

### ***No financial basis for closing Gilmore Pre-School School***

1. The closure of Gilmore Preschool cannot be justified on financial grounds. Gilmore Preschool is largely funded by the Gilmore Preschool community. The likelihood of the same level of commitment from families in the Gilmore priority enrolment area of financially supporting an out of area pre-school has to be questioned.
2. Gilmore Preschool is the newest pre-school in the area. The Preschool was opened in 1987 which coincided with the surrounding suburb of Gilmore being built. Given the Preschool is less than 20 years old the building structure is in excellent condition and requires minimal maintenance.
3. The Gilmore Preschool resources are of an exceptional standard (often commented on by parents and other teachers) and are estimated to be worth around \$150,000. These excellent resources are the result of 19 years of parent's voluntary contributions and fundraising. It is also important to note that the Gilmore Parent Association has an existing partnership with the ACT Department of Education and Training (DET) in the delivery of preschool education. Yet DET has not informed the Gilmore Preschool community on the fate of the resources provided by the community.
4. Gilmore Preschool provides generous resources to supplement the educational program funded by DET. This is despite being situated in a suburb that serves many families of a lower socio-economic status. Gilmore Pre-School's strong community backing is evident in the building of the shade cloth structure covering a play area. This structure within the Gilmore Pre-School playground was funded and erected by the Gilmore Pre-School community at a cost of \$7,000. The structure won an award in 2001 for the Healthy Schools Award for Community Involvement. This award is an outstanding achievement once again showing the strength and spirit of community behind Gilmore Pre-School.

### ***No Social or Educational basis for closing Gilmore Pre-School***

5. The priority enrolment areas of Gilmore and Chisholm have a high proportion of Government housing. It is still affordable for first time home owners to purchase a home in most parts of Gilmore in comparison to surrounding suburbs. These households of families renting Government properties and first time home owners are often young families or couples who plan to start their family or already have a young family.
6. The demonstration that these families are living in the Gilmore priority area is the fact that Gilmore Pre-School has 47 students this year, 45 are mainstream and 2 are early entry. This figure of 47 students is only 3 students less than the capacity of 50.

7. Gilmore Preschool's mainstream enrolment is comparable to enrolments for other preschools in the ACT. The Preschool children come from all different types of backgrounds and as mentioned in the Gilmore Primary School submission, the Gilmore School's "primary –enrolment area is within the postcode that has the second-lowest average income in the ACT."
8. The current enrolment number to date for Gilmore Preschool in 2007 is 35. Traditionally, the number enrolled often increases by another 10 before the beginning of the school year. Therefore we can anticipate the actual student enrolment in 2007 will once again bring Gilmore Pre-School close to full capacity. The evidence of past years census will confirm this.
9. Many parents inside and outside of the Gilmore priority enrolment area who do send their children to a non-government primary school still enrol their child at the Gilmore Pre-School as a stepping stone. The excellent reputation of the pre- school is renowned in the general community even with those parents who choose other non-government schools after being at Gilmore Pre-School.
10. Should Gilmore Pre-School close the government will need to provide subsidised transport for the low income families who have no private means of transport. In 2002 when Gilmore Preschool was reduced to a single unit and could not cater for all home area enrolments a number of children did not attend another preschool in the cluster because the families did not have transport.
11. A sizeable proportion of Gilmore Preschool families walk their children to preschool. Should Gilmore Preschool close how will families who rely on walking to the preschool be able to access a preschool education for their children? Preschoolers are far too young to be transported to a preschool by themselves. Will parents be expected to twice daily catch subsidised transport to and from a preschool? These parents are as well likely to have younger siblings. And then there are the incidences when a child becomes sick or distressed at preschool. How does the government intend to address this scenario?
12. Our Pre-School has not been provided with enough information nor time to estimate the costs of new buses, extra driver shifts and the construction of under/over passes on major roads to the nearest pre-school facilities at Chisholm, Richardson, Gowrie and Fadden. Unfortunately the pre-school immediately closest to Gilmore Pre-School is Macarthur which *towards 2020* has stated "...will close from the end of 2006...". The only other pre-school on the existing bus route that runs from Gilmore Pre-School is Isabella Plains which according to *towards 2020* will close "...from the end of 2008." Isabella Pre-School is in a geographically different cluster of schools.

