



EARLY
LEARNING
ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIA

The voice for parents and service providers

PRE SCHOOL MATTERS

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
PREPARING CHILDREN FOR LIFE
TERM FOUR 2015

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

PLAYGROUPS
ENGAGING FAMILIES

SCREEN-TIME MATTERS



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Welcome to the final edition of *Preschool Matters* for 2015.

Term four is always an exciting time for ELAA members, educators, children and families as we celebrate a year of learning, development and change – and look forward to welcoming many new children and families into our services in the coming year.

2016 will of course present many challenges for us as a sector and for ELAA as an independent peak body supporting services and parents, and representing our members' concerns to governments and in the wider community.

In recent months, ELAA has been working hard with our members and partners across the sector to plan for changes to service delivery that will come into effect from 1 January 2016 as a key part of the National Quality Framework.

Many early learning service providers will be making changes to the way programs are delivered next year, as new educator: child ratios come into effect. While some educator teams may remain the same, services that need to employ an additional

qualified staff member can look forward to the positive contribution that a new colleague makes to any team.

In this edition of *Preschool Matters*, we are presenting some interesting stories on innovative practice, as well as looking at new ways to deliver programs that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of diverse communities, families and children.

Catharine Hydon and Jade Fraser have written an enlightening article about cultural competency: what it really means for us as service providers to be truly inclusive of all children and families, beyond theory and in practice. Please read this article on pages 10 to 11.

Many families and educators are concerned about the amount of time children spend on screens, at the expense of time spent outdoors or involved in physical activities. Trina Hinkley of the Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research at Deakin University shares with us some of the latest research on ways to ensure our children get enough physical activity at preschool and at home, pages 18 and 20.

I look forward to seeing many of you at ELAA's Annual General Meeting on 29 October, where we will be pleased to hear from the Victorian Minister for Families and Children, the Hon Jenny Mikakos and Aileen Ashford, CEO of Children's Protection Society.

I wish you all the best for the rest of the year and for new beginnings in 2016.

Jo Geurts, President

IN THIS EDITION

- 10 CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
- 12 NEW ROAD SAFETY RESOURCES FOR CALD FAMILIES
- 16 ENGAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES AT PLAYGROUP
- 18 LESS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, MORE SCREEN TIME – DOES IT MATTER?
- 22 KIDSMATTER – NEW ANIMATION FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
- 2 News & Events
- 3 CEO Report
- 4 Q&A
- 5 Training in 2016
- 8 Regulations in Focus
- 26 Innovative Practice
- 28 Member Profile

Cover: East Brunswick Kindergarten.
Photo: Reg Ryan.



EARLY
LEARNING
ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIA

Level 3, 145 Smith Street, Fitzroy Vic 3065
PO Box 1246, Collingwood Vic 3066
Phone (03) 9489 3500 Rural 1300 730 119
Fax (03) 9486 4226 Email elaa@elaa.org.au
Web www.elaa.org.au

CEO Shane Lucas
President Jo Geurts
Editor Sue Smith
Creative Director Louisa Roubin
Advertising Cass Marxsen

Printing Mouleprint @ www.mouleprint.com.au

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Preschool Matters is a quarterly magazine which communicates issues and developments that concern and assist members in the effective management of early childhood services.

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NEWS & EVENTS

ELAA 2015 Annual General Meeting 29 October

We are pleased to invite you to attend the Early Learning Association Australia Annual General Meeting.

This year's meeting will be addressed by Aileen Ashford, Chief Executive Officer of Children's Protection Society, on the crucial work the Society does with vulnerable children and families. The Victorian Minister for Families and Children, the Hon Jenny Mikakos MP, will also address the meeting.

Date: Thursday 29 October 2015

Venue: Treacy Centre, 126 The Avenue, Parkville

Time: 6.30pm for 7pm start

RSVP: By Friday 16 October to Tania De Carli (03) 9489 3500 or tdcarli@elaa.org.au

Romp & Stomp Fun Day For Children

Celebrate Universal Children's Week and join us at Romp & Stomp Fun Day for Children. ELAA and other early childhood organisations are hosting fun, educational activities especially for children aged 0–5 years at the Melbourne Museum on Wednesday 28 October, 10am to 2pm.

Visit rompandstomp.org.au for more information.



2015 Volunteer of the Year Award

The 2015 McArthur Volunteer of the Year Award is now open for nominations.

Celebrate and acknowledge the volunteer at your service who has made a real difference by nominating him or her for this prestigious Award.

The finalists and winner will be announced at ELAA's AGM in October.

To nominate an outstanding volunteer in your organisation, please go to the ELAA website to download a nomination form and email to cmarxsen@elaa.org.au.



Thank you & Congratulations!

Congratulations to Dame Nellie Melba Kindergarten, Richmond, the winner of the ELAA Member Survey prize.

Dame Nellie Melba Kindergarten wins a two day registration to attend the 2016 Early Childhood Education conference to be held on 27 and 28 May 2016 at Caulfield Racecourse in Melbourne. The conference theme for next year is *Together we grow – connecting communities*.

A big thank you to all members that completed either the Independent or Cluster Manager survey this year. We were delighted with the response.

Your feedback about our member services – the advice line, training, resources and advocacy – is extremely valuable to us, particularly your suggestions about how we can improve. The survey results will form the basis for future planning and service delivery.

CEO's REPORT



“ *The future of early learning policy in Victoria looks bright – but as ELAA members know, our sector also faces many immediate funding and practical challenges. As an independent peak body representing the concerns of our members – service providers and parents – ELAA wants to work with the Victorian Government to make that bright future a reality, but we must first ensure that we are building on strong foundations.”*

Shane Lucas, CEO, ELAA

At ELAA, we believe that excellence in early learning for all children is the foundation of any true Education ‘State’ – whether that’s in Victoria, throughout Australia or anywhere in the world.

We were therefore pleased to see the Victorian Government release a discussion paper in late August about the importance of Early Childhood Education for the creation of an Education State – and its commitment to a community consultation process to inform that strategic direction.

After two difficult years in which our sector has had to again make the case to the Federal Government that quality early learning is of significant benefit to *all* children – a case that is founded on a wealth of research evidence and best practice – it is encouraging to work with a State Government that accepts the premise that affordable, accessible early childhood education and care is not just a workforce participation issue.

The future of early learning policy in Victoria looks bright – but as ELAA members know, our sector also faces many immediate funding and practical challenges.

As an independent peak body representing the concerns of our members – service providers and parents – ELAA wants to work with the Victorian Government to make that bright future a reality, but we must first ensure that we are building on strong foundations.

To do that, we must work collaboratively – as a sector, as a community – to ensure that early childhood education in Victoria remains viable for providers, affordable for parents, and accessible for children. The fundamental viability of early childhood education is a critical consideration in developing a future vision for Victoria as the Education State.

On 14 September, ELAA hosted a forum with members, stakeholders and sector partners to assess the discussion paper, and to develop a collaborative, strategic vision for the Education State. We were thrilled with the turn-out and the level of engagement from ELAA members such as ECMS, bestchance, GKA and BPA; research organisations such as the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children’s Hospital; social service organisations like the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Victorian Council of Social Services; thought leaders such as Anne Stonehouse; and sector partners like the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Children’s Protection Society, and the Victorian divisions of Early Childhood Intervention Services and Early Childhood Australia.

