



EARLY
LEARNING
ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIA

The voice for parents and service providers

PRE SCHOOL MATTERS

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
PREPARING CHILDREN FOR LIFE
TERM FOUR 2017

RELATIONSHIPS AND EARLY
BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

CHILDREN'S GROUND –
FIRST CULTURE FIRST

REPORTABLE CONDUCT
OBLIGATIONS





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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

With the end of 2017 approaching I would like to reflect on a significant year for the early learning sector and ELAA.

After years of presenting governments with research demonstrating the value of early learning to our children, the economy and society, 2017 has seen early learning, and the question of how it is adequately funded, elevated into the national spotlight through the media, Federal and State government budgets, as well as the Victorian Early Childhood Reform Plan. ELAA; either through its CEO's Group, budget and policy submissions, or joint advocacy with sector partners; has had a marked influence on this increased attention and resourcing of early childhood education and care.

In addition to our advocacy work, in the past 12 months ELAA has:

- responded to over 15,000 member enquiries on diverse topics including human resources, industrial relations, financial management, governance, payroll and occupational health and safety
- provided training to over 850 early childhood service providers and educators through ELAA workshops and seminars
- produced (in partnership with VicRoads and the TAC) a new video resource for services and parents about choosing and fitting the right car seat for children
- kept members up-to-date with industrial and wages bulletins, *Preschool Matters* magazine, fortnightly e-News, social media and a newly re-designed website
- delivered the annual Early Childhood Education Conference in partnership with Gowrie Victoria with the largest

speaker program and second biggest delegate attendance in the conference's 12-year history.

In this edition of *Preschool Matters* we explore a strengths based approach to early learning (page 9); the influence of relationships on early brain development (pages 10 and 11); the changing experience of parents as their child transitions from early learning to primary school (pages 12 and 13); and the work of Children's Ground as advocates for future generations of indigenous children seeking quality education, health, social and economic opportunities (pages 14 and 15). There's also a summary of the key outcomes from the latest *State of Early Learning in Australia 2017* report (pages 22 and 23); an overview of the new obligations on employers and industry workers under the Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme (pages 20 and 21); and an indispensable article for educators, parents and carers on when it's best to move a child out of a car booster seat (pages 18 and 19).

Finally, I am looking forward to meeting members at the ELAA 2017 Annual General Meeting on Thursday, 26 October – it's a great opportunity to get an update on ELAA's work, the direction of the early learning sector, celebrate the McArthur Volunteers Awards, and enjoy some tasty nibbles and a glass or two with other members and early learning sector colleagues. On behalf of the ELAA Board, management and staff I would like to thank all our members for their support in 2017 and for the opportunity to support you as providers of high quality early childhood education and care.

Lee Cath, President, ELAA

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Cover: Reading about road safety. Photo by Ange Basdekis.



EARLY
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NEWS & EVENTS



The 2018 Early Childhood Education Conference *together we grow*



Planning for the 2018 Conference is well under way. The theme for next year, *Our Children – Our Communities*, emphasises the centrality of children to the work of the early learning sector and invites speakers and delegates to explore the link between engagement with children and the importance of the broader relationships between educators, parents, carers and communities.

The 2018 Early Childhood Education Conference will be held at the Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne, on Friday 25 and Saturday 26 of May. More information on the Conference theme, speaker program and trade exhibition will be available at www.togetherwegrow.com.au over the coming months with delegate registrations opening in early 2018.

Professional Development events still available in Term 4

There are still a number of events available on the ELAA Professional Learning and Development calendar during Term 4. If you are interested in enhancing your skills regarding supporting children with challenging behaviours; physical education and wellness in a 1 to 5 years program; working with vulnerable children and families; workplace safety; or planning an Annual General Meeting and handing over to a new committee then see more information on page 7.



Christmas books

ELAA and Carnival Club have teamed up again this year to bring early learning services an ideal and very affordable selection of children's books for Christmas. These books make a wonderful gift idea for children at your service.

To order your books go to www.elaa.org.au/christmasbooks or contact Julie Thompson at ELAA jthompson@elaa.org.au



WorkSafe alert on use of glass panels in early childhood education and care services

Following a serious incident earlier this year, WorkSafe Victoria have issued an updated safety alert regarding the use of glass in services. Early childhood education and care services should be aware of the details of the alert. The alert document can be found at www.worksafe.vic.gov.au by accessing the Document Library from the site's main menu and searching on "Glass Childcare Alert-2017-08".

CEO'S REPORT



Welcome to Term 4 – a time when early learning services acknowledge the work of staff and the achievements of children through end-of-year celebrations, especially for the children about to transition to Prep.

At this time of year ELAA looks forward to acknowledging the successes and work of the thousands of volunteers that contribute so much to Australian early learning services through the **McArthur Early Childhood Volunteer of the Year Awards**. The Award winners will be announced at the **ELAA Annual General Meeting** – there's a great sense of anticipation in the room before the overall winner is announced and it's always pleasing to see the looks of accomplishment on all the finalist's faces. If anyone from your service has been nominated for this year's awards I encourage you to come along to our AGM to help them celebrate and make the night all the more special.

The AGM promises to be an informative night for ELAA members with our guest speaker, **Associate Professor Warwick Teague** – Director of Trauma Service at the Royal Children's hospital – talking about his passion for keeping young children safe in cars and out of the hospital's emergency departments. Warwick was one of the main presenters featured in ELAA's new video resource guide to purchasing, fitting and using child car restraints *Child Restraints and Booster Seats – What You Need to Know*.

The AGM will also mark the launch of ELAA's refreshed **Strategic Action Plan 2017–2027 Excellence for Every Child**. The refreshed plan re-calibrates ELAA's 2014 Strategic Action Plan in light of changes to the sector over the past three years. Central

to the refreshed Action Plan is what we call '5 Big Things in 10 Years for Our Children' – five clear goals for our sector in the next decade that will deliver high quality and accessible early years education for all Australian Children. I won't be a 'spoiler' and list the five big things here (it's another reason to come along to AGM) but will say that there are close synergies between the 'Five Big Things', which form the aspirational backbone of our refreshed Strategic Plan, and the Victorian Government's **Early Childhood Reform Plan**.

Speaking of the Reform Plan, many of you would have attended one of the information forums held by the Victorian Government over Term 3 regarding the plan. The sessions provided a thorough overview of the Reform Plan in terms of its context and vision and the plan's four key reform directions:

- supporting higher quality services and reducing disadvantage in early education
- providing more support for parenting
- making early childhood services more accessible and inclusive
- building a better system.

ELAA will play significant role in helping the sector to navigate its way toward implementing the Early Childhood Reform Plan, particularly through our Co-chairing of the newly formed **Kindergarten Reform Design (KRD) sub-group** which will co-design specific initiatives contained in the Plan. ELAA has worked with members and other peak bodies to advocate to the Victorian Department of Education and Training for the establishment of this

group and you can read more about the group's objectives in our Advocacy section on page 6.

Finally, I would like to remind all ELAA members about the recent release of the **Early Learning Everyone Benefits** campaign's *State of Early Learning in Australia 2017* report (with analysis from the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University).

While the Report highlights the nation's increase in preschool participation rates among four to six-year-olds, Australia's performance in terms of three-year-old participation clearly needs to improve – and the fact that two in five of our most vulnerable small children are starting school already behind in one more domains is just not acceptable.

The 'take home' message from the report is clear: Australia needs to place a higher value on delivering quality early learning to children in the years before school if we are to thrive as a nation in a globalised world economy. Also, the best remedy for our declining performance in international educational testing is to ensure that all Australian children access at least two days per week of quality, affordable, play-based early learning – before they start school.

ELAA is a leading partner in the Early Learning Everyone Benefits campaign and I urge all our members and friends to read the report, talk about the findings with educators and parents, and share the link to the report on the campaign website www.everyonebenefits.org.au/resources.

Shane Lucas, CEO, ELAA



REGS IN FOCUS

This regular feature focuses on specific Education and Care Services Regulations to ensure that services and staff are clear about their responsibilities

Correction to last term's article regarding WWCC

In our previous article we indicated that anyone who was closely related to a child in the group was not required to hold a WWCC. We have sought further advice on this and have been informed that only parents and step parents are exempt from requiring a WWCC when volunteering in a group in which their child normally participates. We apologise for this misunderstanding, if you have any further questions regarding your specific situation contact the Department of Justice for advice.

Recent changes to the Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations

A review of the National Quality Framework (NQF) has now been completed. Overall, the review found the NQF is an important and successful reform with strong stakeholder support but that some changes were required.

