

Social Impact Report



2025



From the CEO

I am very proud to be launching our first Social Impact Report.

As a community, all we ever want for our children is for them to be healthy and happy. Happiness is important in childhood and is critical to long-term health, social, and psychological wellbeing. When a child or young person has a serious illness or is hospitalised, their ability to be happy is significantly impacted.

That's why Starlight exists. To transform the healthcare experience, creating the happiness every child and young person needs. We exist to brighten their lives.

Australia has one of the best paediatric healthcare systems in the world, but a "total health" approach requires more than just the physical. For nearly four decades, Starlight has created joy, positive distraction, and social connection for seriously ill and hospitalised children and young people. This forms the essence of our Theory of Change.

We always work in partnership with health professionals to ensure we continue to complement the changing models of care and to understand the positive impact created.

This report showcases Starlight's impact and the positive health outcomes we are supporting. By listening to the children, young people, families, and health professionals, we can understand how Starlight is performing against our goals and, importantly, evaluate where we can improve.

All Starlight's programs support our Theory of Change, and we measure this against three key areas:

- ★ **Thriving Mentally and Emotionally**
- ★ **Social Connection and Sense of Belonging**
- ★ **A More Positive Healthcare Experience**

Starlight's work changes lives in the moment and into the future, with a Social Return On Investment (SROI) valued at \$5.70 for every \$1 invested. We always strive to ensure what we are doing is creating positive impact to support improved health outcomes. Because happiness and health go hand in hand.

I hope you enjoy seeing some of our achievements and our positive impact.

Warm wishes,

Louise Baxter

Louise Baxter
Chief Executive
Starlight Children's Foundation Australia

Starlight's Impact



We asked Health Professionals to rate how well, out of 10, we achieved our Theory of Change outcomes:



Transforming Healthcare Through Happiness

Starlight is committed to the total care of seriously ill and hospitalised children and young people through programs designed to Transform, Connect, and Entertain.

As Australia's broadest-reaching children's charity, Starlight's impact is both national in scale and deeply personal in effect. In 2025, we created 926,887 experiences for children, young people, and families in major hospitals, regional health services, remote communities, and through digital platforms. Starlight provided a further 4,554,896 engagements through our online entertainment with Captain Starlight. This report examines how these carefully created moments translate into measurable outcomes—reducing anxiety, improving coping mechanisms, strengthening family connections, and ultimately

contributing to better healthcare journeys and a more positive treatment environment.

Our mission drives everything we do and every decision we make. Working in partnership with clinicians across Australia, we bring play, creativity and social connection into healthcare settings. Each program is purposefully designed to provide positive disruption, helping children and young people cope with pain, fear, and isolation, replacing stress with hope, laughter, and resilience.

★

Vision:

A future where everyone experiences a happy childhood.

★

Mission:

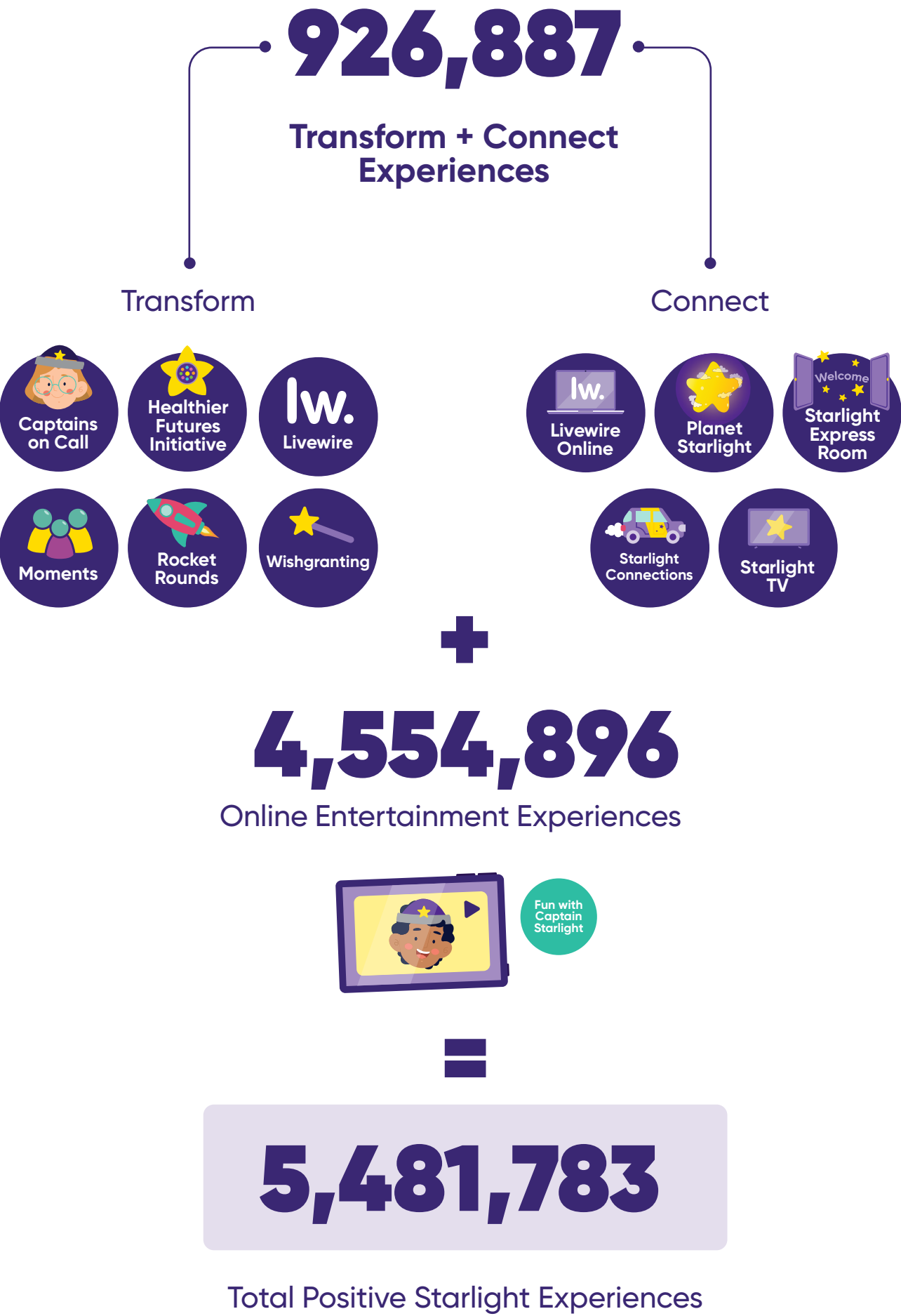
To brighten the lives of seriously ill & hospitalised children and young people.

