LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

No. 323

WRITTEN QUESTION

J Davis to the Minister for Children and Families, Hon Robyn Cahill OAM MLA:

Circuit Breaker Program

1. **How does the Department measure the efficacy of the Circuit Breaker program?**

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) assesses delivery of the Circuit Breaker program through ongoing case reviews, monitoring of family engagement and services, Family Responsibility Agreement (FRA) activity and other operational information.

The Circuit Breaker program is also being assessed through a process evaluation, which will measure the program's establishment, implementation, extent to which it has achieved short-term outcomes and any unintended consequences. It is anticipated the program evaluation will be completed this year.

   a. **Please provide a breakdown of that data.**

Observations made of the Circuit Breaker program to date show an increased capability in domestic and family violence (DFV)-informed frontline workforce, with staff undertaking training in key frameworks including the Risk Assessment Management Framework (RAMF), Safe and Together, and DFV information sharing.

Early observations show that Circuit Breaker is helping young people take practical steps back into learning. There is early positive evidence that Circuit Breaker is supporting young people to return to school or engage in vocational education and training.

2. **Budget Paper No. 3 for 2026–27 reports Circuit Breaker cases commenced at 380 for 2025–26 against a target of 200, attributing the variation to "strong demand and program uptake following implementation in December 2025, which exceeded initial projections", and sets a 2026–27 target of 300.**

a. The 2026–27 target of 300 is below the 380 cases commenced in 2025–26, in a program that operated for part of that year only. Is a reduction in cases commenced intended and, if so, why?

The 2026–27 target should not be interpreted as an intended reduction in service delivery or program access.

The 2025–26 result reflected stronger than anticipated demand and program uptake following implementation of Circuit Breaker, which exceeded initial projections. The number of cases commenced is influenced by a range of factors, including referral volumes, family needs, regional demand and operational requirements.

b. What funding is allocated to Circuit Breaker in 2026–27, and does it assume 300 cases or 380?

A budget of $8.3 million has been allocated in 2026-27. The funding allocation is based on the FTE to support the Circuit Breaker program; the funding amount is not derived from an estimated number of cases.

c. How many cases were commenced in each month since December 2025?

Month	Cases commenced
December 2025	40
January 2026	35
February 2026	31
March 2026	39
April 2026	35
May 2026	47
June 2026	43

d. What is the maximum number of cases the program can carry at its 2026–27 funding, and how many were open at 30 June 2026?

The funding allocation is based on the FTE required to support the Circuit Breaker program; the funding amount is not derived from an estimated number of cases.

As of 30 June 2026 there were 328 open Circuit Breaker cases.

3. How many young people involved in Circuit Breaker have committed offences while in the program?

Information relating to offending, charges and convictions is held by NT Police and the Department of Corrections (DoC) and is not captured as part of Circuit Breaker program reporting. This question should be directed to NT Police and the DoC.

4. **How many young people have been placed in youth detention while involved with the program?**

Information on youth detention placements is held by DoC and is not captured as part of DCF's Circuit Breaker program reporting. This question should be directed to DoC.

5. **How many young people have been removed from their family over domestic violence concerns while involved in the program?**

No children have been removed while involved in the Circuit Breaker program. A removal may occur once a Circuit Breaker case is closed; this occurs when the concerns for a child or children escalate beyond the remit of the Circuit Breaker program and the family move into statutory child protection intervention.

Six children have entered out-of-home care following closure of a Circuit Breaker case.

6. **For each of the preceding three questions, is that outcome recorded against a young person's participation in the Circuit Breaker program?**

The data as questioned in Questions 3 to 5 is currently not recorded in CARE.

   a. **If it is, in which system, and please provide the figures.**

All Circuit Breaker program participants are recorded in the CARE system. The data as questioned in Questions 3 to 5 is not currently recorded in CARE.

   b. **If it is not, how does the Department assess whether participation changes any of those outcomes**?

An outcome evaluation is planned for 2027-28. DCF will consider the above data points for inclusion.

