast, Logan, Ipswich, Bundaberg, Mareeba, Noosa, Rockhampton, Tablelands, Western Downs, Charters Towers, Cloncurry, Longreach, Maranoa, North Burnett, Paroo and Weipa. These collaborations aim to support the health and wellbeing of children and families while fostering community engagement.

The Queensland Ballet has continued its successful partnership programs in Brisbane, Cairns, Gold Coast, Mareeba, Mackay and Goondiwindi. These initiatives have provided children and families with free access to ballet programs hosted in libraries, promoting cultural enrichment and the arts in local communities.

In addition to these activities, Noosa Libraries offered obstacle course activities, which were well received by families. Meanwhile, the Western Downs region saw vibrant community participation in concerts held in parks across Chinchilla, Dalby and Miles, further highlighting the success of these pop-up events in fostering community spirit and engagement.



Pop Up Library, Fraser Coast



Maranoa Regional Council



Park Tales, Moreton Bay

3 Opportunities for play and discovery

Libraries play a pivotal role in fostering childhood development by providing family-friendly, play-based programs and spaces where children can thrive. These programs not only encourage children to explore and learn through play but also create opportunities for meaningful interactions between children and the important adults in their lives.

Snapshot: Bundaberg Library

Across Queensland, play programs have continued to expand within the public library network, offering diverse and engaging experiences for families. Bundaberg Library introduced special *Playtime @ the Library* sessions on Saturdays, enabling both parents to participate alongside their children. These sessions provided a unique opportunity for families to bond while also highlighting the critical role of play in early childhood development.

Snapshot: Celebrating Play All May

The **Scenic Rim region** celebrated *Play All May*, marking 10 years of the First 5 Forever program. This month-long celebration underscored the importance of play in early childhood and showcased the library's commitment to supporting families through innovative and engaging activities.



Snapshot: Messy play programs

Messy play programs have been successfully delivered in **Charters Towers** and **North Burnett**, offering children hands-on, sensory-rich experiences that stimulate creativity and exploration. Similarly, sensory play sessions have been introduced in Cloncurry and Hinchinbrook, catering to children's developmental needs and encouraging interactive, multi-sensory learning.



These initiatives demonstrate the vital role libraries play in creating safe, inclusive, and enriching environments where children can thrive through play. By fostering connections between children and their caregivers, libraries continue to champion childhood development and strengthen family bonds across Queensland.

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.

Libraries across Queensland continue to play a vital role in fostering childhood development by providing safe, welcoming, and child-focused spaces where families can connect, explore and discover together. Through free and engaging First 5 Forever sessions, libraries create opportunities for families to connect with each other, interact with others and develop a love of learning in a supportive environment.

The **Bulloo Shire Council** has demonstrated this commitment by launching the *First 5 Forever on the Road* initiative, which brings library services to remote community members. By hosting sessions at local sporting events, the program ensures families in isolated areas can access these valuable resources and experiences.

In the **North Burnett region**, libraries have partnered with a variety of community groups to integrate First 5 Forever activities into major local events, including the Mundubbera Blueberry Festival, Monto Centenary Festival and Gayndah Orange Festival. These collaborations highlight the adaptability of libraries in embedding child-focused programs into broader community celebrations, fostering connections and inclusivity.

Snapshot: Daintree outreach program

In a significant milestone, the **Douglas Shire** has extended its outreach programs to the Daintree (Diwan) area, marking the first council-led program in the region in nearly two decades. This outreach effort underscores the library's role in bridging gaps and ensuring that even the most remote communities have access to enriching, child-focused experiences.



Daintree outreach program, Douglas Shire



Snapshot: Picnic in Anzac Park

In **Croydon**, libraries have teamed up with a local daycare centre to deliver storytime sessions in the park, specifically catering to working families. This initiative not only provides a safe and engaging space for children, but also supports parents and caregivers, by offering accessible opportunities for family connection to learn and share stories together.

These initiatives exemplify how libraries continue to champion childhood by creating inclusive, safe and engaging spaces for families to connect, learn and grow together.

State Library
Queensland

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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 caregivers to information and resources to support children and their families in the first 5 years.

Through partnerships and delivering outreach programs, libraries ensure parents and caregivers have access to valuable information and tools to support their children's development during the critical first 5 years.

In the **Fraser Coast region**, a key focus has been on expanding outreach efforts to connect with families in their own environments, particularly those experiencing housing instability and isolation in outlying communities. As part of this effort, the Fraser Coast library team was invited to provide drop-in sessions at a local motel being used as temporary public housing due to the ongoing housing shortage in the region. Families attending these sessions received welcome packs containing information about library services, programs and resources. This proactive approach not only provided immediate support to families but also resulted in an increase in attendance at **Maryborough Library**, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted outreach in engaging underserved communities.