“

Looking after a child with a chronic or life-threatening illness requires a comprehensive, 'total' approach to care. Their illness can bring about massive disruption, and for them, even trying to be a normal child is a challenge, if not a dream. 'Total care' means more than excellent medical care – it's a healing environment that includes entertainment, diversion, fun, laughter and joy. Starlight is a key partner in providing these aspects of care"

– Emeritus Professor Les White AM, President of Starlight's Health Professionals Advisory Board.

”





Childhood Shouldn't Stop at the Hospital Door

Starlight is for children and young people who:

- ★ Have serious health issues and frequently interact with the healthcare system
- ★ Encounter the healthcare system due to a short-term illness or injury
- ★ Experience health inequity and barriers to healthcare

Whether a child or young person is undergoing treatment, managing an ongoing health condition, or facing any challenge bringing them into the healthcare system, Starlight is there to support them.

“Positive childhood experiences are foundational. They influence not just physical health, but also emotional and social development throughout life.”
– Dr. James Best, GP & Chair of the RACGP Specific Interests Child & Young Persons Health

When a child or young person becomes seriously ill, the entire family is affected. Children and young people facing health challenges experience significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression, and social isolation compared to their peers [1, 2]. Without emotional and social support, these challenges can complicate medical care and reduce quality of life [1]. But it's not just the unwell child who needs support—siblings are deeply affected too, often experiencing their own anxiety, fear, and feelings of being overlooked [1, 3]. Parents and caregivers face enormous stress as they navigate treatment, manage daily care, and try to maintain family life [4]. Starlight's approach recognises children and young people cope best within the context of family, and our programs are designed to bring moments of joy and connection to everyone affected by childhood illness.



“Unfortunately, hospitals are designed for sickness, rather than looking forward to wellness. The distraction you provide is excellent and provides a significant positive contribution to the child and caregivers' wellbeing.”
– Clinician

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, these challenges are compounded by significant health disparities and barriers to accessing care, particularly in rural and remote communities [5-8]. Starlight is committed to reaching these families wherever they are, ensuring every child and young person—regardless of their diagnosis, location, or background—has access to the happiness they need.

Starlight is there for children and young people facing serious illness and experiencing hospitalisation, and the families who support them.



The Power of Partnership

Starlight doesn't operate alongside the healthcare system—we're embedded within it. For nearly 40 years, we've worked together with hospitals, health services and medical professionals across Australia, becoming a trusted and valued part of the healthcare experience for seriously ill children and young people. Our programs are designed and provided in partnership with clinical teams, integrated into treatment plans, and designed to complement medical care by offering positive distraction and the social support children, young people, and families need.

These partnerships are fundamental to how we work. By collaborating closely with health professionals, we ensure our programs are responsive to the real and evolving needs of children and young people in healthcare settings. The Starlight Health Professionals Advisory Board, comprised of leading specialists,

clinicians, nurses, and allied health experts, provides ongoing guidance to keep our programs evidence-informed and aligned with best practices in paediatric care.

We have built deep relationships with Australia's major children's hospitals, regional health services, and community health providers. With a permanent presence in all Australian paediatric hospitals, Starlight is already there when families enter the healthcare system—a familiar, positive constant throughout their journey. The value of this partnership extends beyond the immediate joy we bring: our Social Return on Investment of \$5.70 to \$1 demonstrates the value Starlight delivers to the health system, families, and communities—reinforcing why health professionals see us not as an add-on, but as an essential component of quality paediatric care.

“[Starlight has] become an essential part of the hospital landscape. It's a really positive program that children and families look forward to and one of the highlights they remember. Kids who come back for follow up love going back to the Starlight Express Room and seeing familiar Captain Starlight's and making those connections with something positive from their hospital stay - which is really important.”
 - Health Professional

Starlight's Health Professionals Advisory Board

Along with Starlight's National Board Directors, **Professor Tracey O'Brien AM, FRACP, MBChB, MBA, LL.M (Health), BSc, GAICD, DCH, NSW Chief Cancer Officer CEO Cancer Institute NSW** and **Adjunct Professor Frank Tracey, MHealthSc (Nsg) Hons 1st Class, RN, GAICD, Health Service Chief Executive, Children's Health Queensland HHS**, the Starlight Health Professional Advisory Board provides specialist guidance on emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges in paediatric healthcare. The range of areas, depth of expertise and breadth of practice spanned by the members help to ensure Starlight programs remain clinically relevant to changing models of care.

