



# 2016 Early Childhood Education Conference

The tired hands of the barista at the 2016 Early Childhood Education Conference *together we grow – connecting communities* conference is one of the best possible measures of the events' success.

The warmth and enthusiasm of delegates reacquainting themselves with colleagues and talking about conference sessions translated to serious pressure on the McArthur coffee cart, with more than 1000 coffees brewed for delegates over two days.

The highlight of the annual calendar for preschool educators attracted more than 80 speakers across 47 sessions and was opened by Victorian Minister for Families and Children, the Hon Jenny Mikakos.

Ms **Charlotta Oberg** provided much food for thought with her keynote address on educating in the global village.

Originally from Sweden – but now settled in Sydney – Charlotta works with professionals around the world to develop Cultural Intelligence in many different commercial and educational settings. Charlotta previously worked for the Swedish Government as a cultural diversity advisor and has also been an intercultural consultant to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

After painting an evocative picture of the complex communities in which we now live, Charlotta challenged delegates to consider their own socio-cultural experience and assumptions when seeking to connect with children and families from diverse culturally, linguistically and faith-based backgrounds. These are daily challenges in our modern life, but challenges that can be met by early childhood educators with a mix of respect, reflection and openness.

On Saturday morning, Mr Toby Kent briefly summarised his role as the Chief Resilience Officer at the City of Melbourne, and the work being undertaken through the Rockefeller Foundation to develop resilience strategies in 100 cities across the world. In preparing delegates for the enlivening panel debate about risk in Early Childhood Education settings to follow his presentation, Toby asked delegates to think about risk – avoidable, manageable or unacceptable – in the context of delivering rich educational and development experiences for children that balance an educator's need to provide children with a safe environment, with a child's need to explore risk to develop resilience.

Dr Tom Nehmy's session on pathways to a healthy mind and a session on the National Disability Insurance Scheme

by Noah's Ark Training Manager, Lou Ambrosy, each attracted a huge audience response underlining a commitment to building resilience and inclusion.

"It was so inspiring to see so many educators committed to finding out more about building resilience and inclusion of children with disabilities, so that we move beyond discussions of how is it possible to include them, into dialogue about how children with disabilities can develop a sense of belonging," Ms Ambrosy said.

Like many delegates, Ms Ambrosy had enjoyed Comedian Denise Scott's wry observations, but the ultimate standout presentation for her was from an early childhood educator called Ally Bruce.

"Ally shared her own story, growing up with Cerebral Palsy Hemiplegia and the issues of how she longed for a sense of acceptance and belonging – and how she has used that insider's knowledge in her career as an early childhood educator, working with children with a range of disabilities.

"It's great to hear so many perspectives and learnings throughout the conference and certainly the trade show was absolutely buzzing, with a terrific line-up of exhibitors, but when someone shares their own personal experience and we can all learn from it that's a really powerful moment. It is fair to say that I wasn't the only one who shed a tear during her presentation."

The event was the culmination of months of work by staff from ELAA, Gowrie Victoria and the Conference Reference Committee, drawing on the talents and insights of a dedicated band of educators and experts from across our sector.

The Committee acknowledged the support of a range of representatives, including Gold Sponsor, the Department of Education and Training.

The coffee cart, provided by one of ELAA's partners, McArthur, along with delicious lunches, morning and afternoon teas, plus the 43 exhibitors at the trade show kept the 850 conference delegates engaged and well fed between sessions.



A conference for everyone involved in early childhood education from birth to the early years of school

**27–28 May 2016, Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne**

*together we grow* **connecting communities**



*"Experienced, driven, motivated speakers"*

*"Amazing diversity of presenters"*

*"Great to be able to go online/ revisit information"*

*"Well done – a great day – best yet"*

*"The conference is always run exceptionally well and is at the highest quality in every way! Always so inspiring and motivating. Great speakers. That's why I enjoy coming every year! Fabulous trade fair! Everything!"*



Clockwise from top left: Keynote speaker, Charlotta Oberg; feathered fun during one of the sessions; workshop during the 'The art of integration' session; Ally Bruce presenting 'The Importance of Belonging'; Shane Lucas (ELAA CEO), the Hon. Jenny Mikakos MP (Victorian Minister for Families and Children), Jo Guerts (ELAA President); Nicole Pilsworth (ELAA Board member) and Andrew Hume (Gowrie Victoria CEO). Opposite: the Main Plenary area was packed for the opening session.

### **2017 Early Childhood Education Conference**

The 2017 Conference will be held on Friday 26 May – Saturday 27 May. All suggestions for sessions can be sent to ELAA's Communications and Marketing Officer James Gardener [jgardener@elaa.org.au](mailto:jgardener@elaa.org.au)

See you there!