As a result, the Australian, state and territory education Ministers have agreed to a number of changes to the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations to maintain quality outcomes for children, while balancing the need to reduce red tape and unnecessary administrative burden for approved providers and educators.

Key decisions include:

- a **revised National Quality Standard** (NQS) to strengthen quality through greater clarity, reduced overlap between elements and standards, simplified language and reduced number of

standards and elements. **This will be introduced on 1 February 2018 in all states and territories**

- **improved oversight and support within Family Day Care** to achieve better compliance and quality across the whole sector
- **removing supervisor certificate requirements** so service providers have more autonomy in deciding who can be the responsible person in each service, and to reduce red tape
- **introduction of a national educator to child ratio of 1:15** for services providing education and care to school age children.

Changes to the legislation came into effect on 1 October 2017 and include the following:

- nominated supervisors – services may now appoint more than one nominated supervisor and will be required to make their own decision about whether someone is 'fit and proper' to be nominated as a *responsible person*. All references to supervisor certificates and certified supervisors have been removed from the legislation
- Approved Providers are now responsible for notifying the regulatory authority if a nominated supervisor changes or if there is a change in their name or contact details
- all nominated supervisors and persons in day-to-day charge of a service are now required to have undertaken child protection training
- educator breaks – current sector guidance (Guide to the Education and Care National Law and Regulations) regarding breaks will be removed and services in Victoria will be required to maintain ratios at all times. Services may seek a waiver from DET where they are unable to meet these requirements
- serious incidents – notification is only needed when emergency services attended a location as a result of an emergency and not, for example, as a precautionary measure. The definition of 'emergency' has been clarified to mean an incident, situation or event where there is an imminent or severe risk to the health, safety or wellbeing of a **person** at a place where the education and care is being provided, including adults
- prescribed matters for notification – approved Providers are now required to notify the Regulatory Authority of an incident where they reasonably believe that physical or sexual abuse of a child has occurred, or is occurring while the child is at the service or that there has been an allegation this has occurred or is occurring
- Regulation 136 – first aid qualifications – permits any staff member (not just educators) or nominated supervisor to be the person immediately available who holds an approved first aid, anaphylaxis and emergency management qualifications
- Regulation 168 – services are now required to have in place policies and procedures about sleep and rest for children and infants. ELAA has previously included a Rest and Relaxation policy as part of our suite of Best Practice policies in *PolicyWorks*, which has now been updated to meet these new requirements
- Regulation 358 – all staff members (not just educators or volunteers) in early childhood services must have a valid Working With Children card.

You can find further information about these and other changes on the ACECQA website. It is also suggested that you register for the ACECQA newsletter so that you can keep up-to-date with new resources to assist with implementing the changes.

Q&A

WE ARE CURRENTLY PLANNING OUR END-OF-YEAR EVENTS AND ORIENTATION FOR NEXT YEAR. WHAT ARE THE TERM DATES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR BOTH STAFF AND FAMILIES?

The final day for Term 4 2017 is Friday 22nd December and the first day of Term 1 2018 is Monday 29th January.

When planning any 'end-of-year' events and 'orientation' programs, Early Childhood Service providers need to balance a number of requirements to ensure they are not breaching any legislation or agreements or inconveniencing families.

Funding requirements

The Victorian Government funds early childhood services that provide a kindergarten program for a minimum of 15 hours per week (600 hours per year) to eligible children in the year before school. Therefore it is expected that the funded program is available to all children for the **entire** school year. The DET does, however, recognise that some individual children require additional support to settle into the kindergarten program which may include a variation in the normal hours. In these cases early childhood staff and service providers should consult with families to

determine appropriate orientation programs for individual children.

Service providers should also be aware that additional events such as concerts, special persons nights, family picnics etc. that occur outside normal operating hours are not considered part of the normal program and therefore not included in the minimum hours for funding.

Further details regarding maintenance of service delivery are on page 9 of the DET Kindergarten Funding Guide.

Parents expectations

When parents enrol their child in an early childhood program they expect that, in return for the fees they are charged, their child will have access to the program for the rostered hours throughout the year as advertised. Any changes to these times e.g. finishing a session early for a night event, closing the service before the end of the year can cause great stress and inconvenience to families. In a funded service, the funding agreement requires that services communicate with families

at the beginning of the year about days and times the service will operate and identify any planned closures, and planned alternative sessions.

Staff entitlements and expectations

The VECTEA (Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement) 2016 includes provision for two child free days for organisational purposes (Clause 35). For part-time staff this provision is pro-rated at 40 percent of their normal weekly hours.

The purpose of these days is to provide staff with time to undertake organisational activities approved by the employer to prepare for the commencement and conclusion of the kindergarten year. These days are scheduled as the first and last days of the year. Staff who are not normally rostered to work on these days are rostered and paid, according to their average weekly hours (20%), to work on these days. If a staff member is not able to attend on one of these days then a substitute day may be scheduled by agreement with the employer.

PUTTING A FACE TO THE VOICE



Lynsey Leong started work with ELAA in May 2017 as the Professional Learning and Development Co-ordinator and Membership Services team member. She has worked in Early Childhood Education for 12 years, across a range of services, in roles such as room leader, kindergarten teacher, educational leader and centre manager. A recent Masters in Educational Leadership has fuelled Lynsey's passion to advocate for high quality professional learning and development that supports and extends early learning teachers, educators and committees of management.

My work day entails... planning and facilitating our professional learning and development sessions alongside the leading early childhood education and care experts who deliver our sessions. I work closely with these

experts to identify gaps in the sector and develop professional learning programs that provide early learning professionals the opportunity to learn, develop and be equipped to tackle the every-day challenges of working with children and families.

I am most inspired by... people. I enjoy listening to people's stories, their goals, aspirations and dreams and how they go about achieving and making the most out of life.

What I like most about my job... reading the feedback on the evaluation forms after our professional learning sessions. This reveals the aspects of our sessions that make a difference to our participants and which strategies and ideas they are excited about taking back to their services. In conjunction with our expert facilitators, I use this valuable feedback to improve and strengthen our professional learning and development program.

If I wasn't doing this job I'd be... making cakes and travelling the world to hunt down food unique to each country and culture!

ADVOCACY

YOUR COLLECTIVE VOICE

*Each edition of **Preschool Matters** we report on ELAA's advocacy work to represent the collective voice of our members.*

Early Learning Everyone Benefits

ELAA is a leading partner in the national *Early Learning Everyone Benefits* campaign, working with a coalition of peak bodies and service providers to promote the value of early learning for the long-term developmental outcomes for children – and the social and economic prosperity of our nation as a whole. The *Early Learning Everyone Benefits* campaign recently published a report on the *State of Early Learning Report in Australia 2017* with support from the Mitchell Institute. The report shows that while some gains have been made, some children continue to miss out on accessing high quality early education and care, possibly due to affordability, distance or a lack of awareness of the benefits that early education can bring. ELAA will continue to work closely with campaign partners as part of working towards ELAA's strategic vision of "excellence in early learning for every child".

CEO Group

In August 2017, ELAA hosted the quarterly meeting of our Early Years Manager CEO Group to plan the next phase of advocacy around the future of the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access (the critical agreement between the Commonwealth, States and Territories that delivers funding for kindergarten participation); the implementation of the Victorian Government's Early Child Reform Plan; and the important relationship between not-for-profit service providers and the local government sector.

The CEO Group was established in 2015 to ensure that ELAA was able to regularly engage with senior thought leaders across the sector to develop and refine our advocacy activities. We have been delighted to see engagement and membership in this group growing over the past 12 months.

Co-design of the Early Childhood Reform Plan implementation

ELAA has worked with members and other peak bodies to advocate to the Victorian Department of Education and Training for the establishment of a new governance group to co-design specific initiatives in the Early Childhood Reform Plan. Together with our members, we believe we will bring expertise to develop and support the implementation of a number of projects of the Reform Plan, including:

- funding models which support higher quality services and reduce disadvantage in early education, including the 'school readiness' funding model
- improving quality in early learning services, including through:
 - building partnerships with parents and community
 - building workforce skills and capacity to deliver on the Reform Plan
- enabling early learning services to enhance support for parenting
- improving participation for children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage in early learning and improving accessibility to early childhood services
- ensuring the suite of initiatives contained in the Reform Plan contribute to an early childhood service system that is connected, flexible, responsive, accountable, and supports and shares best practice.

The Co-design Group met for the first time in September. We will also continue to work with Government to develop a long-term vision for the early learning sector that builds on an evidence base of high quality research and innovative practice.