Emeritus Professor Leslie White AM, MBBS, FRACP, DSc, MHA, AFACHSM, DUniv
 President Starlight Health Professionals Advisory Board

Professor Michael Brydon OAM, MBBS, FRACP, M Paeds, Masters of Health Admin
 A/Dean, Rural Clinical School, University of Notre Dame Australia

Ms Sara Burrett BA, BSW, Grad Cert HSM
 Executive Director Allied Health and Rehabilitation Services at Gold Coast Health

Professor Trish Davidson AM, MB., ChB., FRCP, FRCS, FRACS, MD Paediatric Surgeon (retd)
 Professor (Hon.) Paediatric Surgery University of Newcastle

Professor Valsamma Eapen MBBS., PhD., FRCPsych., FRANZCP
 Chair, Infant, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Discipline of Psychiatry & Mental Health/ School of Clinical Medicine, UNSW Medicine & Health & Head, Academic Unit of Infant Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Services (AUCS) and Clinical Academic, South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD)

Associate Professor Joshua Francis BAppSc(MedSc) MBBS, PhD FRACP
 Paediatric Infectious Diseases Specialist, Royal Darwin Hospital; Principal Research Fellow, Menzies School of Health Research

Professor Harriet Hiscock MB BS, FRACP, MD, FAAHMS, GAICD
 Group Leader, Health Services and Economics, Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital

Dr Andrew Martin MBBS, FRACP, MD
 Consultant Paediatrician, Department of General Paediatrics & Hospital in The Home, Perth Children's Hospital

Dr Matthew O'Meara MBBS, FRACP
 Paediatric Emergency Physician, Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick

Professor Susan M Sawyer AM, MBBS, MD, FRACP
 Geoff and Helen Handbury Chair of Adolescent Health
 Department of Paediatrics, The University of Melbourne;
 Director, Centre for Adolescent Health Royal Children's Hospital;
 Murdoch Children's Research Institute

Mr Matthew Schmidtke BNurs, GCertDiabEd
 Manager, Health Facility Planning, New Women's and Children's Hospital Project

Dr Barbara Vernon BA Hons, PhD
 CEO at Women's & Children's Healthcare Australasia



Theory of Change

IMPACT

A healthcare system that supports the total care needs of children, helping to protect and develop their mental, emotional, and social wellbeing and supports their participation.

This means that children and young people are supported to optimise their wellbeing and to live their best lives.

Issue	Need	Strategic Response
Australia has one of the best children's healthcare systems in the world. However: • Going to hospitals or clinics can be frightening and overwhelming • For a child or young person with a serious illness, ongoing treatment can impact their long-term wellbeing; and • For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, some of the worst health outcomes in the world is their reality	Happiness matters in the moment and long-term. That's why children and young people need us when they are facing their toughest times. Children and young people need more than the excellent care of clinicians. They need support to: • Thrive mentally and emotionally • Enjoy social connections and a sense of belonging • Participate in the healthcare system	Through play, creativity, and social connection, we positively disrupt their healthcare experience. We work with clinicians, from ward rounds in specialist hospitals to mobile clinics visiting remote communities. Together, we help to create the best possible 'total' care for children and young people. Our Mission is to brighten the lives of seriously ill and hospitalised children and young people.

Participants	Programs	Outcomes
Our programs reach children and young people who: • Have serious health issues and frequently interact with the healthcare system • Encounter the healthcare system due to a short-term illness or injury • Experience health inequity and barriers to healthcare We focus on children and young people (patients and their siblings) whilst valuing the vital role of family and community.	• Starlight Express Room • Captain Starlight, in hospital and online • Livewire, in hospital and online • Starlight's Healthier Futures Initiative • Starlight Wishes • Starlight Moments	Children, young people, and families: • Thrive mentally and emotionally • Enjoy social connections and a sense of belonging • Positively participate in their healthcare

How We Create Happiness



Captain Starlight

Through the power of imagination, Captain Starlight brings fun and laughter to children in hospital. Whether in the Starlight Express Room, on hospital wards, in clinics, or through digital platforms like Planet Starlight, Captain Starlight helps children feel like a child again—offering moments of happiness when it's needed most.

Captain Starlight ensures serious illness doesn't rob children of the joy of childhood.



Livewire

Being a teenager can be challenging enough, let alone throwing serious health challenges into the mix. Livewire was specifically created to meet these unique needs. It supports adolescents in hospital and online, offering young people creative workshops and a safe digital community where teens can connect, express themselves, and find support from peers who just 'get it'.

Through social connection and engaging experiences, Livewire empowers young people to navigate their health journey with confidence, creativity, and connection.



Starlight's Healthier Futures Initiative

Brings the fun of Captain Starlight to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In partnership with healthcare teams, Captain Starlight supports children during clinic visits, enabling more engaging and less intimidating experiences through fun and positive disruption.

Starlight helps to create more positive healthcare experiences, improve trust in health services, and increase participation in vital health checks.



Starlight Express Room

The Starlight Express Room is a fun-filled space within a hospital where children can escape the clinical environment and simply be a child. Packed with games, creative activities, and entertainment, it offers a safe space for creativity and play during treatment.

More than just a distraction, the joy and social connection found in a Starlight Express Room helps children and families to cope with the challenges of serious illness.



Starlight Wishes

A Starlight Wish is a once-in-a-lifetime experience providing seriously ill children, young people, and their whole family something to look forward to. Whether it's meeting a hero, going on an adventure, or simply spending quality time together on a much-needed holiday, each Wish is a powerful reminder of what's possible and life beyond illness.

More than just a moment of happiness, the anticipation and long-lasting memories of a Starlight Wish provide much needed strength during the challenges of serious illness.



Starlight Moments

Starlight Moments creates meaningful experiences for families living with the challenges of their child or young person having a life-limiting condition. Even the simplest joys—a movie night, a trip to the beach, a birthday celebration—can feel out of reach.