As a sector, we have many common challenges and many common priorities for action. The group wants to ensure that submissions to the Victorian Government prioritised children’s right to early learning services above all, and called on the government to ensure that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was a fundamental driver of policy and program innovation.

Our sector also wants to ensure that the government understands that the future must build sustainably on the past. We have much to be proud of in Victoria and we need to look at the strengths of our pre-school programs particularly, and seek ways to ensure they remain strong and viable into the future if an Education State is to be realised.

If there was one key message from our forum for government it was that the research into brain development is emphatic – we must start children on an early learning pathway from birth. Three year old programs and four year old kindergarten programs are critical and must be supported by government, but the State also has a role to play in ensuring that the quality of early education and care for our 0–3 year olds is not simply left to the Federal Government or to the market.

ELAA will be engaging with the State Government throughout the Education State consultation process, and we will also be working with our members and stakeholders to seek a bipartisan and sustainable approach to reform and growth of the critical early childhood education and care sector in Victoria.

Shane Lucas, CEO, ELAA

Q&A



“If you are unable to fill all positions on the night it is okay to close the elections provided you have at least elected a Secretary and the minimum number of committee members required by your constitution. You will then be able to form a quorum at committee meetings and therefore make decisions.”

Pat Rustad, Member Services Officer

Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) is being held in November and we do not think we will be able to fill all the positions, what do we do?

DON'T PANIC.

It is important that you know exactly how many positions you are required to fill so check your constitution and then start planning.

- **Proactive recruitment and personal invitations** are always the most successful strategies for encouraging people to join the committee.
- It is helpful to have a **recruitment pack** of material to give prospective members and to assure them there is lots of help available should they choose to join. Be honest regarding the workload and responsibilities but also positive about all the skills you have learnt and the networking and friendships made along the way.
- **Ask for nominations prior to the meeting** and any nominations received prior to the meeting would be considered elected to the position (unless you have more than one nomination in which case you would then need to hold an election).
- **On the night of the AGM** it is important that committee members are welcoming, enthusiastic and encouraging.

If you are unable to fill all positions on the night (do not threaten to lock doors etc. as this will usually result in nominations from people who are not going to be active members of the committee) it is okay to close the elections provided you have at least elected a Secretary and the minimum number of committee members required by your constitution. You will then be able to form a quorum at committee meetings and therefore make decisions. The remaining positions become 'vacant' positions and the committee can continue to try and fill those positions in the coming months.

The new committee is generally responsible for making decisions immediately after the AGM (unless your constitution states otherwise) and therefore it is critical that a handover meeting is held as soon as possible for exchange of information and completion of required forms.

ELAA's Early Childhood Management Manual includes additional information and templates to assist you in conducting a successful AGM and ensuring a smooth handover to the next committee. To purchase a copy, visit the shop resources section of the ELAA website, elaa.org.au.

TRAINING IN 2016

LAST
SESSION
FOR 2015!

27
OCT

Supporting staff safety: OHS & Return to Work seminar for the early childhood sector

Presenter: ELAA/Recovre

Date: Tuesday 27 October 2015 **Time:** 9am – 5pm

Venue: Southern Golf Club, Lower Dandenong Rd, Keysborough

Cost: Member: \$313.50 / Non member: \$357.50

FOR EDUCATORS, EDUCATIONAL LEADERS AND MANAGERS

1
MAR

Settling and supporting
anxious and agitated children –
evening seminar
Quality Area 1, 5 & 6

Presenter: Jo Lange

Date: Tuesday 1 March 2016

Time: 7 – 9.00pm

Venue: Manningham City Council
Chambers, 699 Doncaster Road, Doncaster.
Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$65 / Non member: \$80

3
MAR

Re-thinking events &
celebrations
Quality Area 1, 5 & 6

Presenter: Karen Glancy

Date: Thursday 3 March 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Knox Civic Centre, 511 Burwood
Highway, Wantirna South. Free parking
onsite (enter via Capital City Blvd).

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

9
MAR

Making indoor/outdoor
programs work – two
part series
Quality Area 1 & 3

20
APR

Presenter: Karen Glancy
Dates: Part 1 Wednesday 9
March 2016 and Part 2

Wednesday 20 April 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Victorian Archive Centre, 99 Shiel
St, North Melbourne. Free parking on site
(enter via Macaulay Street).

Cost: Member: \$300 / Non member: \$450

23
MAR

I'm a teacher not a manager –
the educator with two hats
Quality Area – 1, 4 & 7

Presenter: Anthony Semann

Date: Wednesday 23 March 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Darebin Art Centre, Cnr Bell St
& St Georges Rd, Preston VIC. Free parking
on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

14
APR

Responding to child abuse
& talking to children
about safety
Quality Area 1, 2, 5, 6 & 7

13
JUL

Presenter: Children's Protection
Society

9
SEP

Dates: Thursday 14 April 2016
– Victorian Archive Centre,
99 Shiel St, North Melbourne.
Free parking on site (enter via
Macaulay Street).

or

Wednesday 13 July 2016 – Victorian
Archive Centre, 99 Shiel St, North
Melbourne. Free parking on site.

or

Friday 9 September 2016 – Hobson's
Bay City Council, Civic Centre, 115 Civic
Pde, Altona. Free parking on site.

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

22
APR

Defending our pedagogy &
practices: how do we convince
others to care about what we
care about?

Quality Area – 1, 6 & 7

Presenter: Anthony Semann

Date: Friday 22 April 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Hobson's Bay City Council,
Civic Centre, 115 Civic Parade, Altona.
Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

29
APR

Conversations &
collaborations with families
Quality Area 1, 5 & 6

Presenter: Catharine Hydon

Date: Friday 29 April 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Southern Golf Club, Lower
Dandenong Road, Keysborough. Free
parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

4
MAY

Loose parts play
Quality Area 1 & 3

Presenter: Karen Glancy

Date: Wednesday 4 May 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Hobson's Bay City Council,
Civic Centre, 115 Civic Parade, Altona.
Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

FOR EDUCATORS, EDUCATIONAL LEADERS AND MANAGERS *continued*

11 MAY Practical physical & outdoor play – evening seminar
Quality Area 1, 3 & 5

Presenter: Paul Pennisi

19 JUL **Dates:** Wednesday 11 May 2016 – Manningham City Council, 699 Doncaster Rd, Doncaster. Free parking on site.

12 OCT or
Tuesday 19 July 2016 – Hobson's Bay City Council, Civic Centre, 115 Civic Pde, Altona. Free parking on site.

or
Wednesday 12 Oct 2016 – Knox Civic Centre, 511 Burwood Highway, Wantirna South. Free parking onsite (enter via Capital City Blvd).

Time: 6.30 – 9pm

Cost: Member: \$65 / Non member: \$80

9 JUN Engaging & nurturing learning environments for babies and toddlers
Quality Area 1, 3, 5 & 6

Presenter: Karen Glancy

Date: Thursday 9 June 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Manningham City Council Chambers, 699 Doncaster Road, Doncaster. Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

16 JUN Supporting pre-schoolers with conflict resolution – evening seminar
Quality Area 1, 5 & 6

Presenter: Jo Lange

Date: Thursday 16 June 2016

Time: 7 – 9.30pm

Venue: Knox Civic Centre, 511 Burwood Highway, Wantirna South. Free parking onsite (enter via Capital City Blvd).