Success for the Circuit Breaker program will be determined by the specifics of the child and family; school attendance, parents receiving referral to early intervention programs, and no escalation to a CPI.

7. **Circuit Breaker is funded from the domestic and family violence funding stream. On what basis is that classification justified, and can a completed evaluation of the program be tabled?**

Circuit Breaker is a proactive early-intervention program partially funded through the NT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Reduction Strategy 2025-2028 (Strategy 2025-28). The program responds to Strategy 2025-28's priority to connect Territorians at risk of experiencing violence to support early, and to intervene with young people impacted by or at risk of using DFSV.

A process evaluation is in its final stages of completion. The program has been informed by RAMF and Safe and Together, and links people with services they need to be safe and supported.

a. What has the Circuit Breaker program cost to date?

Year	Cost $000
2024-25	6 451
2025-26	10 473
2026-27 to 30 September 2026	2 112
Total	**19 036**

8. How much funding is allocated to Circuit Breaker in 2025–26 and 2026–27, broken down by funding stream?

Funding Stream	2025-26 $000	2026-27 $000
DFSV Strategy	6 550	6 550
(former) Youth Outreach and Re-Engagement Team (YORET) program	1 750	1 750
Budget related parameters (indexation)	-	78
TOTAL	**8 300**	**8 378**

a. What amount and proportion is drawn from domestic, family and sexual violence funding?

$6.5 million from Strategy 2025-28 and $1.8 million from the former YORET program. The entire $8.3 million is reported as DFSV funding.

9. Is Circuit Breaker classified as a specialist DFSV program, a child protection program, a youth justice program, or a Family Responsibility Agreement program?

The Circuit Breaker program is a proactive early-intervention program. Through an early intervention approach, the program seeks to reduce risk factors associated with youth offending, including exposure to violence, disengagement from education, and limited connection to family and community supports.

a. If it is classified as a specialist DFSV response, what criteria does the Department rely on, and can the program logic, outcomes framework and any evaluation supporting that classification be tabled?

DCF relies on the Strategy 2025-28; with the program logic provided at Attachment A demonstrating this alignment. The data matrix is not currently available for publication while further updates are being made.

10. Which outcomes under the DFSV strategy does Circuit Breaker contribute to, and how?

Within Strategy 2025-28, the Circuit Breaker program contributes to *Domain 2 – Early Intervention and accountability*. The Circuit Breaker program supports *Short-Medium Term Outcome 2: Territorians at risk of experiencing violence are connected early to support services,* including integration of DFV-informed practice, proactive discussions on DFV supports, coordination with DFV specialists and DFV-related support services.

a. What data shows how Circuit Breaker directly contributes to the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence?

Number of staff trained in DFSV-informed practice:

- Across different regions, training completion rate to date is recorded to be between 20% to 83%.

Number of referrals to specialist DFSV support:

- As of 31 March 2026, 27 referrals to service providers were related to DFV support

11. How is victim-survivor safety made central to Circuit Breaker procedures?

Circuit Breaker policy and procedure have been developed to align with DFV RAMF and Safe and Together principles, that acknowledges victim-survivor safety as central.

a. Does Circuit Breaker complete DFSV risk assessments and safety plans with victim-survivors and children? If so, how many were completed in 2025–26?

Circuit Breaker staff are being trained to identify and respond to DFSV in accordance with the RAMF. Staff work with practitioners and DFSV services to use a Common Risk Assessment Tool (CRAT) and develop a safety plan.

12. How does the Department define success in the Circuit Breaker program, and how is a case classified if the family:

a. declined engagement;

Participation in the Circuit Breaker program is voluntary. If a family declines engagement, the case is closed due to inability to gain consent for the program.

b. did not receive practical support;

Families who consent will always receive practical support. Support goals differ from case to case and will be recorded as goals in a FRA.

c. did not complete a Family Responsibility Agreement; or

Refer to response to Question 12.a.

d. was only referred to another service?

This depends on the individual support needs. If a referral to a more specific service is all that's needed, it may lead to a case closure, with the consent of the family.