Created in partnership with paediatric palliative care specialists, each Starlight Moment creates light in the dark for the whole family, through positive experiences and valued memories.



Charlotte's Story

“Whether we were competing on the arcade tables, doing crafts, or just chatting with the Captains, Starlight brought us such joy.”

In 2019, Charlotte's family faced a difficult Christmas when her sister was hospitalised. Amid the uncertainty and stress, they discovered the fun and joy of the Starlight Express Room.

“Whether we were competing on the arcade tables, doing crafts, or just chatting with the Captains, Starlight brought us such joy,” Charlotte recalls. “Seeing my sister smile during such a dark time meant the world to us.”

The experience left a lasting impression. Motivated by gratitude, Charlotte began volunteering – keen to give back to Starlight after all the joy her family once received.

Charlotte describes volunteering as “a privilege” and a deeply rewarding part of her life. “I’ve been profoundly

inspired by the children and families I’ve met. Their resilience and joy in the face of adversity is something I carry with me every day.”

Charlotte's favourite part of her role? The conversations. “Children's imaginations are endless. I love seeing their dreams come to life through play and painting. Their curiosity and creativity are infectious.”

One moment standing out for Charlotte was during an early shift, when she spent hours with a young girl building and painting together. “We made everything from a princess castle to a crocodile! It reminded me how powerful simple play can be. Even if just for a little while, I was grateful to be someone who encouraged her creativity.”

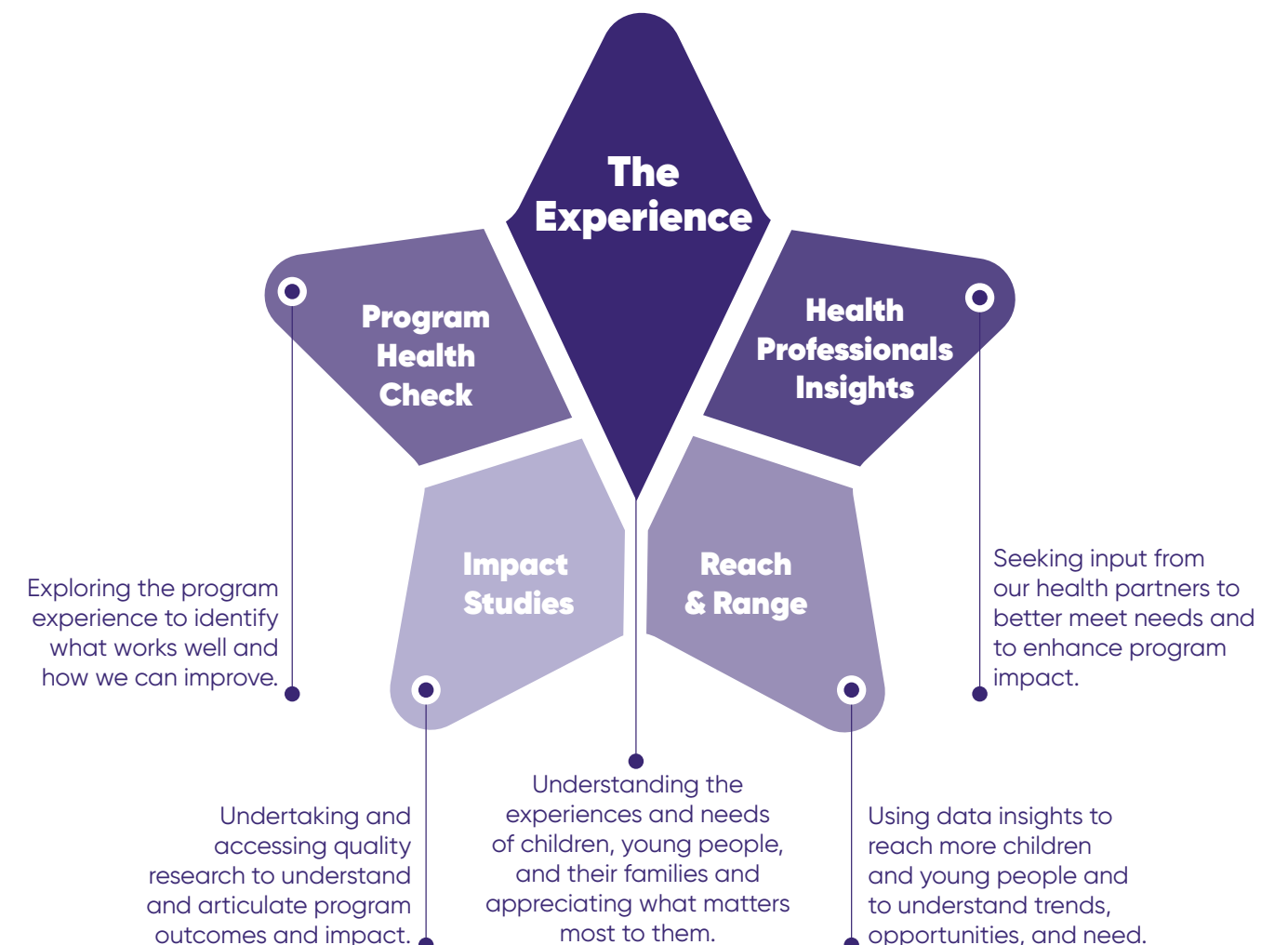
Key Impact Areas

From our Theory of Change, we have focused on reporting against three key impact areas:

- 1 Thriving Mentally and Emotionally**
- 2 Social Connection and Sense of Belonging**
- 3 A More Positive Healthcare Experience**

Starlight has designed an evaluation framework to measure the impact of our programs. We are committed to understanding the social impact of Starlight programs across families and time, from the immediate relief they can provide, to the long-term benefit of reframing the healthcare experience.