Cost: Member: \$65 / Non member: \$80

24 JUN I'm no counsellor: How to support people in times of need and change
Quality Area – 4 & 7

Presenter: Anthony Semann

Date: Friday 24 June 2016

Time: 9.30 – 2.30pm

Venue: Manningham City Council Chambers, 699 Doncaster Road, Doncaster. Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

29 JUL Curriculum & pedagogy: exploring practice possibilities. A two part learning opportunity
Quality Area 1 & 5

26 AUG

Presenter: Catharine Hydon

Dates: Part 1 Friday 29 July and Part 2 Friday 26 August 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Victorian Archive Centre, 99 Shiel St, North Melbourne. Free parking on site (enter via Macaulay Street).

Cost: Member: \$300 / Non member: \$450

4 AUG Collaboration at its best: Team teaching that rocks the world
Quality Area – 4 & 7

Presenter: Anthony Semann

Date: Thursday 4 August 2016

Time: 9.30 – 2.30pm

Venue: Manningham City Council Chambers, 699 Doncaster Road, Doncaster. Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

12 AUG Intentional teaching in the outdoor program
Quality Area 1, 2 & 3

Presenter: Karen Glancy

Date: Friday 12 August 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Southern Golf Club, Lower Dandenong Road, Keysborough. Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

1 SEP Curriculum that changes the world. Big ideas that make education matter
Quality Area – 1, 5, 6 & 7

Presenter: Anthony Semann

Date: Thursday 1 September 2016

Time: 9.30 – 2.30pm

Venue: Darebin Arts Centre, Cnr Bell St & St Georges Rd, Preston VIC. Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

FOR EDUCATORS



Engaging with the EYLF: a professional learning session for educators who want to start from the beginning

Quality Area 1, 5 & 6

Presenter: Catharine Hydon

Date: Friday 5 August 2016

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Manningham City Council Chambers, 699 Doncaster Road, Doncaster. Free parking on site.

Cost: Member: \$150 / Non member: \$225

FOR PARENTS



Talking to children about safety – evening seminar for parents

Presenter: Children's Protection Society

Date: Thursday 28 April 2016

Time: 6.30 – 9pm

Venue: Manningham City Council Chambers, 699 Doncaster Road, Doncaster. Free parking on site.

Cost: \$50



2016 FREE COMMITTEE TRAINING

Free Committee training in partnership with the Department of Education and Training and local councils.

Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management

Welcome to the Committee

Join us for a comprehensive introduction to the roles and responsibilities of committees of management of early childhood services.

In this free session we will discuss your role:

- in providing good governance as a member of a committee of management of an Incorporated Association
- as an employer
- as an Approved Provider of an early childhood service
- as the manager of a funded organisation.

Tuesday 16 February 7pm – 9.30pm	Maroondah City Council, Croydon Office – Yarra Valley Room, 7 Civic Square, Croydon
Thursday 25 February 7pm – 9.30pm	Darebin Council Offices, 274 Gower Street, Preston
Saturday 27 February 9.30 – 1pm	Hobson's Bay City Council, Civic Centre, 115 Civic Pde, Altona
Monday 29 February 7pm – 9.30pm	Yarra Ranges Council, 15 Anderson Street, Lilydale
Thursday 3 March 7pm – 9.30pm	Mornington Peninsula Council Chambers Cnr Queen & Main Street, Mornington
Tuesday 8 March 7pm – 9.30pm	Banyule Council Chambers, Nellie Ibbott Room (no disability access please advise if needed), 275 Upper Heidelberg Road, Ivanhoe
Thursday 17 March 7pm – 9.30pm	Stonnington Council, Prahran Town Hall, 180 Greville Street, Prahran

Hot Topics

ELAA presents workshops on specialist topics that are important to volunteer committees as managers of early childhood services. These all conducted at the ELAA Office, Level 3, 145 Smith Street, Fitzroy.

Wednesday 24 February, 10 – 11.30am & 6 – 7.30pm
Understanding your responsibilities as a member of the committee of an Incorporated Association

Wednesday 16 March, 10 – 11.30am & 6 – 7.30pm
Financial management – Key practices and procedures to protect your organisation and it's members.

Wednesday 27 April, 10 – 11.30am & 6 – 7.30pm
Budget & Fees – Developing and understanding your budget and it's impact on the sustainability of your service

REGS IN FOCUS

Staffing

This new regular feature will focus on specific Education and Care Services National Regulations to ensure that services and staff are clear about their particular responsibilities.

In this edition we shine the spotlight on **staffing requirements**. We look at **the new child/staff ratios, qualification requirements and the definition of 'Working Towards'**.

Who are 'educators'?

An educator is defined as an individual who provides education and care for children as part of an education and care service.

'Educators' include individuals who hold or are 'actively working towards' an approved Early Childhood Teaching Qualification, Approved Diploma Qualification or Approved Certificate III Qualification.

'Educators' also includes those people who, immediately before 1 January 2012, were recognised under the former education and care services law of any participating jurisdiction as a Certificate III level educator (in Victoria this refers to Assistants who met the 'grandfathering' requirements of the Children's Services Act and regulations).

What does Actively Working Towards mean?

Regulation 10 defines the requirements for 'Actively Working Towards' an approved qualification as

1. being enrolled in a course for the qualification
2. having commenced the course
3. making satisfactory progress towards completion
4. meeting the requirements to maintain enrolment

5. holding an approved Certificate III qualification OR having completed the approved Certificate III units OR having completed 30% of the units in an approved ECT qualification.

A person who meets requirements 1 to 4 above may be counted as a Certificate III qualified educator. They must also give the approved provider documentary evidence from their course provider that they meet requirements 2 to 4.

A person who meets all five requirements above may be counted as a Diploma qualified educator. They must give the approved provider documentary evidence from their course provider that they meet requirements 2 to 5.

From January 1st 2016 how many educators do we need at our service?

Regulation 123 outlines the minimum number of staff required to educate and care for children as the following:

Birth – 24 months – 1 educator to 4 children

24 months to 36 months – 1 educator to 5 children (in Victoria it is 1 educator to 4 children)

Children 36 months (3 years) to school age – 1 educator to 11 children

Who can be counted in the child staff ratios?

Only educators working directly with the children can be included in the child staff ratios. This is defined in Regulation 13 as being

- Physically present; and
- Directly engaged in providing education and care to the children

A new educator without an approved qualification can be counted towards educator to child ratios for a three month probationary period (Regulation 126(A))

How many qualified staff do we require at our service?

All services must have an Early Childhood Teacher or access to an Early Childhood Teacher (the amount of time depends

on the size of the service as outlined in regulations 130 – 134). NB. In Victoria, a funded program must be planned and delivered by an Early Childhood Teacher for at least 15 hours per week.

Regulation 126 states that at least 50% of educators working with the children must have at least an Approved Diploma level education and care qualification.

All other staff must have, or be actively working towards at least an approved Certificate III level education and care qualification.

Examples:

- **One group of 25 x 4 year old children in a funded kindergarten program.**

You will need 3 educators:

This could be (as a minimum)

- An Early Childhood teacher
- A Diploma qualified educator; and
- A Certificate III educator

- **One group of 22 x 4 year old children in a funded kindergarten program**

You will need 2 educators:

This could be (as a minimum)

- An Early Childhood teacher; and
- A Certificate III educator

- **Two groups of 4 year old children attending at the same time (double unit) with a total of 52 children**

You will need 5 educators (minimum)

This could be

- Two Early Childhood teachers
- 1 Diploma Qualified Educator; and
- 2 Certificate III educators

Are the ratios worked out according to the number of children in a room or in the service at any one time?