Impact in the Education State: DET Community Sector Forum

ELAA attended this high-level forum on 29 August at which all Victorian Government Education Ministers presented on the work undertaken so far to deliver the Government's ambitious *Education State* agenda. ELAA is a member of the DET Community Sector Governance Group.

Early Years Management Governance arrangements

ELAA has been working closely with the Victorian Department of Education and Training, and the Municipal Association of Victoria to establish two complementary bodies to oversee governance and implementation of the Early Years Management (EYM) Framework.

The EYM Strategic Partnership Forum is co-chaired by ELAA and MAV, and comprises representative organisations from the not-for-profit EYM sector, the local government sector and Goodstart as a large provider. The Forum met on two occasions in Term 3 and is intended to provide advice to Government on operational issues arising from implementation of the framework.

The EYM Strategic Partnership Group is chaired by DET and comprises ELAA and MAV. The Group has met once (at time of writing) and is intended to provide governance oversight of actions arising from the forum, and to provide advice to Government on longer-term strategic opportunities for the Framework.

ELAA is here to listen to you

ELAA is pleased to represent the interests of our members and we welcome any questions or input by contacting us at elaa@elaa.org.au



THERE'S STILL TIME FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN 2017

ELAA still has professional learning and development opportunities available for early learning professionals as well as committees of management.

Sessions are delivered by leading early childhood education and care experts each seminar is mapped to the National Quality Standards (NQS). Session outcomes are also aligned to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST), making it easier for teachers to record and fulfil their Victorian Institute of Teaching professional development requirements.

APST = Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

NQS = National Quality Standard

Quality Area 1 – Educational Program and Practice

Quality Area 2 – Children's Health & Safety

Quality Area 3 – Physical Environment

Quality Area 4 – Staffing Arrangements

Quality Area 5 – Relationships with Children

Quality Area 6 – Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities

Quality Area 7 – Leadership and Service Management



Using positive relationships and the EYLF to plan for and support children whose behaviour is affected by challenging life circumstances

Quality Area: 1, 2, 3, 5 & 6
APST: 1.3, 3.5, 4.1, 4.3, 6.2

Presenter: Children's Protection Society

Date: Friday, 20 October

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

Venue: Quest Caroline Springs, 234 Caroline Springs Boulevard, Caroline Springs. Free parking on site.

Cost: \$175 members \$250 non-members



Strategies to include physical education and wellness in the 1–5 years program

Quality Area: 1, 2 & 3
APST: 1.1, 1.5, 3.3, 6.4

Presenter: Paul Pennisi

Date: Wednesday, 1 November

Time: 6.30pm – 9.00pm

Venue: Quest Caroline Springs, 234 Caroline Springs Boulevard, Caroline Springs. Free parking on site.

Cost: \$80 members \$95 non-members



Working with vulnerable children and families

Quality Area: 1, 2, 5 & 6
APST: 1.3, 3.7, 4.1, 6.2, 7.3

Presenter: Children's Protection Society

Date: Thursday, 16 November

Time: 9.30am – 2.30pm

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

Cost: \$175 members \$250 non-members



Safety – not just child's play

Quality Area: 3, 4 & 7
APST: 4.4, 6.2, 7.2, 7.4

Presenter: Zora Marko & Emma Morgan

Date: Friday, 24 November

Time: 9.00am – 5.00pm

Venue: Eastern Hub Geelong, 285a McKillop Street, East Geelong. Free parking on site.

Cost: \$323.50 members \$367.50 non-members

Planning your Annual General Meeting (AGM) and handover to a new committee

Your Committee of Management has worked hard all year to ensure your service has all it needs to provide the best quality education and care for your children. So make sure your good work continues into the next year by planning for a successful Annual General Meeting and a smooth transition to a new Committee of Management. This session, run by experienced ELAA trainers, is completely FREE and covers:

- The Annual General Meeting (AGM):
 - constitutional requirements
 - committee recruitment
 - planning the meeting
 - agenda and reports
 - committee elections
 - after the AGM
- The handover – what, when and who?

Remaining AGM/Committee Handover sessions in 2017

30 October – Footscray

8 November – Fitzroy

5 December – Sandringham

Starting from the beginning – governance information and support

Ideal for your Committee of Management, this free seminar introduces you to the roles and responsibilities of the Committee to ensure good governance and focuses on your role as:

- an incorporated Association committee
- an approved provider and an early childhood funded service provider
- an employer of staff in an early childhood service
- a manager of an early childhood service.

30 November, 2017

6.30pm – 8.30pm

ELAA office, level 3, 145 Smith Street, Fitzroy VIC 3065

Register on-line at www.elaa.org.au/pld or call (03) 9489 3500.

Prior registrations are essential. Please sign in 15 minutes prior to the commencement of a session.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING WITH ELAA

BY LYNSEY LEONG – ELAA PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM CO-ORDINATOR

Professional learning is a journey. It doesn't stop after you complete your teaching qualification. It is a journey that requires support, planning and perseverance.

On commencement of your journey as a practicing educator, it is important that you work with your employer to establish a professional development plan. This plan should look for areas for development and identify areas of interest. Once these are identified, it is important to put together some strategies on how both you and the employer will work together to create opportunities where formal and informal learning can take place.

Professional development is not just solely for early childhood teachers. If we want to improve the quality of the education and care we provide to our children, every early childhood professional – including teachers, Diploma qualified educators, Certificate III qualified educators, service coordinators, centre managers as well as Committees of management, – needs to be able to access and attend quality professional learning and development. For each of us, every new day of work with children presents itself with a unique set of challenges that we may not be prepared for or have the knowledge to deal with. In such times, I would encourage you to stop, reflect on your practice and go on a journey.

How does ELAA's Professional Learning and Development Program benefit our the early childhood sector?

ELAA plans its professional development program around topics that are relevant to today's context and changing landscape. We seek to offer professional development opportunities that go beyond ticking the boxes to satisfy industrial and registration requirements. We value that early childhood professionals want to take away strategies to assist them with day-to-day practice – but we also know they want to build their capacity to confidently plan and implement a quality early childhood program informed by contemporary pedagogical research.

ELAA's professional learning and development program is developed in conjunction with our session presenters who are experts in early childhood education and extensively involved in research, as well as projects, with the Department of Education and Training and other stakeholders such as Early Childhood Australia. Our presenters have rich experience working alongside educators and children and often bring this to the sessions. We recognise the needs of professionals in the sector and where the knowledge and skills gaps are and work to develop programs that meet those needs.

Participants attending ELAA's 2017 professional learning and development sessions have spoken highly about how the sessions allow for open and honest

conversations. Early Childhood Professionals also enjoyed the opportunity to bounce ideas off each other and work together to solve problems – many affirm the relevance of the topics to their current professional challenges and the value of strategies offered by session presenters. This means they leave feeling inspired and equipped to overcome challenges when they go back into their service the next day.

2018 Professional Learning and Development Program

ELAA has planned an exciting calendar of Professional Learning and Development workshops for 2018. These will be presented by well-known and respected presenters who are experts in their field.

Look out for practical, hands-on sessions covering:

- music and movement
- technology in play-based learning
- physical activity
- bush kinder in your own back yard
- Indigenous culture.

You will also be able to engage in sessions that offer challenging conversations regarding:

- pedagogy
- leadership
- strengths based-learning
- documentation
- working with families
- professionalism.

Finally, there will also be sessions focusing on the current important issues in the early childhood sector including:

- implementing and embedding the new child safe standards
- the revised NQS and working on your Quality Improvement Plan
- including and supporting children with additional needs and challenging behaviours
- OHS in the workplace
- health and wellbeing for early childhood staff.

Further information regarding ELAA's 2018 Professional Learning and Development Program will soon be available via the ELAA Learning and Development Calendar www.elaa.org.au/pld, future editions of *Preschool Matters*, eNews and our Professional Learning and Development Program Guide (available later in 2017).





STRENGTHS BASED LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Ariadne Lack is a Psychologist and mum of two young boys. She is passionate about helping educators and parents of young children build resilience and wellbeing by harnessing children's strengths. In this article for Preschool Matters, Ariadne explores just what is meant by 'strengths based learning' and provides some practical tips for applying this approach in your early learning service.

What is **Strengths Based Learning** and how can it help early childhood teachers and educators support the learning, wellbeing and resilience of children and their families? As early childhood educators you already have finely tuned strengths antennae. You know how focusing on a child's strengths helps bring out the best in them (and you know it brings out the best in you as an educator!). You have witnessed the slow, effortful progress associated with trying to help a child overcome a weakness. You have also experienced the positive impact that focusing on a child's abilities, skills, talents and strengths has had on their behaviour, confidence and sense of happiness.