We gather evidence on five key areas and have an ever-evolving range of bespoke evaluation tools, tailored to the impact area and audience. Central to all our evaluation is the voice of the child or young person and their family.





163,294
**Starlight
Express
Room** visits

163,294
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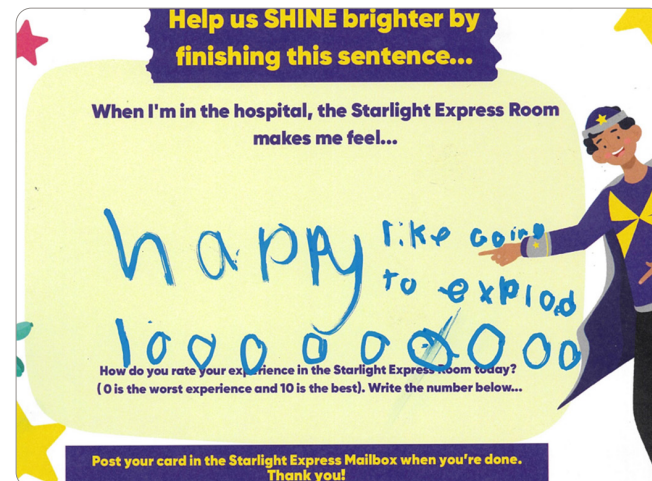
163,294
**Starlight
Express
Room** visits



“Our son recognises the Starlight Express Room as his safe space away from medical equipment and personnel. It’s a place where kids feel they can be free to be themselves, to meet friends and make new ones.”
– Parent



Parents and Carers Rate the Starlight Express Room



“The Starlight Express Room is like a room away from hospital where I can have fun and forget about everything for a while and... be happy and carefree... Even if it’s for just half an hour, I’m not in a bed feeling like ‘Oh I can’t do anything’.”
– Child



Why Happiness Matters

Tom's School Speech, shared by his Mum



Have you ever noticed how everything feels better when you’re happy? Even a bad day can feel okay if someone makes you laugh, or if you do something fun. That’s because happiness isn’t just a feeling – it’s something that helps you stay strong, even when life gets really tough.

Happiness might sound small when you’re facing something big. But it’s not. It’s powerful. And sometimes, it’s the one thing that helps you keep going.

When I was younger, I was diagnosed with cancer and had to spend a lot of time in hospital. It was pretty scary, and honestly, it was hard to feel happy. There were needles, tests, and some days when I didn’t want to talk or even get out of bed.

But then something special came into my life – the Starlight Foundation.

They didn’t give me medicine, but they gave me something just as important: happiness. And when you’re sick, happiness really matters.

Starlight made the hospital feel less like a hospital. There were games, fun activities, music, and the Captain Starlight team who always made me laugh – even on the toughest days. Sometimes, I even forgot I was in hospital at all.

They reminded me that I was still a kid, and that it was okay to smile and have fun.

Then came one of the best experiences ever – thanks to Starlight, I got to go to the Lego Masters Grand Final – Masters of the Galaxy! I met Hamish and Brickman in the actual Brick Pit! I really like LEGO, so getting to build with them was incredible. We joked around and made some funny creations together – I couldn’t stop smiling.

And it didn’t stop there. After that, I got to stay at the Crown Hotel in a VIP Suite with amazing harbour views, an incredible buffet, and even pool access. They treated us like superstars.

And for the first time in a long time, I felt happy. I even realised something – if I hadn’t had cancer, I might never have had these amazing experiences.

All of this was made possible by Starlight. They gave me memories I’ll never forget – not just fun ones, but moments that helped me feel strong again.

That’s why I believe happiness matters. It’s not just about fun – it helps kids feel brave, loved, and full of hope.

Starlight helped me smile when smiling was hard. They helped me feel like a kid again.

Because happiness isn’t just a nice-to-have – it’s something that gives you strength, even in your hardest moments.

Happiness matters because it reminds us that no matter what we’re facing, there’s still something worth smiling for.

424
children were
granted a
**Starlight
Wish**



Child and Young Person
Wish Satisfaction

Starlight Wishes are powerful experiences offering seriously ill children, young people, and their families a chance to reconnect with joy, hope and imagination. Each Wish is uniquely tailored to the child's dreams—whether it's a family holiday, meeting a hero, or receiving something special like a bedroom makeover—and becomes a source of emotional uplift during a difficult healthcare journey. From the moment a child learns their Starlight Wish will come true, the anticipation and excitement begin to shift their focus from illness to possibility.



“He takes a while to warm up to people, and we found that when we were [on Wish Week], he was a different kid. He was going on rides and he was outgoing. He has a clinical psychologist that he sees at the hospital, and we were telling her about the experience, and even she was amazed that he went on rides and everything else... And that has continued since Wish Week. We noticed that he's more open to talking to people and being a little bit less worried about doing certain things.”

– Parent



“I don't think it's possible for me to put into words how grateful I am for my Starlight Wish. That was the best day of my life. I've been using the memories to distract me from pain and it has helped so much. This Wish has changed my life.”

– Starlight Wish Child

100%
of families
recommend a
**Starlight
Wish**

“I think it was experiencing something completely different and having something to look forward to. We have a lot of medical 'count downs'... but he got to count down to something he actually wanted to do.”

– Parent





2

Social Connection and Sense of Belonging

Social isolation is a significant challenge for children and young people with serious illnesses, particularly when hospital stays and treatment limit their ability to connect with peers [1]. Strong social connections are linked to better mental health, improved recovery times, and increased resilience [1, 2].