Ratio requirements can be determined on a room by room basis or by adding up all the children in attendance and determining the number of staff required for the ages and number of children in attendance at any one time. The Approved Provider may allocate staff as needed across the rooms but must be able to demonstrate that adequate supervision and quality interactions with children are maintained at all times.

How do we work out what staff we need in a long day care with mixed ages?

If you operate an early childhood service that cares and educates children from different age groups you may wish to calculate the educator to child ratios under the requirements of Regulation 123(2). This allows children in older age groups to be considered as part of the ratios for children in younger age groups. There is an online Mixed Age group ratios calculator on the DET website (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/regulation/nqfmixedAgesjan14.pdf>)

Example:

Number of children	5 children (under 3 years)	7 children (over 3 years)
Number of educators required	2 qualified educators	1 qualified educator
Number of children (mixed ages)	5 + 7 = 12 children	
Total number of qualified educators required (mixed ages)	3 qualified educators	
Overall qualification requirements for mixed ages group	2 diploma qualified educators and 1 certificate III educator	

Are there any waivers?

Services who are unable to recruit appropriately qualified staff and can demonstrate that they have advertised widely can apply to the DET for a temporary waiver for up to 12 months.

For further information a range of Fact Sheets can be found on the Department of Education and Training and ACECQA websites

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/nqffactsheets.aspx

www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/faqnqfstaff.aspx#link60

www.acecqa.gov.au/educators-and-providers1/educators-and-providers-faqs

ELAA is funded to support services with implementing the new ratio requirements. Please contact us on 9489 3500 if you would like further information.





CULTURAL COMPETENCY

HONOURING CHILDREN'S CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC RIGHTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

By Jade Fraser and Catharine Hydon

Jade Fraser, fka children's services and early childhood expert Catharine Hydon, presented a popular session on Cultural Competency at the 2015 Early Childhood Education Conference, Together we grow. This article shares some insights from the presentation.

"Respecting diversity means within the curriculum valuing and reflecting the practices, values and beliefs of families."
(EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p.13)

Culturally competent practices are central to our capacity to meet the needs and best interests of young children. While most early childhood educators agree that they

respect children's rights and value cultural diversity, the reality is that our actions too often remain superficial. We are sometimes reluctant to engage in the politics of diversity, preferring to steer clear of the courageous conversations of rights and honouring difference. Educators, children and families using our early childhood services continue to receive the message that their home language and culture, and therefore their identity and sense of belonging, is not fully valued. How do families and children know that we value their identity unless we are explicit in our reflection of this value?

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

(UNHCR 1989), Australia has agreed to be internationally accountable for ensuring that children have every opportunity to exercise their rights as set out by the Convention. Article 31 of the Convention specifically addresses children's cultural and linguistic rights and affirms that "Children have the right to learn and use the language and customs of their families, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live" (UNICEF 1996). Educators play a crucial role in enacting these rights. Through critical reflection, educators are invited to consider how to provide opportunities for these rights to be realised. This becomes particularly challenging when our language and cultural experiences are very different to those of the children and families accessing our services.

The definition of cultural competency outlined in the EYLF provides a starting point to addressing questions of practice.

Cultural competency is 'much more than awareness of cultural differences. It is the ability to understand, communicate with,

and effectively interact with people across cultures' (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p.16).

Cultural competency is a lens applied to our thoughts and actions when we work with children and families. It is referred to as a journey or continuum because there is no end to culturally competent practices and understandings. Therefore, cultural competence is about the ability to be responsive to culture and competently work with children and families from all cultural backgrounds. When we make intentional efforts to develop respectful and supportive relationships we send powerful messages of respect, we begin to understand and value the influence that culture has on experiences, perspectives, expectations and practices. These efforts enhance our ability to support a child's identity, sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Another important beginning step towards cultural competence is to reflect on your own world view and how it has been influenced by the cultural values implicit in your life. Educators who identify the cultural influences that shape their own experiences and perspectives are able to recognise the impact of culture

on others. This understanding can assist early childhood services to embed cultural perspectives throughout their programs and relationships in order to create a culturally rich and safe environment for all children and families.

Another important action to consider is the way we support children's first or home language.

"Children's use of their home languages underpins their sense of identity and their conceptual development. Children feel a sense of *belonging* when their language, interaction styles and ways of communication are valued. They have the right to be continuing users of their home language as well as to develop competency in Standard Australian English." (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p. 38)

Of course learning English is an important and necessary skill for living in Australia, however the learning of an additional language should never be at the expense of the first or home language. There is sometimes a misconception that children in the process of learning English as an additional language might be delayed in their learning – in fact, maintaining first

language supports and enhances learning. Early childhood educators and services have a vital role in supporting children and families to maintain their languages, identity and wellbeing while also learning a new language.

Cultural competency is about everyday practicalities as much as big concepts and principles. Educators create culturally supportive programs and environments when they work collaboratively with families to include elements of family life into the service. Familiar items from children's homes, celebrations that recognise the important times in families lives and routines that respond to children's everyday lives are just a few of the ordinary ways we can make cultural competence real.

Respecting the cultural and linguistic identity of the children and families we work with is a sign of our ethical and professional practice. At its best, it contributes to the wellbeing of whole communities and ensures that Australia nurtures its diversity now and into the future.

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EDUCATING THE EDUCATORS – THE KEY TO CHILD ROAD SAFETY

By Caroline Milburn

Parental confusion about using the safest, age and size-appropriate car seats for children could be reduced if family day care services were better equipped to pass on safety information to families, according to a new study.

It found that family day care services were a vital but underused resource for educating parents about how to safely transport children in cars.

“Parents see early childhood educators as good, credible sources of general health information about children and keeping children safe in cars is a health issue,” said the study’s senior researcher, Dr Julie Brown, of Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA), an independent, not-for-profit medical research institute.

“Family day care educators have lots of close interactions with parents so there is great scope for utilising educators as delivery points for health promotion. We’ve shown in other studies that the quality of child restraint use in cars can be improved if we provide good, coordinated support to educators about child restraint information so that they can pass that knowledge on to parents.”

Family day care educators are registered with a family day care service to care for children aged from 0-12 in the educator’s home. Family day care is the fastest growing area in the early childhood sector. In 2015 the number of family day care services in Australia has increased by 20 per cent within a year.

Educators regularly use their own cars to take children to and from school, to kindergarten or to other activities.

The study by Dr Brown and her colleagues is the first to investigate child car restraint safety practices and knowledge among family day care educators and the extent to which this knowledge is being passed on to parents.

ff *Parent's don't cite educators as a source of information and we don't know why that is. It could be that they don't recognise the informal transition of knowledge that the educator is passing on or that if an educator passes on a brochure from a local road safety agency the parents see the agency as the source of information rather than the educator."*

Dr Julie Brown, Neuroscience Research Australia

Eighty-two educators and 142 families from 32 family day care services across urban and regional Victoria were surveyed as part of the study by the research team from NeuRA, the University of New South Wales and VicRoads, Victoria's road safety authority.