Supporting your experiences as educators, there is now extensive evidence that identifying, using and developing strengths is important. Studies have found:

- use of our top (signature) strengths is associated with greater wellbeing and less psychological distress
- use of signature strengths in new ways and contexts is associated with increased happiness and decreased depression
- when children are aware of their strengths, and have opportunities to use and develop them, it positively

impacts their wellbeing, positive behaviour and achievement

- when individuals use their strengths they tend to learn more readily, have higher levels of motivation, confidence and performance as well as a stronger sense of satisfaction.

Strengths are our greatest opportunities for growth and success, which makes sense really. Strengths are things we enjoy doing and do well so we are more likely to use and practice them. This increases our likelihood of success, which helps develop our confidence. We are then better resourced to keep going when challenges get harder or when we make mistakes. Despite this, sometimes we really need to help a child in areas where they are not so strong. So does using Strengths Based Learning mean ignoring aspects where the child is not so capable?

No. Strengths Based Learning is about identifying a child's assets before we seek to remedy any problems. It is about looking for positive behaviours before we work on the negative ones. Essentially, what we focus on grows. Focusing on what is valuable and strong, gives children and educators positive resources and energy to tackle aspects that need more development.

So how can you incorporate more Strengths Based Learning activities into your existing routines, rituals and resources?

Three Tips for Strengths Based Learning in an early childhood setting

1. Watching play. Watch out for moments when a child gets excited and engaged, when they **'light up'**. Chances are they are using strength. What are they doing? What strength do you think they are demonstrating? Talk with them about what you saw.

2. Reading time. Ask children to identify the strengths they see in book characters and if they can recall a time in their life where they had to draw on the same strengths e.g. *The Little Red Caboose* – bravery and determination.

3. At pick up. Describe at least one strength to parents that you saw their child use today e.g. 'Lucy had a great day today. She used her determination and bravery to climb to the top of the A-frame. She was so pleased with herself.'

As the focus you apply to Strengths Based Learning increases so will your awareness of your own strengths. So enjoy your discoveries, dial up your curiosity, courage and forgiveness (for the times when things don't work out as planned), play around with the activities and see what works for you.

If you would like to learn more about Strengths Based Learning or Strengths Based Parenting skills you are welcome to email Ariadne at ariadne@humanendeavours.com.au.



THE INTEGRAL ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS ON EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

BY CHERYL NEILSON

As an early childhood educator, I have worked with many children with challenging behaviours. Over the years I came to understand that many of these children had or were continuing to experience negative environments, (sometimes involving trauma, abuse and/or stress) in their lives. Some of which I was made aware of, most of which I wasn't. My journey to understand more about what underlies behaviour and associated social and emotional skills, led me to explore the integral role of relationships on early brain development. Below is a brief summary of what I have learnt.

Brain development is all about making neural connections, often referred to as *wiring the brain*. Genes provide a blueprint for brain development and predispose us to develop in certain ways. Experiences, especially the interactions and relationships we have with others, impact on how these genes are expressed.

Brain development is the process of creating, strengthening or discarding connections between neurons. Those that are used are strengthened and remain intact. Those that are not or rarely used are pruned. Pruning or discarding is a natural process.

If we think of the brain as a representation of “what we do or experience most”, it may be easier to understand how impactful the quality of relationships is as the brain develops. Brains will “come to represent” negative relationships and experiences just as readily as positive ones.

More complex brain wiring builds on simpler circuits formed earlier in life. The brain has plasticity: the capacity to reorganise neural pathways in response to varying environments and changes to the environment. Plasticity is important because it allows learning, and it means that it's never too late to change.

The relationships that a child has experienced will affect what “relational template” is created for that child. Over time, relationships will impact the child's perceptions of others. The type

“ If we think of the brain as a representation of “what we do or experience most”, it may be easier to understand how impactful the quality of relationships is as the brain develops.”

of relationships a child experiences will influence if the child see adults as safe, reliable, and responsive. Do adults make me feel loved and worthwhile? Do they make repairs when our relationship has gone awry and do adults help me understand my own emotions? These perceptions of others are carried over to other environments and other adults.

Consequently, a child's own relational template can impact the child's self image, how the child views his or her social world, what he or she expects of relationships, and the child's feelings around and perceptions of safety.

Relationships are felt.

Coupled with the understanding that relationships impact the brain's wiring, the hierarchical way the brain develops also plays a part in what may be underlying behaviour. The brain develops from the “bottom up”. Put simply, this means that the parts of the brain that deal with emotion (the brain stem and limbic system) come “online” before the reasoning, thinking and judging centre (the cortex). This is why toddlers, feel and then act. When the brain is mature enough there is capacity for the cortex to become increasingly involved, somewhere around preschool, the child begins to feel, think and act. Like all wiring in the brain it takes repetitive experience in the context of positive relationships to form strong pathways between the emotional centre and the cortex to support “feel, think and then act”.

In all of us, it is the role of the emotional centre of the brain to recognise threat. When the threat is sensed as strong, it triggers the brain to react as if survival is threatened, resulting in fight, flight or freeze mode. This survival based response is designed to disconnect the thinking part of the brain to allow for fast reactions. However, if the emotional centre is triggered and senses strong threat repeatedly, then it becomes easier to be switched on, and easier to be triggered.

If the child's emotional brain senses enough threat, resulting in fight, flight or freeze response it will be seen in the child's behaviour. So it might be worth reflecting: is the child who is acting out or showing aggression, reacting with a

BOTTOM-UP BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



CORTEX

Reasoning/judging centre
3–6 years

LIMBIC SYSTEM

Emotional centre
1–4 years

CEREBELLUM

Motor centre
Birth – 2 years

BRAIN STEM

Basic survival functions
Pre-birth – 8 months

Image concept sourced from the Australian Childhood Foundation

“ The parts of the brain that deal with emotion (the brain stem and limbic system) come “online” before the reasoning, thinking and judging centre (the cortex).”

survival response to something they have perceived as a threat or trauma trigger?

How does all this relate to challenging behaviours? The behaviour may be as result of the child's relational template; it may be a reaction to perceived threat and therefore the child's feelings of safety and this behaviour may have made “sense” in the circumstances that it first developed but not in the current environment.

As educators we must focus on relationships with all children, especially those who present with challenging behaviours. Our relationships impact each child's brain development, and it may be significant for some that we form positive, consistent and reliable relationships.

Recommended viewing: “Building Better Brains” by Alberta family Wellness Initiative at: <http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/resources/video/how-brains-are-built-core-story-of-brain-development>

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WHY IT MATTERS TO TRANSFORM PARENT INVOLVEMENT FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

This article by Laura McFarland and Angela Fenton, from Charles Sturt University, provides some insights for early years educators about the experience of parents as their children transition from early learning to primary school. We encourage you to share it with your parent community.

THE CONVERSATION

This article was originally published on The Conversation on 13 July 2017.

The phrase “parent involvement” in children’s learning may conjure images of parents in the classroom eagerly helping children to make Easter baskets or complete their readers. These are typical examples of parent involvement in preschools. But how is involvement fostered in the primary school years?

Parental involvement in children’s learning is beneficial. Research shows it leads to better educational, social, and emotional outcomes for children. In addition, a report from the Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY) has found parental involvement contributes to overall student positive attainment, behaviour and attendance at school.

However, as children grow up, the ways in which parents can be involved in their learning changes. While it is acknowledged that employment-related demands limit

parents’ attendance during school times, the physical presence of parents in the classroom is no longer essential, or necessarily effective.

Changing parent engagement at primary level schooling

Regular face-to-face contact with teachers is more common in preschools than primary schools. As this changes, new ways of parent involvement can be created.

In primary school, contact is also more likely to be initiated by parents than teachers. Nonetheless, results from our research show parent involvement levels are lower at primary school level. Specifically, direct involvement in classroom activities, excursions and parent committees is rarer for parents in primary schools.

These changes occur for several reasons.

First, parents’ work schedules may restrict their availability throughout the day.

Second, although parents often need to physically come in to the classroom to drop children off at a preschool, this is less frequent in primary schools. Older children may take a bus or be dropped off at the school gate.

Third, parents’ direct involvement on school grounds wanes as children get older and most become more independent.

Above all, direct engagement isn’t necessarily effective as children pass through school.

