



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR MEDIA AND SECTOR PUBLICATIONS

19th MAY 2020

GOODSTART EARLY LEARNING AND BIG FAT SMILE TO MERGE

Two of Australia's leading not-for-profit early learning and care providers are joining forces.

Goodstart Early Learning and Big Fat Smile have signed a Merger Agreement that is expected to be finalised by end of June 2020. Big Fat Smile will remain independent but a part of the wider Goodstart family.

Big Fat Smile, which began life in 1981 as the Illawarra Children's Services Action Group, will continue to operate independently with its own branded centres and management, providing the same high quality services to families and the community - with the support of Goodstart, Australia's largest early learning and care provider.

Big Fat Smile Chief Executive Officer, Jenni Hutchins, said the agreement, many months in the making, would ensure the Illawarra-based organisation has the financial stability it needs, ensuring the longevity of the Big Fat Smile organisation for future generations.

"Over the past year it has become increasingly difficult to maintain our financial sustainability despite the high-quality early education and care our 41 centres and 700 staff provide to families across the Illawarra, the ACT and other parts of NSW."

"Our sector has experienced many pressures over recent years and it has become increasingly difficult to maintain our financial sustainability. We have worked with Goodstart for some time, learning from their experience navigating the competitive early learning market."

"Goodstart has demonstrated a not-for-profit enterprise can be both financially sustainable and true to their social purpose. Their economies of scale offer us a huge advantage and degree of protection from market forces in uncertain times."

"I know our families, staff and the broader community will be very excited to know that our future is secure," Jenni said.

Goodstart Chief Executive Officer, Julia Davison, said the merger would be an alliance between not-for-profit organisations with a shared commitment to children's learning, development and wellbeing.

"Big Fat Smile brings an impressive track record of highest quality early education for children and service to community. There is much we can learn and leverage from each other."

"The early learning and care sector is becoming increasingly competitive and by joining forces with Big Fat Smile we will be in a strong position to ensure their valuable work continues."

"Over many months we've been working on ways to help secure Big Fat Smile's sustainability it has become clear that a merger was the most practical way forward."

"Big Fat Smile has decades of history and its high-quality centres and services will continue."

"We share the core objectives of delivering quality, affordable and accessible early education and care, with a particular focus on children and families experiencing vulnerability."

"The Big Fat Smile services will continue to operate independently. They have deep roots in communities across the Illawarra as well as the Sydney Metropolitan Area, Southern Highlands, Wollondilly and Tablelands. Maintaining their independent operations will enable them to continue a stable presence in those regions, with our national backing."

"We look forward to ensuring Big Fat Smile's commitment to children's learning, development and wellbeing continues without interruption," Julia said.

Big Fat Smile Chairman, David Campbell, said the not for profit ethos shared by both entities is a win for employees, families and communities.

"Our organisations exist for children and families. This will be a merger between friends and allies that will deliver a more certain future for all."

As the organisation moves under the umbrella of Goodstart, three of Big Fat Smile's Board members will remain on the Board, including the current Board Chair, David Campbell.

Big Fat Smile will welcome four Goodstart Board Members to make up the complement of seven Board members.

Notes for editors

Goodstart Early Learning is Australia's largest early learning provider with 665 centres throughout the country. The not-for-profit social enterprise exists purely to improve the lives of Australia's children and their families. For more information, visit <https://goodstart.org.au/About-us>

Big Fat Smile has been operating for almost 40 years as a not for profit provider of child education, care, recreation, cultural and inclusion services in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. It operates 41 services supporting 5,400 children and employing over 690 people. Visit <https://bigfatmile.com.au/>

Acknowledgement of country

Big Fat Smile and Goodstart Early Learning acknowledge all Traditional Custodians across Australia and recognise First Nations peoples' continued cultural and spiritual connection to the land, sky and waterways that surround us. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

- ENDS -

MEDIA CONTACT: Lara McCabe | 0402 254 471 | lara.mccabe@bigfatmile.com.au