The study found 70 per cent of educators gave parents advice about child restraints in cars and 88 per cent of educators said they had received training about the correct use of child restraints. But only nine per cent of families surveyed said their family day care educator was a source of information about child restraints.

"A more structured approach to training and support for family day care services is required to ensure consistent and effective information exchange with parents," the study said. "While family day care educators are a potential health promotion delivery point about child restraint use, this potential is currently being underutilised."

Among those educators who advised parents about the correct way to use restraints, most gave the advice verbally or handed brochures to parents. Dr Brown said it was unclear why there was such a discrepancy between the high number of educators giving information to parents and the low numbers of parents reporting that educators were a source of information about the correct use of child restraints in cars.

"Parent's don't cite educators as a source of information and we don't know why that is," Dr Brown said. "It could be that they don't recognise the informal transition of knowledge that the educator is passing on or that if an educator passes on a brochure from a local road safety agency the parents see the agency as the source of information rather than the educator."

"The type of information being passed on and the way it is being passed on to parents is variable. We need to ensure

that educators get the best information and that there is more consistency between services in delivering the information."

The study's findings were published recently in the prestigious journal *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*. Most of the families who chose to respond to the survey were highly educated and came from high socio-economic backgrounds.

When asked if they knew Australia's laws for children travelling in vehicles, 67 per cent of the families surveyed said they were confident about their level of knowledge, but few could correctly state the minimum age when children can use forward facing child safety seats and booster seats.

The biggest area of confusion for parents, involved not knowing when older children are legally allowed to graduate from their booster seat to an adult seat belt or allowed to sit in the front seat.

Under Australian law, all children aged up to seven are required to use appropriate child car seats when travelling in a motor vehicle. The law's minimum standards for transporting children in vehicles require that:

- Children aged up to at least six months old must use a rear facing child car seat
- Children aged up to at least four must use a forward facing child car seat
- Children aged up to at least seven must use a booster seat
- Children aged beyond seven must use a booster seat or an adult seat belt

Dr Brown said family day care educators generally had good knowledge about appropriate child restraints in cars. But there was room to improve educator and parental knowledge, particularly about when it is safe for older children to graduate from using booster seats and when it is safe for them to sit in the front seat. This was especially important for parents from non-English speaking

backgrounds because previous studies had shown that these families were at higher risk of transporting children unsafely.

"Families from non-English speaking backgrounds have problems with the way they restrain children in cars, not because they don't want to do the right thing but because they have difficulty accessing the level of detail they need to understand how to use the appropriate child restraints," Dr Brown said.

"For example there may be a brochure in three different languages saying that a child up to seven must use a restraint. But the level of detail about what sort of restraint for children of different ages may not be in the brochure and you may have to go elsewhere to find that information. That's when these families have difficulty accessing the more detailed information."

Family day care is popular among families and educators from diverse cultural backgrounds. Many of Victoria's newest family day care services are located in population growth areas whose new residents include large numbers of migrants and refugees. Nationally about 38 per cent of family day care educators speak a language other than English, according to federal government figures.

In Victoria almost half of family day care educators are from non-English speaking backgrounds, according to previous research cited in Dr Brown's study.



“ To our knowledge, this is the first time that something so comprehensive in a range of languages has been developed about the use of child restraints. We’re providing these new resources and structured training for educators to help overcome the issues that the sector and the study have highlighted.”

Zora Marko, ELAA’s early childhood road safety program Manager

Ms Zora Marko, ELAA’s early childhood road safety program Manager, agrees with the study’s conclusion that the demographic profile of family day care meant the services were ideally placed to reach out to parents from non-English speaking backgrounds to improve their understanding of how to transport children safely.

Ms Marko, has been working with VicRoads and the sector’s peak organisation Family Day Care Australia, over the past few years examining the needs of family day care educators and service providers.

This work has since led to the development of a best practice road safety policy, *Safe Transport Policy (Family Day Care)*, for the family day care sector, with free tailored training and resources to improve educator and parental knowledge about the safe transportation of children.

An information brochure, *Travelling with Children in Cars*, has recently been produced in 22 languages by ELAA, funded through TAC’s Community Grants program. Audio file versions of the brochure have been created in 10 languages, with more languages planned. This translated material complements work ELAA undertakes in delivering Victoria’s early childhood road safety education program, *Starting Out Safely*, funded by VicRoads.

“To our knowledge, this is the first time that something so comprehensive in a range of languages has been developed about the use of child restraints,” Ms Marko said. “We’re providing these new resources and structured training for educators to help overcome the issues that the sector and the study have highlighted.

“If educators are more confident about the quality of the information they’re receiving on child restraints, they’ll be more confident relaying this information more effectively to parents. This is really important for families from non-English speaking backgrounds because they often feel more comfortable seeking information from educators from the same cultural background.”

In August, ELAA launched a website www.childroadsafety.org.au containing online versions of the new brochures and other new resources for home-based and centre-based early childhood services.

Ms Marko said the website was developed to provide a central location for educators and parents to get clear, easily accessible information about early childhood road safety education and the safe transportation of children. Most of the website’s material is relevant for use throughout Australia and New Zealand and can be downloaded free.

It includes practical tips such as an easy five-step test to judge when a child can safely graduate from wearing a booster seat to an adult seat belt. The test, devised by road safety experts, is based on a child’s height and best practices that are higher than the minimum standards required under current road safety laws.

SAFEST FIT: When a child can use an adult seat belt or sit in the front seat

The five-step test:

Use this test to judge whether a child is big enough to be safely restrained by an adult seat belt. The child should be able to:

- 1** Sit with their back against the seat back
- 2** Bend their knees comfortably over the front of the seat cushion
- 3** Sit with the sash belt across their mid-shoulder
- 4** Sit with the lap belt across the top of their thighs
- 5** Remain in this position for the whole trip.

Source: www.childroadsafety.org.au





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PLAYGROUPS ENGAGE LOCAL FAMILIES TO SUPPORT EARLY LEARNING

By Janine Regan, Manager Practice and Research, Playgroup Victoria

Children's development and learning starts and continues within their family. Janine Regan looks at the interconnectedness between parents, communities, educators and playgroups which enhance children's early learning and development.

Children are born with an inherent need to connect with others and it is through strong, warm and loving relationships that children grow and learn. As a child's inner world begins to grow, so do they.

From extended family through to local neighbourhood and community connections, the child develops his sense of identity and makes sense of the world around him and his place in it. The rate of brain development in these first years is phenomenal, a rate of growth that will never be repeated at any time over the rest of his life. It is the connections that the child makes with trusted adults, both at home and in the community, that form strong patterns for life long learning.

Where do children learn?

Parents, families, teachers and the community all influence a child's learning and developmental trajectories.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory emphasises the many different impacts on the child and the effects of the different environmental systems that the child encounters. (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

According to this theory, the child is at the centre of interactive microsystems including family, community, educational settings and activities that the child participates in. This ecological theory underpins research that demonstrates how parenting practices, the quality of education and the resources of a community all interact to influence the learning outcomes and developmental trajectories of young children from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Ryan, Fauth, and Brooks-Gunn 2006).

The most important microsystem for a young child is the family, with research confirming the predominant influence of family on a child's cognitive and language functioning (NICHD, 2006).