Ageing and adjusting: re-imagining parental roles in learning

So how do parents transform their role of being “involved” as their children transition to primary school? It is important for teachers and parents to be aware that there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

A variety of opportunities should exist to allow families to support their children in meaningful ways. Some types of parent involvement will be less active and formal than others, and this is not a bad thing.

“ Research suggests that the quality of the home learning environment is linked to better cognitive outcomes in children.”

Evidence shows that when regular communication channels suit families' needs and schedules, family-school partnerships are stronger. This in turn encourages children to learn outside of school.

This could mean that phone calls work best for some families, while emails, Skype sessions, text messages, or face-to-face meetings work better for others.

More schools are now using social media to create effective opportunities for indirect parent involvement. They often have Twitter feeds, and Facebook pages, and post images of students engaged in activities such as excursions, sporting events and shows. For parents who cannot attend such events, this sharing is inclusive and respectful.

A school website with a regularly updated photo gallery, and copies of the most recent newsletters and reminders, is also a useful resource for parents. This includes providing a space for feedback, comments and a variety of contact points that enable parent input.

Some schools are now using interactive technologies, such as parent-school wikis, blogs, and virtual chatrooms to engage parents. These allow parents to have regular contact and involvement with their children's schooling.

These “virtual” strategies are the building blocks for parents to be aware of what is going on with their children's education, while adjusting to the reduced need for their physical presence.

It is a crucial element of fostering better engagement with children in home learning environments, because it allows parents to ask nuanced questions about their children's studies or school activities.

Practical tips for creating a positive home learning environment

Using these different ways of engaging in primary schooling, parents can then better encourage their children's learning in the home environment. This is the most effective way that parents can be involved.

Research suggests that the quality of the home learning environment is linked to better cognitive outcomes in children.

Evidence also shows that parent engagement in children's learning at home is more important than direct parent involvement in school. Considering a range of studies, ARACY states that the relative influence of the home environment on student achievement is 60%–80%, while the school environment accounts for 20%–40%.

Parent involvement in children's home learning can be fostered in a variety of ways, including:

- asking questions about what children are learning, encouraging and supporting children to complete homework
- helping to teach organisational and self-study skills, such as keeping notebooks organised, and creating time and space for learning activities
- showing an interest in children's learning, listening to them talk about their day
- engaging with the information distributed by schools (via Facebook, email, website, etc.)
- providing access to learning resources, such as trips to the library, access to internet, and materials to complete homework.

Most importantly, these strategies create a range of ways that connect the home and primary school environments. By being engaged and interested in their children's activities outside the school, parents can be powerful supporters of their children's learning.

Laura McFarland is a Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies, Charles Sturt University and Angela Fenton is Associate Head of School of Education, Lecturer, Charles Sturt University.

ADVERTISING

“What are shadows made of?”

Oxana

Age 4



CHILDREN'S GROUND – FIRST CULTURE FIRST

Jane Vadiveloo is Chief Executive Officer of Children's Ground and will be the Keynote speaker at the ELAA and Gowrie Victoria 2018 Early Childhood Education Conference. In this article Jane discusses the work of Children's Ground and approaches to First Nations early childhood learning, development and wellbeing.



Experiences in early childhood influence the brain, social and physical development, which impact on future health, learning and behaviour and quality of life. The language and identity of a child are their foundation.

First Nations cultures in Australia, and the knowledge systems inherent within them, have evolved for more than 60,000 years

into a sophisticated system of society and law. First Nations approaches to early childhood learning, development and wellbeing embed what is often considered to be 'innovation' in the Western approaches to early childhood education.

Mark Djandjomerr and May Nango were co-directors of Children's Ground through our time in Kakadu West Arnhem. They

argued that children needed an education that was strong in Western learning as well as "good First Nations education – balanced. We want the best for our children".

"If they listen to what they have been told from early childhood they keep growing, keep growing, keep growing, keep growing they start to grow whiskers, their whiskers appear on their face – that's the time when they start to acquire knowledge into their minds, from things they are listening to, passed on to them in speech, Aboriginal language, they put into their heads and accumulate knowledge," they said. "There are so many things to teach them, our children, so many things. Just as there is in non-Aboriginal culture, there's a lot to learn."

Major inquiries over the past 25 years have presented the statistics and the reasons, both historical and current, for the profound inequity and pain of First Nations peoples in Australia. This trauma is generational and carried by children born today. The Northern Territory Children's Commissioner has referred to the situation facing Aboriginal children and families as 'catastrophic'.¹



Image above: Felicity Hayes, senior educator, advisor and Traditional Owner of Alice Springs, teaches children on her country at Irrkerlantye in Central Australia. Image top: Dulcie Sharpe lights a small fire for Clarice, Anton and Shishana during an early years session on Country in Central Australia. "The smoke will stop the kids crying and make their spirit strong," says Dulcie.

In 2009, Tom Calma, the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner noted:

“This is another truth and a terrible reality. The rapid loss of Aboriginal and Islander languages in Australia is a cultural catastrophe. With the loss of these languages we lose whole cultural concepts and meanings that can never be explained in any other language.”²

So much of the Closing the Gap approach appears remedial. Preventing the gap begins in early childhood. Early childhood at Children’s Ground is part of our broader *Learning, Wellbeing and Development* platform which tackles the social, structural and economic determinants and inequities that currently underpin the devastating life experiences of children living in socio-economic-cultural environments of exclusion.

Children’s Ground prioritises local cultural knowledge systems and combines this with other leading international and national evidence and practice.

On the ground, Children’s Ground is led by families and communities to deliver quality early years learning and wellbeing. A rich play-based environment allows children to grow in their first language and culture, as well as in the global Western culture, with critical wrap around support.

The community members set policy that aligns with cultural standards. For example, early childhood education is the responsibility of families so children aged 0 to 3 years are to have a family member present whenever they are at Children’s Ground. There are cultural safety issues

that can only be met by the role of family members, but that is not restricted to Western nuclear family structures.

First Nations learning systems are experiential. Learning comes from the land. As a result, Children’s Ground is committed to taking learning back to the land. Learning occurs on country as well as in our intergenerational community and learning centres.

Children are enriched and grow in an intergenerational environment. There is an important connection between the young and the old. At Children’s Ground, our intergenerational centres are where early years learning and wellbeing is delivered. These centres become part of community life and are where people come for work, for programs, to connect or just to have a cup of tea. This creates a rich environment of children being surrounded by their families across generations in a first language and culture environment.

First Nations Early Years Learning Frameworks sit alongside the National Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) – Belonging, Being, Becoming. Together they provide the policy and practice framework for learning outcomes, which are adapted to the local context.

Early childhood learning is the beginning of a new future.

- 1 2011, Bath, H, Disparity and disadvantage – the context for child protection in the Northern Territory, NTCOSS Conference
Dr Howard Bath is the Northern Territory Children’s Commissioner
- 2 2009, Tom Calma, Mabo Oration

Arrernte Early Years Learning framework includes the following:

- Iterrentye (good mind)
- Tyerrtye (healthy body)
- Arne Mpwaretyeke (being active)
- Akaltye Irretyeke (learn more)
- Antarnte Arelheme (learn to look after yourself)
- Ingkerrenyeke Anyenteke-irreme (family & community together)
- Tyerrtye-kenhe Iterrentye (learn about safety)
- Utnenge (strong spirit)

MK Turner OAM is an Arrernte educator, linguist, knowledge holder and law woman. She is one of the key senior people who direct our work and set the standards and expectations for Children’s Ground in Central Australia.

“Young people need to learn what the land is called in Arrernte, how they are related to the land, what they are to the land, and what the land is to them, the dreaming for that place, which skin group they are, who is the owner of the land and the keeper of the land,” she said. “You’ve got to tell the right story. It is important to get this right. It has to start with the Elders. If we don’t do it now, it will all be lost.”

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RACHEL
Age 5

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Geelong Kindergarten Association (GKA) was initially formed in 1994. In August 2016, the intention to merge with Bethany Community Support was announced. Based in Geelong, Bethany Community Support provides a wide range of community services for children, families and individuals across south western Victoria. The two organisations were bought together in July 2017 creating Bethany Kindergarten Services (BKS). The aim being to strengthen our collective ability to deliver quality early childhood education programs for children and provide support to families in new and innovative ways as part of a broader network of community services.

Our approach to early learning focuses on...

Each and every child experiencing a quality, contemporary educational experience through providing our educators with opportunity to keep up-to-date with current practice through

a robust commitment to professional learning, leadership and development. BKS is invested in ensuring children are able to participate in a variety of rich, meaningful, enquiry-based experiences that promote inclusion, respect and diversity.

