

Research backs the importance young minds

The better educators aim to foster a lifelong love of learning to set up children for the future.

National and international research continues to inform us that access to quality early learning education significantly impacts on a child's future learning capabilities and social outcome.

Early Learning Association of Australia chief executive officer Shane Lucas says he's heartened to see a growing body of research informed by the Australian context, as this supports the push by educational organisations for additional State and Federal funding for quality early learning. "Our sector has traditionally been dependent on research from the US and England, but the Australian evidence base is growing and that is extremely helpful when talking with governments that want evidence of similar outcomes happening here," says Lucas. "Now, there's a lot of interesting research coming out of places like the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University and the University of Wollongong; and recently the Melbourne Graduate School of Education brought out the long-awaited, longitudinal E4Kids Study. And to now have Minister [for Education and Training] Simon Birmingham talking about the importance and value of early childhood education is significant from a policy and funding perspective."

Stimulating change from ground-breaking research takes time, and ELAA sees one of its roles as a "middle-man" between academia and service providers. "Good research can inform good practice, and we use our publications, our profession-



Early Learning Association of Australia CEO Shane Lucas (left), and Eureka Community Kindergarten Association CEO Jo Geurts.

al learning program and our annual conference to help translate that into new methods of engaging with children and families. With new research, the challenge for providers and educators is to bring new knowledge back to the service and put into practice what you've discovered. We run our annual conference with Gowrie Victoria and other organisations and we seek to offer a balanced offering between new research, policy developments and practical approaches that educators can use."

Eureka Community Kindergarten Associ-



ation chief executive officer Jo Geurts says local, state and federal governments should consider specific national and international research evidence that shows the importance of brain development of children from birth to five years of age.

"It's critical that children are offered everything that supports their wellbeing, health and development in those early years. Every dollar spent on children in the first five years of their life will have an economic benefit in the long run," says Geurts.

"These children will have better educa-

tional outcomes and be better contributors to communities. Early learning services play a crucial role as our teachers and educators are trained to understand how children learn and can help each child develop to their full potential. We aim to embed a lifelong love of learning to set children up for positive future educational outcomes. More investment in early childhood would likely reduce the amount of money needed to be spent on youth detention and education engagement programs."

While Geurts believes the National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework have positively impacted the industry, and that the Victorian Government's \$202 million Early Childhood Reform Plan is a step in the right direction, she maintains that "more needs to be done, especially to support vulnerable children and those with disabilities. There are often challenges with children who have been exposed to detrimental environments and we need other services to support us.

"The frameworks set the bar high and that gives us all something to work towards that ensures we're focusing on better outcomes for children. The Early Years Learning Framework uses a play-based curriculum to engage children in learning in a positive way and through that they learn the essential life skills they're going to need, including the foundations for numeracy and literacy.

The federal government needs to look carefully at how they can inject more funds into early learning."

See: elaa.org.au
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