Understanding the interacting circles of influence in a child's life, educators should then embrace opportunities to support a holistic approach to children's learning.

Educators who look beyond the doors of their service, and foster strong connections with parents, families and their community, optimise children's learning outcomes. Playgroups offer opportunities for early childhood educators to connect with local children, parents and community.

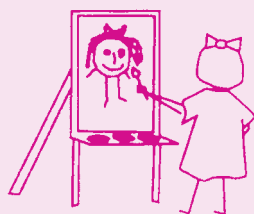
Playgroups for families with children 0–3

Playgroup complements the role that childcare and kindergarten have in a young child's growth and development from birth to the years prior to school. During this crucial time, children learn fundamental cognitive, physical, emotional, and social principles that become the building blocks that facilitate later learning and development.

Playgroups help to lay the foundations for children's lifelong learning. Research conducted by the Telethon Institute found that children consistently attending playgroup are better prepared for kindergarten and school, especially where children experience disadvantage. (Hancock, Lawrence, Mitrou, Zarb, Berthelsen, Nicholson, Zubrick, 2012).

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The Early Years Framework reflects the important role early childhood services play in supporting the capacity and efforts of families to support and guide their child's learning and development. By connecting to local playgroups, early childhood services can partner with families as a starting point for early learning and parental engagement.

Parents as life long teachers

Parents are a child's first and most enduring teacher and active involvement in their children's early learning prepares them for ongoing involvement in educational settings, including early childhood education and care centres and school.

Playgroups promote parents as the child's first educator and provide opportunities for parents to learn, share, and transfer play-based activities and experiences to the home environment. Interaction with parents at home has the greatest impact on a child's social, emotional and intellectual development.

Strong attachment between a parent and child enhances a child's learning experiences and development. Playgroups offer parents the opportunity to make the most of the "teachable" moments of everyday life. Research indicates that positive parental engagement in their child's learning significantly influences student academic attainment. The key to facilitating positive change in a child's academic attainment is the engagement of parents in learning outcomes in the home.

Connecting local playgroups with families

Connecting with families through playgroup is a local approach to increasing community connectedness and engagement between families and services. The positive outcomes for early learning services include:

- connection with first time parents and/or families new to the area and provision of information, support and resources to families
- establishment and enhancement of positive partnerships between staff and new families prior to the child's transition to the service
- improved parental perceptions of the service and staff
- facilitation of enrolments.



Practical ways educators connect with families through playgroup

- visit the local playgroups – offer advice and support about quality play experiences and transitions – from playgroup to early childhood education and care services and school
- offer to host a playgroup at your service – encourage parents who have children at your service to start a playgroup with their younger child while their older child is at kindergarten
- invite playgroup families to an open day at your centre.

- link new or isolated families in to other parents and their community via the local playgroup.

This article is underpinned by significant research. Please contact the author for more information on the references, links and acknowledgements, via email janine@playgroup.org.au.

For general information about Playgroups, visit the Playgroup Victoria website www.playgroup.org.au.

Connecting Rural Communities

Hepburn Kindergarten, Hepburn Springs

Seven years ago, Hepburn Kindergarten was concerned by its low enrolments. Following the advice of a local MCH nurse, the kindergarten decided to start a community playgroup at their centre. The playgroup was promoted widely throughout the community and, as word of mouth spread, the playgroup blossomed.

The playgroup now has 23 families and is an integral part of the Kindergarten. The Kindergarten committee of management oversees the playgroup and provides access to kindergarten resources and equipment. Director Wendy Hawker, who regularly drops in to visit and chat with the playgroup families, says that the playgroup helps the community connect with each other and with the service prior to their children attending a kindergarten program. In addition, the kindergarten has also opened its doors to a gay and lesbian parent's playgroup who now meet at the centre monthly.

Children become familiar with the kindergarten environment, parents form friendships, kindergarten enrolments have grown and community connections are strengthened. A win-win situation!



LESS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, MORE SCREEN TIME – DOES IT MATTER?

By Trina Hinkley, a research fellow at the Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research, Faculty of Health, Deakin University

Trina shares with us the latest research which highlights the importance of increasing physical activity and decreasing screen-time for positive outcomes in young children's health and well-being.

As parents, we want to do the best we can for our children. Similarly, as educators, we want to provide the children in our care with the best opportunities for a healthy start to life and smooth transition to school. When we think about our children's health, we tend to worry more about coughs and colds than longer term issues, and many of us believe that our children's behaviours are unlikely to impact their health or development at

an early age. For instance, we think that our children are naturally physically active – mostly all we need to do is open the door for them and they'll run around and have as much activity as they need. When it comes to screen time – using devices such as TV, iPads and computers – we believe they offer valuable benefits such as quiet time, time out for busy parents, and are beneficial to children's education. Certainly, promoters of 'educational' games and programs suggest that this is the case.

However, evidence now suggests that young children typically participate in less physical activity, and more screen time, than Australian and international health

guidelines recommend (Hinkley, Salmon, Okely, Crawford & Hesketh, 2012).

Australian guidelines recommend that children five years and younger participate in at least three hours of physical activity every day. Children aged birth through two years are recommended to take part in no screen time at all, and children aged two through five years should use no more than one hour of screen time each day (Department of Health, 2014).

But what does it really matter if your child, or the children in your care, don't meet these guidelines? As it turns out, it matters a lot. Higher levels of physical activity during early childhood are beneficial for maintaining a healthy weight, developing motor skills such as jumping, kicking and catching, well-being, cognitive development, bone health and heart health (Timmons et al., 2012). Lower levels of screen time are beneficial for maintaining a healthy weight, well-being and cognitive development (Leblanc et al., 2012).

Many of us will be familiar with the concepts of things like maintaining a healthy weight, bone health and heart health. The impact of physical activity and screen time on children's well-being and cognitive development may be less well understood, and it's these outcomes we'll explore further here.

Well-being incorporates children's psychological and social health. It is considered to be the presence of higher levels of positive, and lower levels of adverse, psychological and social attributes and behaviours. These may include things like children's social skills, self-regulation, and physical aggression, anxiety, and attention problems. Therefore, children who have higher levels of social skills and better self-regulation, and lower levels of aggression, anxiety and attention problems, would be considered to have more favourable well-being overall. Children's physical activity and screen time may play a role here. For instance, children who have higher levels of physical activity have been shown to have lower levels of conduct problems,

“ But what does it really matter if your child, or the children in your care, don’t meet these guidelines? As it turns out, it matters a lot. Higher levels of physical activity during early childhood are beneficial for maintaining a healthy weight, developing motor skills such as jumping, kicking and catching, well-being, cognitive development, bone health and heart health.”

peer problems, and emotional symptoms, and more favourable levels of emotional competence. Children who have lower levels of screen time, particularly television viewing, tend to have lower levels of aggression, hyperactivity, are victimized less frequently and are less likely to be a bully. Lower levels of screen time are also associated with better self-control and more positive classroom engagement (Hinkley, Teychenne, Downing, Ball, Salmon & Hesketh, 2014).