Our proudest moments have included...

- realising an overall improvement and increase in the quality across our services rated against the National Quality Standards through the Assessment and Rating process
- seeing an increase in the participation of vulnerable families, and
- beginning and embedding the principles of inclusion through our cultural and anti-bias approaches. This will be a key focus for BKS into the future.

Lately we've been working on... Leadership within the organisation and building on this to embed a collaborative, positive organisational culture and sharing practice

as a professional learning community. We, as an organisation, are continually working on and reflecting on our practices in-line with:

- our vision – to develop every child's potential, and
- our value – to encourage children to express themselves and their opinions, and to undertake experiences that develop resilience and promote opportunity for individual development and learning.

We are inspired by... The responsibility we have to children and the community to provide excellence in service and commitment to ensuring the needs of children and families are met through our quality early years educational experiences. We draw inspiration from knowing what we do today, tomorrow and beyond in our programs will contribute to children's success now and in later years.

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Associate Professor Warwick Teague – Director of Paediatric Trauma at the Royal Children's Hospital is passionate about keeping children safe in cars. Warwick is one of the key presenters featured in ELAA's new video resource guide 'Child Restraints and Booster Seats – What You Need to Know'.

HEIGHT, NOT AGE, IS THE KEY TO CHILD SEAT BELT SAFETY

BY ZORA MARKO – ELAA ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION PROJECT MANAGER

Most people believe that if they follow the law when transporting children in a car, they are doing what is safest for their children. However, there is a substantial difference in what the law requires and what current research tells us we should be doing to keep our children safe in a car in the event of a crash.

The law says that children do not have to be in a child restraint once they are over seven years of age. The law also allows children to sit in the front seat of a car once they are over seven years of age. However, research shows that children are safest if they stay in a child car seat until they are approximately 145cm, regardless of age. In general, children will reach this size when they are **10 to 12 years of age**.

How a seat belt works

To understand why height rather than age is important, we need to know how seat belts work in a crash. According to Dr Julie Brown from Neuroscience Research Australia and a founding member of the

Child Restraint Evaluation Program, "The vehicle environment i.e. the seats and seat belt systems, are designed for adult occupants. Booster seats are designed to increase the seated height of children to help them achieve a better seat belt fit."

A seat belt is designed to sit over the strong bones of the body and absorb the impact of a crash. These bones also protect vital organs. The seat belt sash must sit over the shoulder and across the sternum. The lap part of the belt should sit across the hips. If a child is too short the seat belt sits across their neck and across their stomach. This means that the blood vessels and arteries to the brain and

“ Research shows that children are safest if they stay in a child car seat until they are approximately 145cm, regardless of age.”

internal organs in the abdomen can be damaged and result in serious or even fatal injuries as the seat belt impacts with the body in a crash. Even a low impact crash can cause very serious injuries to internal organs and the neck. Children under 145cm are more at risk of injury from an airbag than an adult.

Dr Warrick Teague, Associate Professor and Director of Paediatric Trauma at The Royal Children's Hospital, says that ill-fitting or inadequate restraints, can make motor vehicles dangerous places for young children. He recommends that behavioural changes are needed to help reduce the road toll and the traumatic effect of serious and long lasting injuries to children.

How can early childhood educators help?

Early childhood educators can play an important role in educating children, families and communities to positively influence how children travel in their family cars. This approach includes educating the educators, providing information and workshops for parents and integrating road safety education into the early childhood service's curriculum and policies. It is important that early childhood educators and services ensure they are up-to-date on best practice in safe transportation of children and have the latest materials on hand to support their families.

Parents and educators of young children are able to influence attitudes of children to child restraints at an early age. The expectation can be set with children and their families that child restraints will be used until the child is 145cm in height at which stage they would be able to move to using an adult seat belt.

Resources for educators

ELAA has developed a number of resources to help educators, parents and children understand and reinforce the message that children under 145cm should not be in adult seat belts or in the front seat of the car. One of the resources available, the video, *Child Restraints and Booster Seats – What You Need to Know* provides parents and care-givers with valuable research and ideas they can apply in their daily routine to help protect the lives of the children in their care.

Unfortunately, road trauma is still the number one cause of death of Australian children. Approximately three thousand children are seriously injured each year on our roads. Whilst the law remains to be changed to follow the recommendations of current research, the community can still share the message – it is important that children are over 145cm in height when they graduate to using an adult seat belt. This will help reduce the number of children killed and injured in car crashes.



For more information
childroadsafety.org.au
carseatssavelives.org.au
 (includes video *Child Restraints and Booster Seats*)

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EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES AND THE REPORTABLE CONDUCT SCHEME

BY LISA MINCHIN, ELAA POLICY OFFICER

The Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme places new obligations on heads of organisations within the scheme. The Scheme complements the Child Safe Standards and other existing child safety measures. In this article, we draw on information available from the Commission for Children and Young People to explore what it means for early childhood services.

What is the Reportable Conduct Scheme?

The Victorian Reportable Conduct Scheme has been designed to improve organisations' responses to allegations of child abuse and neglect by their staff and volunteers. The scheme, established by the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, is overseen by the Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP), whose role it is to:

- support and guide organisations to respond in a fair, effective and timely way to allegations
- oversee, monitor and make recommendations to improve the responses of organisations.

The Commission is required to be informed of 'every allegation in relevant organisations of certain types of employee misconduct involving children'. Relevant organisations include those which exercise, care, supervision and authority over children.

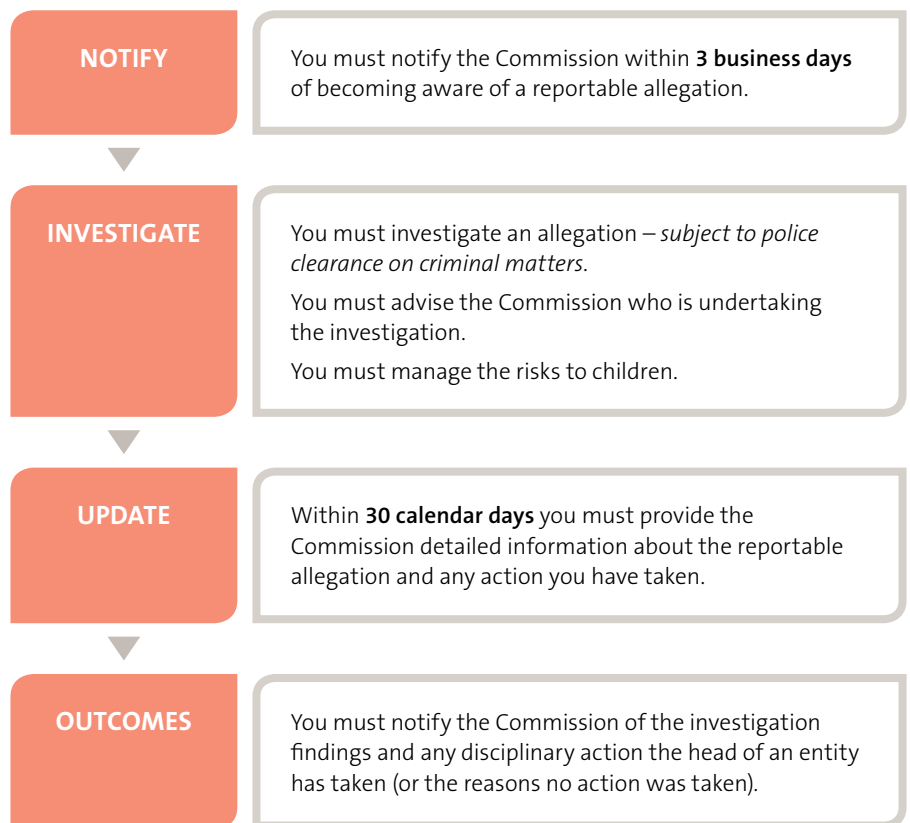
What types of conduct are reportable?

There are five types of reportable conduct in the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*:

- sexual offences (against, with or in the presence of, a child)
- sexual misconduct (against, with or in the presence of, a child)
- physical violence (against, with or in the presence of, a child)
- behaviour that is likely to cause significant emotional or psychological harm
- significant neglect.

What are the obligations of the head of an organisation under the scheme?