Starlight breaks down these barriers by creating opportunities for vital connection. For children in hospital, this might mean spending time with siblings

in the Starlight Express Room. For parents, it can be meeting others in similar situations during Wish Week. For young people, it's finding their tribe through Livewire—connecting with peers who truly understand their experience.

We create spaces where children and young people can experience social normalcy, form friendships, and feel part of a supportive community.

125,904
Livewire
experiences

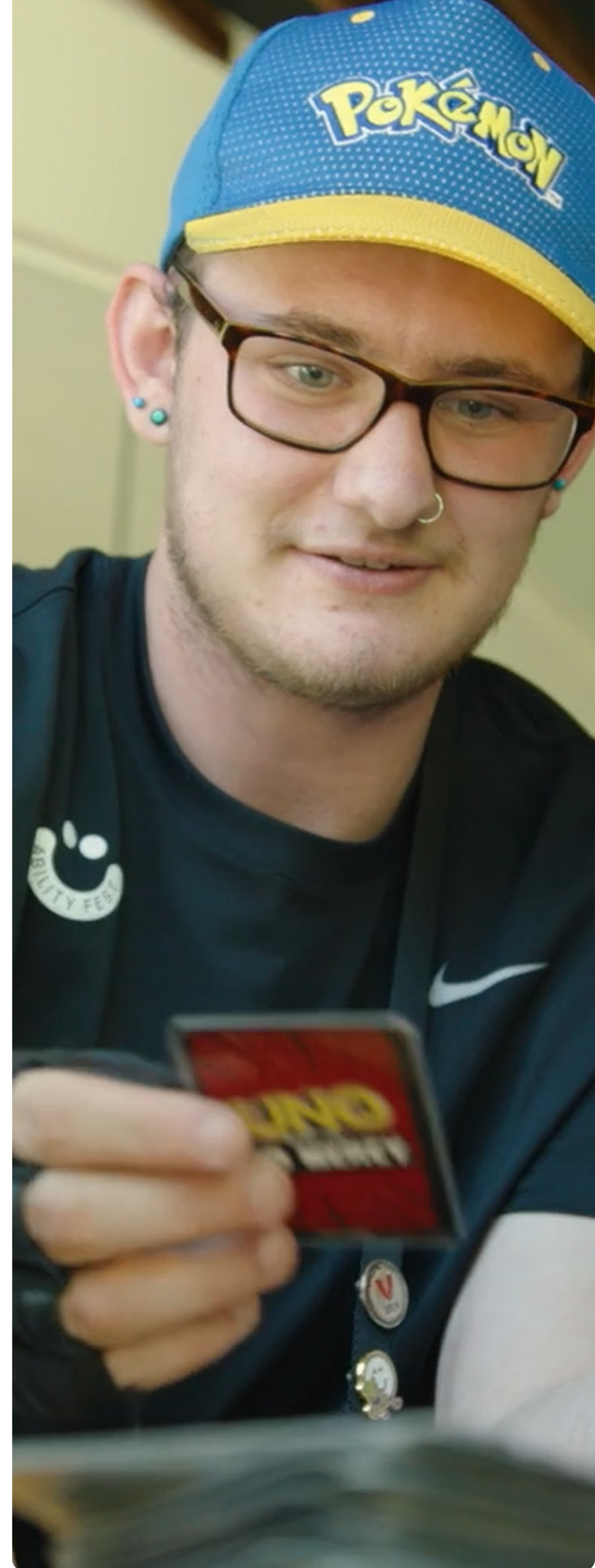
The increasing number of young people seeking mental health support has created further demand and need for programs providing connection and belonging. Livewire has become an important part of the hospital landscape, offering young people creative and meaningful engagement both during their hospital stay and beyond.

“*The Livewire program is an essential element of treatment for many of our adolescent patients during their inpatient admission, especially those diagnosed with eating disorders. Having the Livewire team provide regular activity time on the ward for our eating disorder cohort, it allows the opportunity for the patients to socialise together, boosts the wellbeing of patients, and will often improve the atmosphere within the ward.*”

– Clinician

Livewire is available both in hospital and online. The moderated online community overcomes barriers of illness, disability, and distance. Whether sharing stories, chatting with peers or leading their own livestreams, young people gain a sense of agency and discover a community where they belong.

Ongoing evaluation with co-design elements continues to inform enhancements, ensuring Livewire remains an engaging and supportive space for young people navigating serious illness [14].



“

I just wanted to feedback how integral Livewire is to promoting a therapeutic space on the mental health unit. The young people engage with them in a different way to what the clinical roles do and offer a safe, inclusive, and creative space where all young people are able to focus on activities of interest.

Livewire has a unique engagement style and we wouldn't be the same without them. Livewire offer a structured activity space post the end of the school day, which inadvertently helps the mental health unit team with prevention of escalations due to boredom and further engagement with other young people which is integral for recovery and social inclusion!

We can't thank the Livewire team enough for all they do for us!"

- Health Professional

“

I have always struggled with friendships and when I joined Livewire, I was so alone that if you had told me I would meet the best people and would be going to Tassie to see my best friends I wouldn't have believed you. So, thank you!"

- Livewire Member



“

As someone who is primarily housebound, Livewire is the only opportunity I have to be able to socialise with other young people. If it weren't for Livewire, I would be very lonely and find managing my illnesses harder as I would feel like no other young person experiences what I do. Livewire stops me from feeling isolated."

- Livewire Member

TO LIVEWIRE

Thank you so much for the work you do to make us all smile. For me the highlight of everyday was to have a smile and laugh with Livewire and enjoy the activities they bring. I honestly don't know what I would do without Livewire. You guys always cheered me up and always did/facilitated activities we want to do. I hope to see you guys again

Starlight Moments

supported
443
families

10
out of 10
Family Satisfaction
Rating

Starlight Moments creates joyful, meaningful experiences for families with a child or young person with a life-limiting condition. Provided in partnership with paediatric palliative care teams, each "Moment" is thoughtfully designed around what matters most to the family—whether it's a beach outing, a backyard treasure hunt, or a movie night at home. These experiences offer vital opportunities for family connection, helping to ease emotional stress and create cherished memories during incredibly challenging times.