Optimal cognitive development during early childhood includes the development of cognitive abilities in a number of areas. These include language, memory, and executive function which is the ability to regulate thoughts, actions, and emotions. Emerging evidence is showing that physical activity and screen time can impact children’s cognitive development. Increased physical activity during early childhood has been shown to be beneficial to a number of aspects of cognitive development including language, executive function, flexibility of ideas, self-regulation (the ability to control our emotions and regulate our behaviour) and sustained attention. Children who

spend less time in screen time tend to have better language development (more words and better word understanding) and understanding of numbers. Children who watched violent shows or cartoons tended to do even more poorly in these areas. Of note also, children who spend more time reading, or being read to, tend to have stronger language development (Carson et al., in press-a; Carson et al., in press-b).

While the body of evidence investigating these aspects of children’s behaviours and development is still small, the emerging evidence is fairly clear: physical activity is beneficial for children and screen time can be detrimental. So, what can you do to support healthy outcomes in your children?

For parents, a great tool to work out how much time we spend doing just about anything is monitoring. This involves keeping a really careful record of how much time your child spends being active and using screens. A simple diary on the fridge works well. Pop your child’s name down one side and mark times of the day across the top. You might like to have one each for physical activity and screen time, or include them both on the one. Simply

mark off the times your child was being active (time outside can be easy to keep track of) or using screen time. After a few days, add up the times. You might find this surprising! Parents often find their child is doing much less activity and much more screen time than they thought. Once you know how much time your child spends in each behaviour, and at what times of the day, it’s easier to have an idea of how that might be better managed. Repeating this process of monitoring from time to time helps to keep things on track.

Some of the things we know support physical activity during early childhood include being a boy (so girls might need extra support), time outside, and parents or other adults being active with children. Finding activities that you and your children enjoy will help to make active time more fun – and this is what it should be about! Spend more time outside – explore your neighbourhood on an adventure walk – how many different types of flowers or seed pods can you find? How many trees can your child count between corners? How many different colours are letterboxes painted? Touch, feel and talk about these things as you

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“Educators can support children being active by allowing plenty of time outside – an average of 15 minutes per hour is a great start. Ensuring there is plenty of equipment for children to use is helpful and providing instruction in fundamental movement skills such as jumping, catching and kicking (there are lots of programs available) have been shown to be really beneficial.”

find them to help your child's language development also. Invite a friend along to help your child practice their social skills. The times your child might usually watch TV can be replaced with blocks, reading or looking at books, craft activities, cooking and helping around the house – children are amazing helpers when chores are turned into a fun game. Educators can support children being active by allowing plenty of time outside – an average of 15 minutes per hour is a great start. Ensuring there is plenty of equipment for children to use is helpful and providing instruction in fundamental movement skills such as jumping, catching and kicking (there are lots of programs available) have been shown to be really beneficial. Here's a

great resource for parents and educators alike to help with ideas for fundamental movement skills and physical activity: <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/primary/pdhpe/gamesport/fms001.htm>

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2015 National Training Schedule now available

To help ELAA members begin planning their training requirements for the new year, Allianz' workers compensation courses for 2015 are now available online.

The online National Training Schedule, gives you access to book your training courses 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Other benefits include immediate confirmation for your booked course, email and SMS reminders and the ability to pay for courses via EFT, MasterCard or Visa, that incur a fee.

Our 2015 training offerings will be reviewed quarterly to ensure they continue to be relevant and topical. Courses scheduled for the second half of 2015 will be released in March.

As well as standard course offerings, three new courses have been introduced.

- Incident Investigation – This course will provide participants with an overview of incident investigations, reporting, notification obligations and prevention strategies in the workplace;
- Prevention of Musculoskeletal Injuries in the Workplace – This course will examine the common causes of musculoskeletal injuries, including manual tasks and slips, trips and falls. The course will focus on prevention and provide ergonomic principles and risk management strategies to implement in the workplace.
- Enhancing Wellbeing in the Workplace – This workshop will help you understand the impact of health and wellbeing levels on workforce capability and the benefits that a wellbeing program can add to your workplace. It will also assist you to develop and implement a strategic wellbeing program in your workplace.

For more detailed descriptions of these new courses and all other courses available go to <http://www.allianz.com.au/workers-compensation/training/>

For all queries regarding the ELAA/Allianz partnership and the benefits it provides or general queries regarding Workers' Compensation, please contact your Allianz Business Account Manager, Ryan Phillips, on (03) 9234 3633 or via email ryan.phillips@allianz.com.au.



HELPING YOUR SERVICE TO SUPPORT THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN



KidsMatter, in collaboration with a group of highly regarded Aboriginal cultural consultants, has developed a series of powerful and emotional animations and guidance resources for early childhood services to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

The animations provide a rich resource for early childhood services to use with children and their families, as well as in staff professional development. “It’s very important for non-Indigenous educators to expand their knowledge of Indigenous culture, and the animations will give them a very good base to start from”, said Rachael McBrien, an early childhood educator who was involved in the project.

There are twelve animations, which have been created to communicate key messages about resilience, the importance of adults taking care of themselves and cultural identity. They depict everyday interactions in the lives of children and families and feature a range of kin relationships, cultural roles and responsibilities, environments and experiences. The animations highlight the importance that these interactions can play in fostering children’s social and emotional wellbeing.

In developing the animations, two core groups of cultural consultants from Central Australia and Victoria were engaged from the start of the project. They worked with KidsMatter to develop the conceptual framework for the videos, including the themes and key messages,

so that they reflect the KidsMatter framework. The cultural consultants drew on their own life and professional experiences to contribute deep understandings of social and emotional wellbeing from an Indigenous worldview and were very generous in sharing their insights and personal stories. Aunty Di Kerr, a Wurundjeri Elder who was engaged as a cultural consultant said, “We don’t often have a voice, and to me this is our voice. We’re sharing our stories and it’s very heartfelt.”

The animations are authentic, relatable and emotionally and spiritually moving. They acknowledge some of the struggles experienced by Aboriginal people while also conveying the strengths within Indigenous culture. They contain messages about hope, being proud, connecting with culture, land and family, staying strong, finding and being role models, and asking for help when you need it.

Carmen Naivalu was one of the Indigenous psychologists engaged by KidsMatter to provide feedback in the context of contemporary research in Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing. She said, “It’s a kind of journey that the viewer is supposed to go on, and find some kind of personal meaning, in themselves, about what this animation is about.”

Because the themes and messages might be relatable to an individual’s own personal experiences, it’s important to be aware that viewing any of the animations may trigger feelings and other reactions in

viewers, and those reactions will vary from person to person, depending on their culture, background and context. KidsMatter has developed a Safety Statement to help professionals to be aware of possible different reactions and how to support people during and after viewing the animations.

The Safety Statement is part of a series of guidance resources, including three videos, that has been developed to help early childhood services to use the animations safely and constructively. Psychologist Dr. Lyn O’Grady, Manager of the KidsMatter team at the Australian Psychological Society said, “We’ve provided a variety of stories and tools for professionals and communities to use to support Aboriginal children’s social and emotional wellbeing. The stories and guidance resources can help professionals to increase their own knowledge and understanding about Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing as well as support the development of stronger relationships with families and communities.”

The animations and guidance resources are designed to be used by any early childhood service, no matter how many Aboriginal families attend their service or are in their broader community, or how strong those relationships are. The intention is to support early childhood services to build connections and develop stronger relationships with local Aboriginal families, in order to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

Rachael McBrien says, “Knowing your community is very important. There might be people within your early childhood community who can assist you, and the animations are a very good starting point. I think it will encourage educators to reflect on what they know and what they don’t know as well”.