### ***Diversity and Equity of Access***

13. Gilmore Preschool caters for the inclusion of children who are also identified as Indigenous and having English as a second language. These children are taught at Gilmore Preschool for 6 hours a week. Evidence obtained from the Pre-School shows that many of these children have simply no other means of transportation other than walking to school.
14. As Gilmore Preschool has had up to five vacancies in the past two years it has been able to cater for those students that DET have identified as needing early entry. These students are either Indigenous or have English or need to have English as their second language. It is predictable that these students will miss out on this vital head start that the early entry programme currently provides if Gilmore Preschool is closed. Other preschools are likely not to have vacancies once Gilmore Preschool's mainstream students have been accommodated.

### ***Opportunity - Early Intervention Unit in Gilmore Pre-School***

15. Gilmore Pre-School now houses the Early Intervention Unit (EIU) in its second classroom. The children who attend the EIU come from all areas of the Tuggeranong valley. The Unit is used for 9 hours a week. The unit originally came from Richardson School which unfortunately was burnt down. The EIU families have no idea what DET plans are for their future location. What the EIU families do know is they want the unit to remain at Gilmore Preschool. Besides the fire the EIU has experienced staff changes and so the families believe a stable locality should be a basic entitlement for their special needs children.
16. Gilmore Preschool Parent Association has demonstrated its strong sense of community by sharing with the EUI its extensive resources and including the EIU families in our social events. The DET staff in the Preschool and EIU have developed a strong network. There have been significant educational outcomes for the children in both settings as a result of this networking. On this basis it is imperative the EIU stays operative at Gilmore Preschool. To move these children to yet another unknown location in such a short period is not only costly but traumatic.

### ***Gilmore Preschools resources***

17. In comparison to other preschools in the area, Gilmore Preschool's play room is a much bigger space. The design area provides for a much more flexible use of space.
18. The beautiful bush garden which surrounds a man made creek running down the side of the playground is another major and unique feature of the Gilmore Pre-School playground which the children enjoy. Once again it was the parents of the Pre-Schoolers who designed and planted the native bush plants.

19. The main front entrance to the Gilmore Pre-School also features another community project with terra cotta name plates of previous Gilmore Pre-schoolers which has now formed part of the footpath. These types of experiences and resources cannot just be transplanted into another Pre-School. Most of the current equipment and resources have been funded by past and current families who have envisaged enrolling their younger siblings in future years at Gilmore Pre-School. Past and current Gilmore Pre-School Parents Association has already raised funds to supplement a playground upgrade for 2006/07 which has been approved by DET.

### ***“Seamless pathway” for students from Gilmore Preschool to Gilmore Primary School***

20. Currently a buddy program is in place with the Gilmore Primary School. Students in Year 4 at Gilmore Primary buddy up with a Gilmore Preschool student in Term 4. The Gilmore Primary buddies accompany the Gilmore Pre-Schoolers to the Primary School. Parents at Gilmore Preschool first learn of the outstanding “Seamless pathway” that exists from Gilmore Preschool to Gilmore Primary School at the Preschool’s Information session at the beginning of their children’s preschool year.
21. This buddy program provides the Gilmore Preschoolers access to the Gilmore Primary School with the “big kids” in a non-threatening and relationship building environment. It is a very important step for the following year when the Gilmore Pre-schoolers will walk next door to the Gilmore Primary Kindergarten amongst the “big kids”.
22. In Term Two by which time Gilmore Pre-school students feel totally secure in the preschool environment the pathway begins. Weekly Gilmore Preschoolers participate in Gilmore Primary School’s recycling programme by taking down their food scraps and putting them in the correct bins. The highlight for the children is viewing the worms. This visit often incorporates a visit to the playground so our children are familiar with Gilmore Primary School boundaries. During these visits our children encounter many people, the Principal, the Janitor, the Office Staff, teachers and students. Our children go onto Gilmore Primary knowing the staff there.
23. These familiarisation trips to the Gilmore Primary School are extremely important to the psyche of a Preschooler who is preparing themselves for that “seamless pathway” to the Primary School next door. Term Three and our children start aspiring to what they will do when they go to Gilmore Primary School. The Gilmore School Band plays at the preschoolers Annual Games Day, our children watch the Gilmore Primary School performance and Year Five and Six students assist with craft activities as part of our children library visits.
24. Other links between the Gilmore Pre-School and Primary School include the Pre-schoolers visiting the Primary School library and undertaking a craft activity with

older primary students and the Year 6 band playing at the Games Day for the Pre-School.