The head of an organisation is the person who is primarily responsible for an organisation's compliance with the scheme, such as the president of a committee of management or the CEO of an early years management organisation. While heads of organisations are responsible for ensuring that their organisation complies with the scheme, the CCYP expects heads to use internal organisational support where available. The ultimate responsibility for notifying the CCYP of any reportable allegations, however, remains theirs. The diagram below provides a snapshot of a head of organisation's obligations under the scheme:



The requirements to report to the CCYP are in addition to:

- requirements to have systems in place to prevent child abuse and to ensure that allegations can be brought to the attention of appropriate persons for investigation and response. The actions of organisations to meet Child Safe Standards will assist them to take a preventative approach to child safety and have internal reporting processes to notify allegations
- reporting to the Victoria Police as soon as they become aware that a reportable allegation may involve criminal conduct
- other legislative reporting obligations in regard to child safety, including Failure to Disclose, Failure to Protect under the *Crimes Act 1958*; and mandatory reporting under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (for more information see *Preschool Matters*, Term 3, 2016)
- obligations of early childhood services to report to the regulator, Quality Assessment and Regulation Division, Department of Education and Training.

“ The investigation applies the ‘balance of probabilities’ as the standard of proof, which means that the investigation considers where it is more likely than not that reportable conduct has occurred.”

When does it come into effect?

The scheme is being implemented in phases with the first phase starting from 1 July 2017. Whilst approved education and care services, such as kindergartens and children’s services are required to comply with the scheme from 1 January 2019, if an organisation provides services which start earlier in the scheme, for example disability services, then the organisation as a whole is expected to comply from the earliest relevant phase.

If there are any uncertainties about when your organisation is within scope of the scheme, it is essential to clarify it with the CCYP.

What is a reportable allegation investigation?

When there is an allegation of child abuse against an employee, an investigation must be undertaken by the organisation. If an allegation is criminal in nature, the Victoria Police must provide clearance before the investigation is begun.

The investigation aims to gather and examine information to establish facts. Findings and recommendations about what disciplinary or other action should be taken (if any) are also made. Policies and procedures which help to guide the investigation include:

- code of conduct
- processes for managing the

investigation of complaints, misconduct, discipline, grievances, dispute resolution

- employee welfare and supports.

The investigation applies the ‘balance of probabilities’ as the standard of proof, which means that the investigation considers where it is more likely than not that reportable conduct has occurred.

Ensuring that the process is fair and reasonable means the person against whom the allegation is raised is advised of any adverse information that is credible, relevant and significant and to give them a reasonable opportunity to respond. Whether to advise the employee or others of the allegations may depend on the stage of the investigation to ensure that the investigation is not compromised.

An investigation will have a number of steps, including:

- understanding the issues
- planning an investigation
- coordinating the investigation
- gathering information and evidence
- reporting and recommendations.

The outcomes of the investigation must be reported to the CCYP as soon as practicable.

It is vital that the alleged victim is not re-traumatised by the investigation process. Support must be provided to the child. Support must also be provided to staff and volunteers.

What are the benefits of the scheme?

The scheme makes clear the obligations of organisations when responding to allegations of abuse against children. In addition:

- the capacity of organisations to respond to allegations will be developed
- the CCYP can share information where appropriate, including with the Working With Children Check Unit and the Victoria Police, to better prevent and protect children from abuse
- where there is a finding that a person has engaged in reportable conduct, it can lead to a review of the suitability of the person to continue to work with or volunteer with children, including the possibility that the person’s Working with Children Check could be revoked.

Where to get further information and advice

The Commission for Children and Young People can be contacted for clarification and guidance on 8601 5281 or childsafestandards@ccyp.vic.gov.au. Further information is also available on the Commission for Children and Young People’s website at www.ccyp.vic.gov.au

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NEW REPORT SHOWS HOW AUSTRALIA IS PROGRESSING ON EARLY LEARNING PROVISION

BY CAROLIN WENZEL – CAMPAIGN & MEDIA MANAGER, EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA (ECA)

The Early Learning Everyone Benefits campaign is proud to release the second edition of the State of Early Learning in Australia 2017 report with critical analysis by the Mitchell Institute.

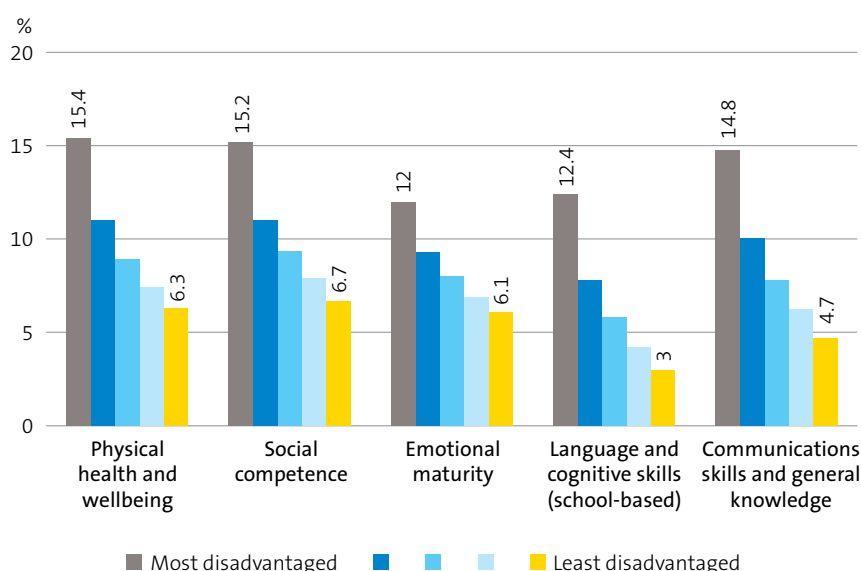
Data nerds will be pleased to know that this report brings together information from a range of sources on quality, child development, participation and investment in early learning into one easy to read document. Essentially, it provides a summary for the sector about how many children are participating in early learning across Australian States and Territories and how they are faring when they start their first year at school.

The campaign will use this important document to communicate with political and community leaders about why investing in quality early learning is so important for the wellbeing of children and families, and how it supports future prosperity for the nation.

The report includes data showing a strong correlation between disadvantage (as measured by SEIFA, the Socio-Economic Index for Areas) and developmental vulnerability – as measured by the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

Across all domains the most disadvantaged group had the highest proportion of children who were classified as developmentally vulnerable, while the most advantaged group had the lowest proportion. There has been little change in this pattern since 2009.

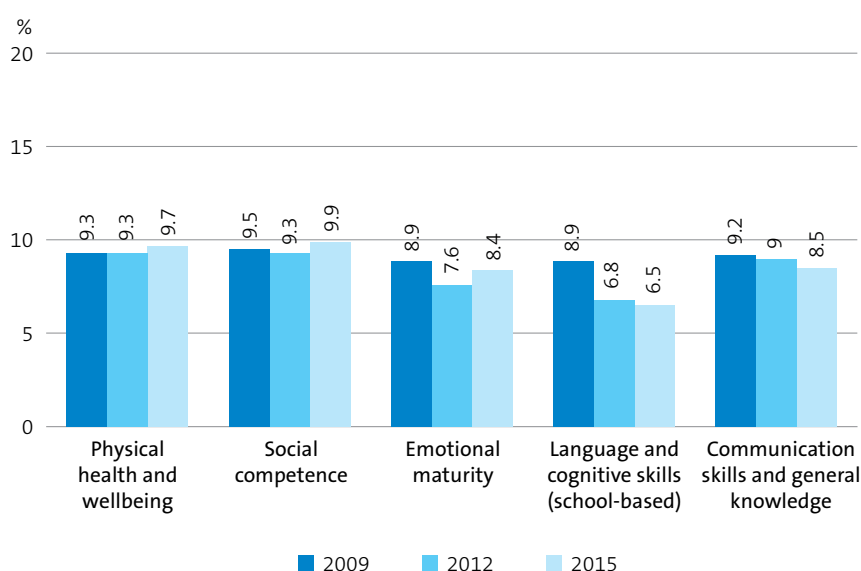
Proportion of children developmentally vulnerable by socioeconomic status (2015)



Source: Australian Government, 2016

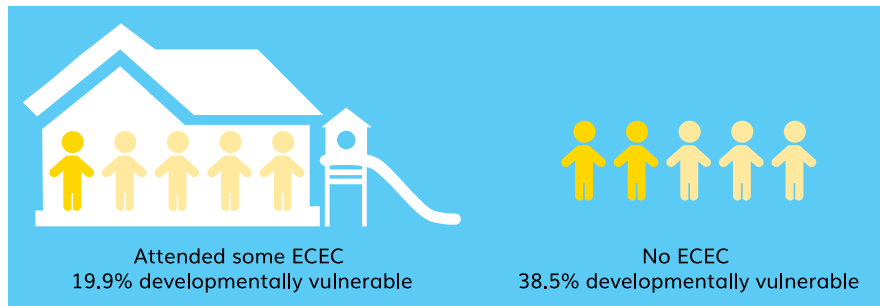
AEDC data compares children who had participated in early childhood education with children who had not, clearly highlighting that Australian children who attended some form of early learning were HALF as likely to have developmental vulnerabilities in one or more domains when they start school, as children who had not accessed early learning.