13. Does the Department count a Circuit Breaker case as successful where the case is closed, even if the family declined engagement, did not receive practical support, did not complete a Family Responsibility Agreement, or was only referred to another service?

No. A Circuit Breaker case is not considered successful solely because it has been closed. DCF considers a Circuit Breaker case successful when the goals identified for the case have been achieved.

14. How many families were referred to Circuit Breaker in 2025–26?

Indicator	2025-26
Cases referred to Circuit Breaker[1]	439

[1] Reported as number of Circuit Breaker cases commenced during 2025–26. Circuit Breaker reporting is based on case commencements and does not represent the number of families referred to the program.

15. How many families successfully completed the program in 2025–26?

Indicator	2025-26
Completed Circuit Breaker cases[1]	289

[1] Reported as completed Circuit Breaker cases during 2025-26. Circuit Breaker reporting is based on case commencements and completions and does not represent the number of families referred to the program.

16. How many families have fully completed Family Responsibility Agreements since the program's inception?

Indicator	As of 30 June 2026
Total active Circuit Breaker cases with a FRA[1 2 3]	138
Total completed Circuit Breaker cases with a FRA[1 2 3]	131
Total active Circuit Breaker cases with completed FRA[2 3]	10

[1] Includes Circuit Breaker cases with a FRA where the FRA status is recorded as either Completed or Ongoing excluding drafts.

[2] Cumulative count of FRAs for Circuit Breaker cases since start of the program, excluding cancelled FRAs.
[3] Reported as the number of Circuit Breaker cases with a completed or ongoing FR) since program inception. Circuit Breaker reporting is case-based and does not represent the number of families.

17. How many families completed a Family Responsibility Agreement and received the practical supports required to comply with it?

All families who consent to a FRA will receive practical support. Support goals differ from case to case and will be recorded as goals in a FRA.

a. Where an agreement required attendance at a domestic violence program, how many families were referred to an appropriate program, supported with transport or other practical barriers, and recorded as completing that requirement?

This data is not currently available.

18. How many children connected to Circuit Breaker families were referred to a child-specific DFSV service?

Information relating to referrals to child-specific DFSV services is addressed in the response provided to Question 19.

19. How many Circuit Breaker families were referred to specialist DFSV services?

a. Please list the specific services, by region, to which families were referred.

b. Of those referrals, how many were accepted and resulted in the person actually receiving support?

c. Where a figure for an individual region, service or category is too small to report, please provide the Territory-wide total.

Referrals reported to service providers by service category	2025-26 Actual (31 March)
DFV support	24

Note: Figures above reflect information provided at Estimates as of 31 March 2026.

Referral reporting remains under development. DCF has recently enhanced reporting on referrals to service providers. Further work is underway to strengthen the recording, categorisation and reporting of referral information, including referral outcomes and service engagement information.

DCF will continue to enhance data quality and reporting functionality to support more comprehensive reporting of referral outcomes and service engagement information.

20. How many people using violence were referred to a specialist behaviour change, men's healing or DFSV intervention program?

Referral reporting for the Circuit Breaker program is currently under development. However, In 2025-26, 261 eligible referrals were made to community-based Men's Behaviour Change Programs, comprising 136 referrals from July to December 2025 and 125 referrals from January to June 2026. During the same period, 615 participants engaged in DFV programs delivered in correctional centres, comprising 305 participants from July to December 2025 and 310 participants from January to June 2026.

21. How many Circuit Breaker staff are employed in specialist DFSV roles?

There are no DFSV specialist roles in the Circuit Breaker program.

a. What specialist DFSV qualifications, training or experience are required for Circuit Breaker staff?

Circuit Breaker staff have completed a range of DFV-informed trainings such as Mandatory Report DFV; Mandatory Report Harm and Exploitation of Children; DFV Information Sharing Scheme; Harm Types and Sexual Exploitation; Basics of DFV Fundamentals; DFV RAMF; and Working With Children and Young People With Challenging Behaviours.