25. Term Four and our children learn what it means to have a buddy. Year Four students initially come to the preschool to read a book and do puzzles with the preschoolers. In this way our children get to know what it is like to be amongst the big kids in a non-threatening and relationship building environment. The Buddies then invite our children to the Primary School do a variety of activities together. As well our children participate in a transition programme with the kindergarten classes. The outcome of this programme which consists of four visits is the preschoolers having a turn at being the kindergarten class.
26. Gilmore Primary School students eagerly anticipate and then enjoy all their interactions with the preschoolers. One of the highlights of being in Year Four is the Buddy programme with the preschool. Gilmore Preschool and Primary School have a “seamless pathway” why destroy it? The Gilmore Preschool community does not want our children in a Preschool to Year Ten School. There is also a Playschool that operates from Gilmore Community House across the road from the preschool and one at the Chisholm Shops. Gilmore Preschool has developed links with both these settings with the children, teachers and parents visiting the preschool.

### ***Gilmore School’s Before and After School Care***

27. A very important feature of the Gilmore Primary school is the high quality before and after school care programs (and school holiday programs) which are currently run by ‘Communities@Work’. The program is run out of a portable classroom which is located within the grounds of the Gilmore Pre-School. Gilmore is the only school in the area that provides children and their families with access to before school care.
28. Funding for the refurbishment of the classroom for ‘Communities@Care’ was provided by the ACT Department of Education and Training in 2004. The classroom provides children with a home away from home atmosphere and the space has been especially designed for this purpose.
29. The before and after school program has been purposely placed within the grounds of the Gilmore Pre-school giving students a sense of leaving school for the day and being able to relax post school in a more homely and comfortable environment.
30. The Gilmore Pre-school provides the children in this program with a large and safely enclosed playground area. Gilmore Primary school children have the opportunity to play outside in a safe and supervised environment. The program also ensures that vandalism is minimised as the Program has officers who are present in the Pre-school environs until 6.00pm every school night.

31. Each year the current Gilmore Preschool Association is delighted that the families whose children once attended Gilmore Preschool are able to reuse the preschool's grounds for the before and after school programme.
32. The old Gilmore baby clinic, is a stand alone building at the Gilmore Pre-School. This building is used as the base for the Information Technology Support staff who services the entire Tuggeranong area. The DET has resourced and refitted the building for the IT staff. As the IT staff still utilise the building in the school holidays and given its close proximity to the Pre-School the incidence of vandalism is significantly reduced.

### ***No social or educational basis for closing Gilmore Pre-School***

33. The viability of any school cannot be determined on financial grounds alone. A public school is an investment in the surrounding community and the people that make up that community, in particular its children. Any consideration of a school's worthiness to remain open must take into account the contribution it makes to the surrounding community and the regard in which it is held by residents.
34. Gilmore Pre-School plays a vital role in ensuring all children within its priority-enrolment area have the best possible educational opportunities. This school is not only an essential investment in the Gilmore and Chisholm community; it is recognised as such by local families, a large majority of whom send their children there. Any thorough assessment of the social and educational contribution Gilmore Pre-School makes to the community would conclude that it must remain open.
35. The strong support for Gilmore Pre-School within the local community was demonstrated in August 2006 by the results from of a petition opposing the closure of Gilmore Pre-School and Primary School. A total of 1,578 people signed the petition. There are 1,439 households in the Gilmore Schools priority area. Petition volunteers spoke to at least 1 adult member in 1,151 households and 1,357 signatures were obtained from those households.
36. The petition was presented to the Legislative Assembly on 16 August 2006. It stated that the close of the Gilmore Pre-School and Primary School cannot be justified on financial, educational, social or geographical grounds, and requested that the ACT Government decide against closing the two schools.
37. Finally the parents, the Parent Association and the children of Gilmore Pre-School cannot understand why they have been named in *towards 2020* as a school to be closed in 2007. The Pre-School has an exceptional reputation; it is financially viable, excellent enrolments, caters for a significant diversity of families and more importantly has extremely strong community support.

38. This submission has been written and collated by the Gilmore Pre-School Parents Association. This is the best submission we can present given the limited resources and time frame set by the Department of Education and Training.