By focusing on shared joy and simple pleasures, Starlight Moments fosters social connection, not only within families, but also with extended networks and communities.

The program reminds families they are not alone, offering moments of celebration, comfort, and togetherness, which strengthens bonds and supports emotional wellbeing.

Families in our Starlight Moments program reported an improved sense of wellbeing and hope, often spurred on by an increased sense of connection (both within their own family and the broader community) and the creation of 'protective' positive memories. The feedback highlighted the program was particularly beneficial to siblings, who face a high risk of isolation due to circumstances surrounding a diagnosis and the focus on the palliative child. The ongoing support into bereavement also assists with isolation.



“

I just want to say thank you, not just from me, but from my three beautiful girls. We've always been a closeknit family, but these Starlight Moments have brought us even closer. They help us stop and say, 'Let's set aside this time to do these activities. Let's set aside this to make these moments precious'. My daughter struggles to breathe every minute of every day, but these Starlight Moments have incorporated the whole family and given us the strength to get through. They have been priceless. They are priceless moments. And that's how we live our life, by priceless moments."

- Parent



“We are extremely lucky to be part of the program as we feel that we are not alone as Starlight is always thinking about us.”

- Parent

“It’s a program that I wish I’d never had to be a part of because that would mean that I don’t have a sick son. But I am extremely grateful to see him and sister destroy smores and paint them all over each other as they were eating them, making a huge mess. To get the blankets out that we were given for a movie night and still have my daughter talk about how we made our own cinema. It’s all things that we love, that we enjoy, with happy family and they are all happy memories.”

- Parent

171,099
Planet
Starlight
sessions

One of Planet Starlight’s greatest benefits is fostering social connection. Through interactive games, livestreams, and special features, children can build a sense of community. Reaching children in over 100 hospitals, Planet Starlight promotes a strong sense of belonging. It empowers children to express themselves, join group activities, and feel part of something bigger than their illness. This inclusive digital space helps restore normalcy and joy, reinforcing they are not alone and that they have choice and the ability to connect.

“A big thankyou to the Planet Starlight team for providing this wonderful resource. We always have such positive feedback from children and families especially now that the platform is accessible online.”

- Child Life Therapist



“It’s an awesome platform. The kids often feel very isolated and the interaction with the Captains puts a smile on their face.”

- Healthcare Provider

Planet Starlight brings joy, connection, and entertainment to children and young people facing serious illness wherever they are. Through 24 live online shows a week, children can interact with Captain Starlight, participate in fun activities, and access uplifting content tailored to their interests and needs. By creating an environment which feels inclusive and engaging, Planet Starlight helps reduce feelings of isolation often experienced during hospital stays or long-term treatment.



5x
average online
Engagement
Time



3

A More Positive Healthcare Experience

The healthcare experience can be intimidating and distressing for children and young people, leading to fear and trauma with lasting effects [15]. Research shows when children and young people feel more in control of their healthcare journey, they experience reduced anxiety, greater treatment adherence, and improved health outcomes [16]. Creating positive associations with hospital settings helps them navigate future treatments with less distress [16].

Starlight reframes the hospital experience through play, creativity, and empowerment. Captain Starlight

and our Starlight Express Rooms transform clinical spaces into places of joy and connection. Interactive workshops, games, and activities give children a sense of control, while moments of play and laughter reduce pain, fear and distress.

By making the hospital a more welcoming space, we help children, young people, and families feel more engaged and confident about their care, reducing pain and stress. The impact translates to greater treatment compliance and better health outcomes.

324
**Captains
on Call**
clinics attended

Starlight's Captains on Call brings Captain Starlight into treatment settings to provide positive distraction during painful and anxiety-inducing medical procedures.

Consistent themes in both internal and external evaluations have highlighted this lessened the stress for both child and parents and supported their wellbeing, leading to a more positive healthcare experience, greater engagement, and an improved working environment for clinicians.

"She's not scared of the hospital, when in reality, she probably should be. She's had such a difficult [time], she was so sick last year and had to have so many procedures. I think long term, I'm really hoping, that the long-term psychological damage will be reduced."

- Parent

A published research study by clinicians at the Queensland Children's Hospital highlighted the positive impact Captain Starlight being present had in reducing children's stress and anxiety about clinics. It found the Captains supported children in reframing their perception of healthcare from "a traumatic procedural experience by creating a less threatening clinical environment" helping to "bring down any intensity and anxiety" and "make the mood light" during perioperative visits" [17]. It spoke to the value of the Captains' unique skills, allowing them to distract children from focusing on the clinical environment.



100%
of families & health
professionals recommend
Captains on Call



“I’ve never heard so much
laughter and joy in the clinic as
when the Captains are there – I
want everyone to know about
the difference it is making!”
– Doctor, Retinoblastoma Clinic.



“Just the distraction of having them
there with their toys or singing their
songs. It’s not so clinically focused
for the kids that then are watching
what the nurses are doing or what
they’ve got on their hands, or what
needle they’ve got coming at them
or anything like that. They’re just
more kind-of focused on what their
Captains are doing.”
– Parent



118
remote communities
supported by
**Starlight's
Healthier
Futures
Initiative**

Starlight's Healthier Futures Initiative plays a crucial role in transforming healthcare into more positive and culturally-sensitive experiences for Australia's First Nations children. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, healthcare can be a source of anxiety and mistrust, often stemming from historical and generational trauma [8]. By partnering with clinical teams to create brighter, more welcoming environments through culturally-relevant programs and collaborations with community health services, Starlight helps break down barriers and fosters greater trust and engagement in healthcare. This initiative not only improves immediate health outcomes for children but supports long-term wellbeing.