Attachment A: Circuit Breaker Program Logic

Problem statement: *Patterns of behaviour and repeat inadequate supervision of children and young people indicates the need for increased involvement and accountability of parents and families in safeguarding the wellbeing of their children.*

Program objective: *The program is designed to connect children, young people and families with relevant support including domestic violence services, address the parental circumstances that are contributing to the child or young person's behaviour and help reduce the likelihood of children or young people entering the child protection or youth justice system.*

Inputs

A skilled and collaborative workforce:

Circuit Breaker Teams

- NT Police
- DOH
- DET
- DOC
- NGO service providers

Budget: $8.3 million per annum

System functionality

Reporting and monitoring

Circuit Breaker policy and procedure

Training framework

Safe sleeping infrastructure in Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine

Outputs

Engagement with the parents and family

Children and young people unsupervised and at risk returned to a responsible adult for focused engagement with parents (all hours) or referred to a designated Safe Place if required.

Consent to enter into a Family Responsibility Agreement

Family and Youth Support (FAYS) workers seek and record consent from parents and responsible adults. FRA meeting is scheduled within 48 hours and to occur no longer than 10 days from consent being provided.

Collaborative partnerships

FAYS work collaboratively with other services and engage in cross-agency meetings

Case management

FAYS workers work with families to identify and address support needs. Case management includes development of FRA, ongoing FRA review, coordination of relevant services, provision of information and advice and referrals to family support services.

Family Support

Parents and young people are referred to support services that address identified risks and needs which may include:

- Domestic, family and sexual violence prevention and response support
- Support to help with school re-engagement
- Behaviour change programs and counselling
- Alcohol and other drug programs
- Pro-social activities to help young person connect with community

Short-term Outcomes (6-12 months)

MO1. Reduction in children and young people unsupervised and at risk late at night.

SO1. A coordinated and integrated service system responding to the needs of young people and families.

SO2. Young people and their families are actively engaged in the Circuit Breaker Program and support services to address their needs.

SO3. Parents and young people at risk of or are experiencing and/or using violence are identified early and referred to support services.

SO4. Young people are supported to return to school or alternative education and training programs.

Medium-term Outcomes (1-2 years)

MO2. Families achieve the success goals outlined in the FRA to address the root causes of child and young person's behaviour.

MO3. Young people and parents at risk of or experiencing DFV are supported to address immediate impacts of DFV.

Young people and parents at risk of using DFV are supported to understand the impact of violence and gain skills and motivation to change their behaviour.

MO4. Young people have increased engagement in school or alternative education and training and achieve their education goals.

Long-term Outcomes (>2 years)

LO1. Reduced antisocial behaviour supports social cohesion, a sense of safety and increased community pride.

LO2. NT children, young people and their families have improved health outcomes.

LO3. NT children, young people and their families are supported to be safe, respected and free from violence.

LO4. Young people contributing positively to the economy through further education and employment.

Strategic Alignment

NTG Strategies
- Reduce Crime
- Restore the Territory Lifestyle
- Rebuild the Economy

DFSV Strategy 2025-28
Domain 2: Early Intervention and Accountability

SO2: Territorians at risk of experiencing violence are connected early to support services.

LO3. Territorians who use DFSV are held accountable and choose to practice non-violent and respectful behaviours, contributing to reduction in DFSV incidents.

LO4. The long-term impact of DFSV on victim-survivors' lives is reduced, and they are helped to recover and thrive.

Assumptions:

- The program will successfully engage families to connect with supports and services and agree to a Family Responsibility Agreement.
- Case management is culturally responsive in a manner and language families and children understand.
- There is sufficient budget and availability of service providers with required expertise and skills to meet the needs of children and young people and their families.
- Family Responsibility Agreements are informed by holistic assessments of children, parents and families, inclusive of health, housing and education needs.

External Factors:

- Legislation changes, including changes in bail or sentencing laws
- Budget constraints
- Workforce constraints
- Social context and narrative regarding youth and crime
- Other programs and support outside of the circuit breaker program positively influencing outcomes