



Grace, 5-years-old

## MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

### Starlight and Masonic Charities launch mission to improve healthcare uptake and outcomes for NT children

[Starlight Children's Foundation](#) (Starlight) is proud to announce it has joined forces with [Masonic Charities SA/NT](#) to help improve long-term health outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians living in remote and regional communities of Northern Territory and South Australia through its [Healthier Futures Initiative \(HFI\)](#).

Working in partnership with health professionals, Starlight's superhero, [Captain Starlight](#) helps ensure clinics are positive health care experiences for children and families by engaging them through music, art, dance and storytelling.

Encouraging clinic attendance through entertainment and play, Starlight's HFI builds trust between health professionals and the local community, supporting early detection and treatment of preventable health conditions.

Masonic Charities has committed \$900,000 to Starlight over the next three years. The funding from the new partnership will allow Starlight to continue its vital program in the Top End and Central NT –sustaining program outreach in 2020 and increasing community trips by 20% in 2021-22.

With over 300 trips projected until the end of 2022, the program will travel to remote NT communities from Wadeye to Groote Eylandt in the Top End and Kintore to Lake Nash in Central Australia\*

The new partnership with Masonic Charities will support over 30,000 seriously ill children and their families in South Australia and the Northern Territory over the next three years, including five-year-old Grace (pictured).

Emma Puddy, Starlight's Hospital Program Manager NT said: "A visit to the doctor for NT children is about to get a whole lot more fun thanks to our Healthier Futures Initiative. With a boost from a new supersonic Masonic Charities partnership, the team at Starlight are ready to blast-off into remote NT communities where they have been missed for many months to once again bring joy, laughter and happiness to sick kids.


"Starlight is fundamental to the healthcare system and we're thrilled to be able to extend this vital program to even more families in NT experiencing serious illness," Ms Puddy said.

"By engaging families through song, dance and storytelling, Starlight has helped improve health clinic attendance, promoting prevention and early intervention. In addition to keeping children engaged during their healthcare visits, Captain Starlight provides a sense of connection and familiarity for these families. This is a priceless act in helping to reduce their anxiety when seeking treatment in the clinic or hospital."

[starlight.org.au](http://starlight.org.au)

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





John Behenna, chairman of Masonic Charities, said the partnership with Starlight Children's Foundation was part of Freemasonry's substantial contribution to "advancing the human condition".

"There is much good in the world and we are delighted to be part of it," Mr Behenna said.

"The Masonic Charities Board, as the vanguard of Freemason philanthropy, seeks an ambitious agenda in benevolence, in South Australia and the Northern Territory, of which this magnificent project is a part."

Neil Jensen, who sits on the Board of Directors for Masonic Charities as the Grand Master of the Freemasons of South Australia and the Northern Territory, said it was an honour to help promote and develop the continuing positive work of the Starlight Children's Foundation.

Dr Jensen said helping children who were fearful of medical treatment to be more relaxed and comfortable aligned with the core values of Freemasonry.

"Freemasons invest in people," Dr Jensen said.

"It is said that those who bring happiness into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves. This is very true of our fraternity, which has been addressing the needs of others for more than three centuries."

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children have some of the highest levels of preventable diseases in the world<sup>1</sup>. Research shows that health professionals and partners in remote communities rate the impact of Captain Starlight on children as significant<sup>2</sup>. Evidence-based outcomes of Starlight's HFI on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children include increased attendance at clinics, early detection of chronic disease, easier management of clinics and positively changed attitudes and beliefs about health care<sup>3</sup>.

Dr Peter Wallis, Paediatrician at Royal Darwin Hospital Women, Children and Youth, praised the positive impact Starlight has on families living in remote communities of the NT.

"Visits to the doctor for the children can be very stressful experiences; doctors come from a very different culture, speak a strange language and often jab kids with needles. Captain Starlight transforms the clinic into a positive, fun experience. Their performance backgrounds transcend cultural barriers and the anxieties felt by children and parents alike evaporate in the waiting room. Children's healthcare should be a positive experience, and Captain Starlights make it just that."

In celebration of the partnership with Masonic Charities and the reopening of Starlight's HFI program in NT communities, Dr Jensen will join Starlight representatives to celebrate the donation of \$275,000 at Government House on November 12, which is an instalment of Masonic Charities' \$900,000 donation to Starlight. The event will be hosted by Vicki O'Halloran AO, Administrator of the Northern Territory. Starlight and Masonic Charities are extremely grateful for the support of Government House in celebrating this occasion.

For more information about Starlight's Healthier Futures Initiative, visit [starlight.org.au](http://starlight.org.au).


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<sup>1</sup> AIHW (2016) Australian Burden of Disease Study Impact and causes of illness and death in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2011, page viii

<sup>2</sup> Treadgold C, Dann J, Bowden A. Starlight's Healthier Futures Initiative: A partnership model supporting health care delivery to Indigenous children and adolescents. *International Journal of Integrated Care*. 2018;18(s1):90

<sup>3</sup> Harrison N, Walker D. (2008) Evaluation of the Starlight Children's Foundation's activities in regional and remote communities of the Northern Territory. Darwin: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (now Lowitja Institute)



\* Communities visited as part of Starlight's HFI

TOP END		CENTRAL	
Alyangula	Katherine (Hospital)	Ali Curung	Mutitjulu
Angurugu	Katherine (Wurli)	Alpumrulum (Lake Nash)	Ntaria (Hermannsburg)
Barunga	Lajamanu	Ampilatwatja	Nyirripi
Beswick	Maningrida	Amunturngu (Mt Liebig)	Papunya
Borroloola	Mataranka	Aputula (Finke)	Santa Teresa
Bulla	Milikapiti	Areyonga	Tennant Creek
Bulman	Milingimbi	Atitjere (Harts Range)	Titjikala
Daly River	Minjilang	Elliot	Ti Tree
Galiwinku	Minyerri	Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff)	Utopia
Gapuwiyak	Nguiu	Kaltukatjara (Dockers River)	Willowra
Gove (Hospital)	Ngukurr	Kintore	Wilora
Gove (Miwatj)	Numbulwar	Laramba	Yuendumu
Jilkminggan	Oenpelli	Yulara	Yuelamu
Kalkarindji	Palumpa		
Ramingining	Peppiminarti		
Robinson River	Pirlangimpi		
Timber Creek			

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### About Starlight Children's Foundation

Starlight Children's Foundation brightens the lives of seriously ill and hospitalised children and young people by replacing pain, fear and stress with fun, joy and laughter. Since its establishment in 1988, Starlight has expanded to become the broadest reaching and most trusted children's charity in Australia. There is now a Starlight Express Room in every children's hospital in the country and Captain Starlight program nationwide.

In 2019, Starlight granted 500 life-changing wishes with 100% of families recommending a wish experience to other families. Starlight also delivered over 610,000 positive Starlight experiences to seriously ill children, young people and their families. [www.starlight.org.au](http://www.starlight.org.au)



### About Masonic Charities

Masonic Charities is the major philanthropic arm of Freemasonry in South Australia and the Northern Territory. It is a leading charity organisation that constantly turns its eyes to, and focusses on, the needs of others. Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest and largest non-religious, non-political, fraternal and charitable organisations.