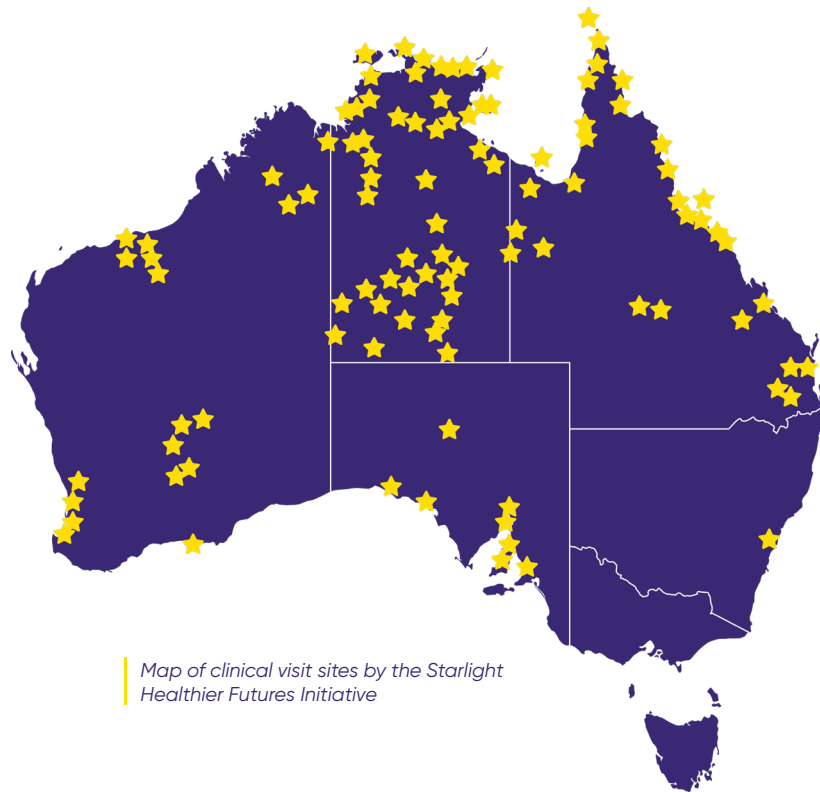
“Having Captain Starlight there
for Healthy Skin week has made
such a massive difference!”
– Dr. Josh Francis, Paediatric Infectious
Diseases Specialist

Captain Starlight's presence supports increased participation in early diagnosis and treatment in four key ways:

- ★ **Attendance** – Children are more likely to attend school, a clinic, or other site on days that they know they will see Captain Starlight
- ★ **Engagement** – Children and their parents are more likely to wait for their appointment at the school, a clinic, or other site if Captain Starlight is there
- ★ **Participation** – Other children – such as siblings – who go with them to appointments may also participate; and
- ★ **Efficiency** – Healthcare professionals can see more patients within the allocated timeframe.



98%
of remote health teams
rate the impact of
Captain Starlight
as significant.



Community Impact in Maningrida

Maningrida is one of the largest remote towns in the Northern Territory, located in Arnhem Land. Maningrida's Healthy Skin Week is a collaboration with Menzies School of Health Research, West Arnhem Regional Council, and Starlight, promoting skin checks throughout the community.

During this four-day event, Captain Starlight worked alongside doctors, nurses, and community health workers to engage, distract, and entertain children and families, helping the team complete over 450 vital skin checks.

"It felt like, for the first time, we were giving to the children instead of taking something away from them. Taking their time, taking their samples, taking their attention, taking them out of class. This time, we felt like we were giving them something."

– Clinician, The Kids Research Institute



Award-Winning Social Impact Measurement Partnership

As part of Starlight's Healthier Futures Initiative, the Cherbourg Community Health Service, Southern Queensland Rural Health, and Starlight, collaborated to co-create an innovative event designed to increase participation in paediatric health checks for Aboriginal children.

The **Third Birthday Party** event transformed routine clinical screenings into a fun and culturally safe celebration. In the day-long event, children and families were entertained by Captain Starlight and engaged in games and party activities. Each child received a specially designed "health passport" to collect stamps at screening stations, turning essential checks—such as speech, hearing, and dental—into a fun and empowering experience. This approach helped overcome barriers of fear and distrust, reframing healthcare as positive and supportive for both children and caregivers.



To understand the impact, Starlight worked with Western Sydney University's Indigenous Health Unit to design a culturally sensitive evaluation. Families rated their experience using age and culturally appropriate methods, and feedback was overwhelmingly positive: **100% of caregivers described the day as "deadly"**. Clinicians reported stronger relationships with the community, and families felt welcomed and supported. The evaluation demonstrated that the event improved caregiver health literacy and created stress-free, engaging introductions to healthcare for children.

This collaborative evaluation was published in the Australian Journal of Rural Health and received a Social Impact Network of Australia Award for **"Outstanding Collaboration in Social Impact Measurement"**.

"The kids just wanted to talk and interact with the Captains... It meant that we could actually just sit back and watch them interacting, which gave us as much information, probably more information, than if we were in there trying to interact with the kids."

– Healthcare Professional





HAPPINESS MATTERS

See our reference list,
check out our Journal
articles, or simply read
more about the details
behind Starlight's impact



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CAPTAIN
STARLIGHT
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Starlight
Children's Foundation

www.starlight.org.au

*Starlight acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional custodians
of the lands on which we live, work and play.*