The animations and guidance resources are all available online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/atsi-resources/aboriginal-animations. For further information, please email enquiries@kidsmatter.edu.au.

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INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

This new regular feature is an opportunity to share everyday practices from quality early learning programs which promote inspiring learning experiences for young children.

Reaching out to families

By Lyndal Bankuti, Parent and Inclusion Support Team Leader, Hume City

The Family and Children's Services Department at Hume City supports families in one of Australia's fastest-growing and culturally-diverse communities. They offer a diverse range of programs that reflect the principles of the Social Justice Charter and guidelines from the Department of Education and Training. Some of their innovative programs, which have been developed as a response to their community's needs, reflect a partnership approach to support vulnerable families.

Access to Early Learning (AEL) aims to improve the participation of vulnerable three year olds in preschool programs by improving parenting capacity and including those families most at risk.

AEL facilitators work with families to build trust and a sense of achievement, supporting them to engage in early years' services and community supports. This may include parenting support, counselling, playgroups and referral to Preschool Field Officers or Early Intervention Services.

For more information about Hume City Council's AEL program, contact Family and Children's Services on 9205 2528 or email contactus@hume.vic.gov.au

The Hamse family

The Hamse* family were referred to the AEL program by Child First, having recently immigrated to Australia from Iraq.

The Hamse family are struggling financially due to the father (Ahmed) being unwell and unable to work and the mother (Rabia) with physical limitations and a history of depression. There are three children in the family aged 4, 3 and 18 months. The family are isolated with no relatives living in Australia, and have been unable to make social connections due to financial and health issues.

As a result of AEL involvement both older children were supported to attend a funded 4yr old kindergarten program. The 3 and 4 year old children have speech delays and have commenced speech therapy. AEL facilitators have collaborated with the speech therapist through regular care team meetings, to incorporate language development into their individual home learning plan, and with the preschool educators, to ensure a warm engagement with the service.

Through Rabia regularly taking the children to preschool she has formed friendships with the other mothers and has now joined a local playgroup. Rabia looks forward to playgroup and the opportunity to socialise with other mothers. She has also noticed that her youngest daughter has slowly begun to play alongside the other children at playgroup, demonstrating her growing independence, confidence and curiosity.

All children have now been successfully linked in to the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Service and are up to date with their immunisations. Through MCH Rabia has been supported to access services to address her mental health needs.

Ahmed has expressed his appreciation of the services supporting his family and is enjoying his involvement in his children's learning.

** All names have been changed to protect the identity of the family.*



Embracing Environmental Education

By Barbara Sidey, Director, Riddells Creek Kindergarten

We would like to share with you our Environmental Education program at Riddells Creek Kindergarten, a Macedon Ranges Shire Council managed service, which reflects children's natural curiosity and wonder about the natural world. This is coupled with strong educator-child relationships using intentional teaching to expand children's understandings and introduce them to sustainability practices.

Our outdoor area is the 'third teacher', offering children many areas to explore, and develop play ideas in a philosophy which promotes and facilitates nature based play. In our Quality Assessment last year we received an overall rating of *Exceeding*, achieving 6 out of 7 exceeding ratings.

ff *Our outdoor area is the 'third teacher', offering children many areas to explore, and develop play ideas in a philosophy which promotes and facilitates nature based play."*



The physical environment particularly impressed the assessor with her commenting that the links between our kindergarten philosophy, program content and inspiring outdoor area were strong and meaningful for the children who attended.

We raise chickens and our other pets include 2 budgies, 6 stick insects and 2 fish. The children, along with an educator, are responsible for looking after them and a designated daily "Garden Helper" sees each child working 1-1 to attend to a variety of outdoor chores including things such asplanting, weeding, pruning, raking leaves, feeding the compost bin, spreading compost on the garden and vegetable beds, feeding the worm farm and compost bins and Mrs Magpie scraps from lunch, collecting worm wee and putting it on the garden and what-ever else needs attending too. Children enjoy play areas to engage in tactile play including sandpit, digging patch, mud pit, stick art box and gravel tub.

All educators are passionate about Environmental Education and embedding sustainability principles as part of the every day. Each person contributes to promoting this area and we find that by establishing caring, positive, respectful relationships with children, the learning is amazing and deeply satisfying for all those involved.

Good design and early learning

While the key to quality early learning programs is strong educator and children's relationships along with intentional teaching practice to support play-based learning, the environment does make a difference to children's learning experiences. St Andrews Kindergarten had the opportunity to create some much needed extra space to accommodate their 4 year old program, which for over forty years, was run from the parish hall. While they had a limited budget, they decided to engage an architect to help them design a space that was purpose built to provide rich play experiences. They were particularly keen to integrate outdoor and indoor play spaces and create a large, light multi-use building. The educators and children love the seamless interaction with their friends between the indoor/outdoor environments, the light and the flexibility of the space.

More information is available at www.standrewskinder.org.au and www.atelierwagner.com.au.



MEMBER PROFILE



“ *The most rewarding aspect has been working with the amazing people on the CoM to support and improve our great kinder. None of us are experts in early learning regulations and governance, but together we have a great brains trust happening.”*

Vida Ivan, President, Summerhill Park Kindergarten Committee of Management (CoM)

I volunteered for the CoM because my family and I have enjoyed our time at Summerhill Park Kindergarten (SPK) and wanted to give something back. I'm more sticky-beak than saint, but I thought some of my skills could be useful – the teachers don't like to boast and I like to talk. CoM roles are as big or small as you want to make them, but all skills and experiences count.

My role involves employee management, strategic planning, ensuring we meet regulatory and other requirements and helping people stay on task according to our constitution. I didn't know that when I started. I thought that if I was going to volunteer, then I may as well have the 'glamour job'. Ha! But I do enjoy it, and I learn something new every week. Who says kinder is just for kids?

The most rewarding aspect has been working with the amazing people on the CoM to support and improve our great kinder. None of us are experts in early learning regulations and governance, but together we have a great brains trust happening. I am a writer, and my passions are community engagement and sustainability. What do I know about OHS requirements, staff ratios, universal access or policy? Not much on my own, but together – that's where the real fun starts.

Playing a dual role (parent/employer) has been made easier because of the professionalism of our teaching team. You see things one way as a parent, but behind the scenes there's a lot more going on. I think I have a pretty open management style. I ask questions, listen hard and believe that we're all trying to achieve the same thing – a great kinder and great outcomes for our kids. If we're up front with each other, then we can fix anything. And then tell me more about my awesome child.

I'm most inspired by the clever and subtle program our long-standing teaching team put together. When the children come out bursting with energy and enthusiasm (or questions!), I know there's been some magic taking place. A lot of care and thought goes into the program, and I'm glad that the CoM is able to support that through one part MacGyver-esque creativity and two parts solid management. QIP and chocolate anyone?

And I love the quotes from the children our teachers leave for us at the session's end. Capturing that little snippet of their day makes me believe even more in the value of a good early learning program. I know our children are in good hands.

For more information, please visit www.summerhillparkkinder.org.au



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- Resources for educators and parents
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- ThingleToodle visits – education sessions for Victorian pre-schoolers
- Road Safety Education Policies for early childhood services and Family Day Care
- Child car seats – information on keeping children safe
- Child car seats – multilingual information
- Research and publications about road safety

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