Giveaway campaign, Bundaberg Library

In **Bundaberg**, the library engaged with over 900 families through a First 5 Forever giveaway campaign. This initiative successfully raised awareness of the program and its benefits, connecting families with resources to support early childhood development and fostering stronger community ties.

These activities highlight how First 5 Forever partnerships enable libraries to extend their reach and impact, ensuring families have access to the support and resources they need. By meeting families where they are and addressing challenges, libraries are making a tangible difference in the lives of young children and their caregivers across Queensland.



Ashleigh Barty AO

First 5 Forever Ambassador

Ashleigh Barty AO has continued her role as a passionate ambassador for First 5 Forever, promoting early childhood development and fostering community engagement across Queensland. Her involvement has enhanced the visibility and impact of the program through high-profile events, media coverage and the development of new promotional assets.

In November 2024, Ash Barty visited the **Cairns Regional Council Library** to participate in a special Grandparents Storytime session. This event was further amplified by a live interview broadcast on the *Today Show*, where Ash highlighted the importance of First 5 Forever in supporting families and early childhood development. The event also received local media coverage from *The Cairns Post*, which showcased the role of libraries in delivering impactful First 5 Forever programs to the community.

To coincide with the Summer of Tennis in January 2025, the *Serve, Return, Rally and Learn* promotional reel featuring Ash Barty was produced and shared across social media platforms. This campaign leveraged Ash's profile as a tennis champion to engage a wider audience and promote the program's key messages about the importance of everyday interactions and caregiver involvement.

In March 2025, a fresh suite of First 5 Forever Ambassador assets was developed and distributed to the public library network. This included new templates and photographs made available on the Public Libraries Connect platform, providing libraries with updated resources to enhance their local promotional efforts and further engage their communities.





When
Men Read,
Gold Coast
Libraries

Reaching All Queensland Families

The First 5 Forever initiative continues to achieve significant growth across its digital platforms, driven by targeted engagement and drawing on the Ash Barty AO ambassador assets. These efforts have expanded the program's reach, strengthened community connections and enhanced its ability to support families across Queensland.

On **Facebook**, the program has achieved a 10% increase in followers, now totalling 21,190. User engagement has been particularly impressive, with 4,123,963 user views and 5,113 content engagements—a remarkable 170% rise. The *First 5 Forever Professional Network* on Facebook also continues to thrive, with 525 members actively participating and sharing insights.

Instagram has demonstrated steady growth, with 2,482 followers generating 655,822 user views and 2,037 content engagements. This platform has proven to be an effective channel for reaching younger audiences and promoting the program's key messages.

The **First 5 Forever website** remains a vital resource for families and professionals, attracting 155,647 page views during the reporting period. This reflects the website's ongoing relevance as a hub for information, resources, and program updates. In 2025 the website hosted a suite of blogs celebrating 10 years of First 5 Forever with families, showcasing First 5 Forever programming and public library staff contributions over the decade.

Email Direct Marketing (EDM) has also seen a surge in subscriptions, with a total of 37,672 subscribers—a 40% increase compared to the 2023–24 period. This growth highlights the program's ability to maintain and expand its audience through consistent and engaging communication.

These figures underscore the success of First 5 Forever's digital engagement strategies in amplifying its reach and influence. By leveraging social media, email marketing, and its website, the program continues to connect with families and professionals, ensuring its resources and support are accessible to communities across Queensland.



Cherbourg
Indigenous
Knowledge
Centre



Building Capability

First 5 Forever
training,
Douglas Shire

First 5 Forever Professional Development and Training in 2024–25

In 2024–25, State Library of Queensland delivered a comprehensive range of professional development and training opportunities to strengthen the capacity of the public library network in delivering the First 5 Forever program. These initiatives aimed to enhance the knowledge and skills of library staff, ensuring they are well-equipped to support families and young children across Queensland.

Training and Networking Opportunities

State Library hosted a series of webinars featuring expert guest presenters from the Centre of Children's Health and Wellbeing, Toy Libraries Australia and the Queensland Brain Institute. These sessions provided valuable insights into early childhood development and innovative approaches to library programming. Additionally, bimonthly First 5 Forever online networking meetings facilitated connections across the Queensland public library network, offering a platform for staff to discuss programming ideas, share resources and exchange marketing strategies.

On 1 November 2024, three updated First 5 Forever online training modules were launched: *Introduction to First 5 Forever*, *Planning for Programs and Diverse Delivery*, and *Facilitating Play in Libraries*. These interactive modules were designed to deepen the understanding of family-facing library staff—both new and experienced—about the program's objectives, the significance of the early years, and the critical role libraries play in supporting families. The modules proved highly effective, with 1,131 completions recorded during the year.

Regional Workshops and Community of Practice Sessions

To further support regional and remote libraries, State Library organised three-day regional workshops in Central Highlands, Mount Isa and Port Douglas. These workshops provided opportunities for regional and independent libraries, and Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs) to connect in person, share experiences, and build expertise in early years programming.