Proportion of children developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains by ECEC experience



Source: Australian Government, 2016

Early learning and developmental vulnerability



The report advocates that access to age-appropriate, play-based quality early learning reduces inequality and helps all children develop the skills they need for lifelong learning and a successful transition to school, regardless of their background or family circumstances.

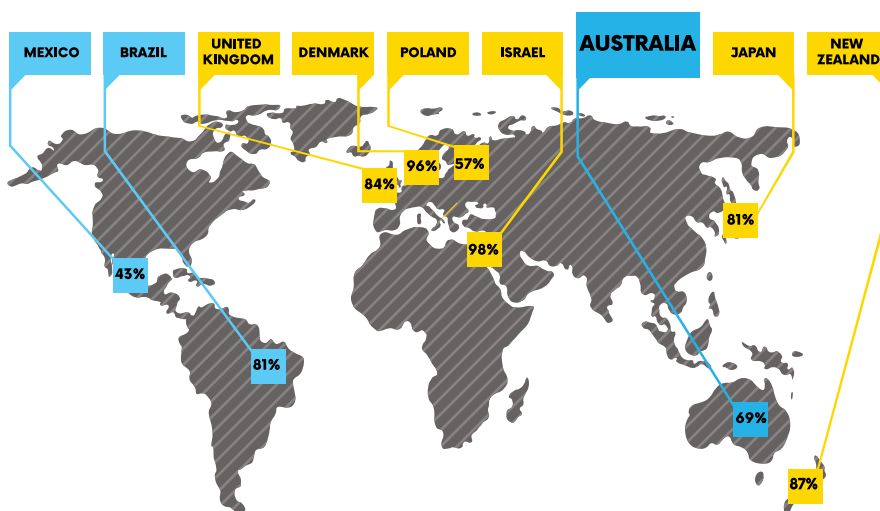
These improved outcomes for young children flow on to economic and social benefits for all of us – estimated to contribute billions to Australia's economy. The report cites a PwC report which calculated that if all Australian children could access quality early learning, it would boost our economy by more than ten billion dollars by 2050.

The *State of Early Learning in Australia 2017* report shows more children than ever are now accessing one year of preschool – the rate of children attending fifteen (15) hours of a preschool program in the year before they start school has increased from just 12 per cent in 2008 up to 91 per cent in 2015. This is a significant improvement and shows what can be done when State and Federal governments focus their policy effort.

Yet we still have a long way to go to reach international benchmarks. Australia is in the BOTTOM THIRD of OECD countries for participation of THREE YEAR OLDS in early learning – with just 69 per cent of children attending an early education and care centre, and only 15 per cent enrolled in a pre-school program led by a teacher.

Enrolment rates at age three in early childhood education and care

Australia has a low rate of enrolment of three-year-olds in early learning and is in the bottom third of countries ranked by the OECD.



We have seen what has been achieved in preschool participation in the year before school. Now we need the same policy focus and commitment to increase access to early learning for three-year-olds, particularly three-year-olds who have experienced disadvantage and are at risk of experiencing difficulties at school.

The Early Learning Everyone Benefits campaign calls on all our Federal and state/territory politicians – from across the political spectrum – to work together to improve access to quality early learning. We want every Australian child to be able to access at least two days per week of quality early learning. This will not just benefit children and their families but everyone who participates in our society and our economy – indeed – everyone benefits.



Early Learning Everyone Benefits

is a campaign leading Australians to value the benefits of quality early learning for all children under five, and for Australia's future prosperity. The campaign seeks political commitment to increase access to quality programs that amplify children's development. We are a coalition of early childhood peak and education, parenting and community organisations. Our combined reach covers about 100,000 parents, 150,000 children and 100,000 early childhood professionals.

Sign up to show your support and receive campaign updates: <http://www.everyonebenefits.org.au/getinvolved>



Like on Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/earlylearning.everyonebenefits/>



Follow on twitter –
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Read the full version of the *State of Early Learning in Australian 2017* report: <http://bit.ly/StateOfEL2017>.

Watch short video of the report highlights: <https://www.facebook.com/earlylearning.everyonebenefits/videos/1146689172097589/>

Read and republish Mitchell Institute's article in The Conversation: https://theconversation.com/early-learning-report-card-australia-is-improving-rapidly-but-theres-more-work-to-do-83706?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=twitterbutton

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY PLANNING

Does your service have a person with the dedicated portfolio of occupational health and safety?

Providing a safe environment is a requirement under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. Services need to be safe for children and their families, for employees, volunteers and also for contractors.

Safety is the responsibility of employers i.e. early years management organisations and committees of management for independent kindergartens. As we move into the period of the year where Annual General Meetings are held and planning for the next year takes place, it is an opportunity to ensure occupational health and safety is included and a person with the lead responsibility is identified.

The Occupational Health and Safety portfolio holder has a leadership role, working in conjunction with the committee or early years management organisation to ensure that:

- employees are aware of the service's occupational health and safety policy
- training is provided for relevant employees and volunteers
- induction for employees and volunteers includes occupational health and safety
- employees are consulted on all occupational health and safety issues
- regular inspections take place to ascertain whether there are any occupational health and safety hazards at the service and that measures to deal with any hazards are identified and implemented
- the service's register of injuries and incidents is reviewed for any learnings and that any changes needed are put into action
- practice of evacuations or lockdowns takes place.

Victorian workplace injury statistics reveal that over 70 per cent of injuries in early learning services are musculoskeletal in nature, such as sprains and strains of the back, knees, neck and arms. Common workplace hazards include:

- poor office ergonomics
- working at low levels, for example using child size chairs and tables



- lifting children
- moving playground and other equipment
- poor housekeeping indoors and hazards in the playground
- storage of equipment.

Inadequate storage areas with little space to walk through and plenty of clutter are accidents waiting to happen. Storerooms are also often designated by services as a lockdown room and in most cases they are unsafe for this purpose. Tips for improving storage areas include:

- ensure there is clear access to shelving
- consider redesigning shelving that is above head height or that is too deep, requiring staff to bend and reach in. Ideally shelving is between knuckle and shoulder height. If redesign is not possible, a step ladder with a handrail should be provided
- store items at the appropriate height and do not overload shelves. Large or heavy items and frequently used items should be stored at easily accessible levels. Smaller, lightweight and infrequently handled items can be stored in higher or lower areas
- items required to be moved by trolley should remain on the trolley while in storage
- regularly review equipment and remove items which are no longer useful or safe to reduce crowding.

ELAA, together with Recovre, presents a one day seminar on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Return to Work.

The course is specifically designed for employers and managers from early childhood services who are responsible for the OHS of their staff. The seminar provides practical information and guidance on how to manage risks by addressing the most common hazards faced by the early childhood sector and what to do should an injury occur.

Topics include:

- OHS laws in Victoria
- legal responsibilities of employers
- duties of employees
- OHS management systems
- hazard identification and risk assessments
- manual handling
- psychological wellbeing of employees
- worker's compensation
- supporting employee return to work.

Further information is available at www.elaa.org.au/learning-development

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ELAA established the Early Childhood Education Foundation to address concerns that many Victorian families were not accessing preschool. Due to financial hardships and other factors many children are not experiencing this vital year of development.

Why was the Early Childhood Education Foundation established?

The ELAA Early Childhood Education Foundation believes that all young children and their families should have access to high quality educational programs.

Please help us to help those families in need. Donations will assist us in providing a child with the opportunity of accessing this vital year of development.

To make a donation or to apply for funding call 9489 3500 or go to www.elaa.org.au/eccef



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Child car seats – it's all about size, not age

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Remember the law is just the minimum and we can do far more than just the minimum to keep our children safe.



Go to www.carseatssavelives.com.au and take the 'five-step test'

To find out if it's safe for your child to be in an adult seatbelt take the 'Five-Step Test' by visiting www.carseatssavelives.com.au where you can also watch ELAA's new video 'Child Restraints and Booster Seats – What You Need to Know' and access more essential information on keeping your child safe in your car.