State Library's Children and Families Senior Program Officer also facilitated monthly *Yarn Up Community of Practice* sessions with staff from IKCs and State Library's First Nations team in Cairns. These sessions fostered collaboration and cultural knowledge-sharing, strengthening the delivery of First 5 Forever programs in Indigenous communities.

The First 5 Forever Network Group Community of Practice meetings attracted 87 participants, further supporting professional development and the exchange of ideas across the library network.

These professional development initiatives demonstrate State Library of Queensland's commitment to building the capacity of library staff to deliver high-quality, impactful programs for families and young children. By providing diverse training opportunities and fostering collaboration across the library network, First 5 Forever continues to strengthen its reach and impact across Queensland.



Elevating First Nations



Snapshot: Children's Voices Picture Book Project

The *Children's Voices* picture book project captured the voices and stories of children and families attending a local playgroup. Supported by philanthropic funding from the Ash Barty Foundation, State Library staff collaborated with the playgroup to create artworks and document experiences through a series of three interactive, guided workshops.

These workshops were designed to be place-based, inclusive, and accessible, ensuring families and staff felt comfortable and confident in sharing their stories.

Over the course of the sessions, participants worked closely with library staff, a First Nations facilitator, and a digital artist to authentically represent their voices and cultural identity. The project culminated in the creation of *Jajum Bajara*, a unique children's picture book designed by a First Nations digital artist, which was launched at a celebratory event at *kuril dhagun* at the State Library.

A Pilot Model for Public Library Engagement

This project served as a pilot model for a public library engagement toolkit, offering a replicable framework for libraries to engage with their communities in meaningful and culturally respectful ways.

Key elements of the model include:

- **Place-Based Approach:** The workshops were held in familiar community settings, ensuring accessibility and fostering a sense of belonging. This approach allowed families to engage in a space where they felt at ease, encouraging open and authentic participation.
- **Cultural Safety and Authenticity:** The involvement of a First Nations facilitator and digital artist ensured that cultural knowledge and traditions were respected and authentically represented throughout the project.
- **Inclusive and Intergenerational Participation:** The project encouraged contributions from children, parents, caregivers and Elders, creating a multi-generational dialogue that strengthened cultural continuity and community bonds.
- **Creative Collaboration:** Artists, writers and designers worked alongside families to visually and narratively represent their voices, ensuring the final product was a true reflection of the community's identity.
- **Documentation and Storytelling:** Families' experiences were carefully documented, highlighting the importance of storytelling in preserving local language, culture and traditions.

The toolkit was launched to the public library network through a webinar in September 2025.

Elevating First Nations



Community
engagement
resources,
Cardwell Library

Strengthening connections with families in their communities

The distribution of *Nyurramba Garran*-designed community engagement resources highlights the importance of a centrally coordinated approach to supporting outreach and engagement efforts across Queensland's public library network. By providing high-quality, inclusive materials, State Library of Queensland ensures that smaller, regional, and rural libraries have equitable access to professional resources that enhance their ability to connect with local communities.

The *Nyurramba Garran* resources included teardrop banners, tablecloths, temporary tattoos, postcards, A3 posters and calico bags. These materials were designed to be visually engaging and culturally inclusive, reflecting the diversity of Queensland's communities. By centralising the design and production of these resources, State Library achieved economies of scale, enabling cost-effective distribution to libraries across the state.

For smaller and regional libraries, which often operate with limited budgets and resources, this approach is particularly valuable. It allows them to access professional, high-quality materials that they may not have the capacity to produce independently. These resources enhance their ability to deliver effective outreach and engagement activities, ensuring that all communities—regardless of size or location—can benefit from the First 5 Forever program.

This coordinated effort demonstrates how a centralised approach can support equity across the library network, empowering libraries to create welcoming, inclusive environments and strengthen connections with families in their communities.



2024–2025 at a glance

30,314

**First 5 Forever
programs delivered**
2.9% decrease YoY

874,932

**participation in
First 5 Forever**
2.3% decrease YoY

4.1 million

user views
and a **170% rise**
in content engagement

21,190

Facebook followers
a **10% increase** from
the previous year

1,650

attendances
in First 5 Forever
professional development

155,647

page views
of the First 5 Forever
website

1,131

completions
of First 5 Forever
online training modules

220 participants

in regional face-to-face training

185 participants

in webinars

27,589

onsite sessions
12% increase YoY

37,672

edm subscribers
40% increase YoY

2,482

Instagram followers
with **655,822 user views;**
2,037 content engagements

525

members
of Facebook First 5 Forever
Professional Network

The 2024–25 reporting period has shown a slight decrease in program delivery (2.9%) and a decline in attendances (2.3%) from the previous reporting year.

Challenges have included staff shortages, resource limitations, space constraints due to overcrowding during library programs, and the need to raise public awareness about the availability of free events and resources.