

THE CHILD IN FOCUS – MOVING TO AN INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL IN 2016

BY SIGI HYETT (GENERAL MANAGER) – KENSINGTON COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S CO-OPERATIVE

Kensington Community Children's Co-operative (KCCC) is a community-managed service that provides education and care to 140 children each day, has nine rooms, including two kindergarten rooms with 287 children across the week and employs 50 staff.

In 2014 the delivery model at KCCC was based on age segregated rooms. The outdoor area was separated by a fence for younger and older children. Children and educators moved up to new rooms each year and each room operated quite separately from the other.

In 2014, a child in the outdoor yard wishing to visit her sibling became distressed when she needed to wait for an educator to open the gate between the two play spaces at our service.

This became the catalyst for our service to reflect on whether the traditional age-segregated delivery model was as child focussed as it could be and led us to investigate other delivery models.

"As soon as one can no longer think things as one formally thought about then transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible" (Foucault, 1988. pp 323–330)

It was not too long ago, that our thinking changed, it became urgent and was not always easy, however, quite possible.

How

A key to our successful change included planning a robust professional development program which commenced in July 2014 and continued over 18 months.

We engaged an external experienced early years consultant, Heather Barnes, to explore the topic of integrated service delivery through critical reflective practice on all aspects.

The workshops and PD sessions provided opportunities for questioning our experiences and views. They encouraged critically thinking about values and assumptions underlying practice and considering different perspectives and possibilities.

Educators visited other services that were successfully delivering multi-age grouping which included one of our educators spending two months at our sister school in Denmark as part of our staff host exchange. Representatives from other services were also invited to attend our staff meetings for a Q & A session.

These partnerships enabled educators to engage in investigating real-life examples and link these to our own setting.

Families were offered an information session facilitated by Heather Barnes, drop in sessions which provided them opportunity to unpack and ask further questions, and detailed information packs were provided to families.

The KCCC Board, that comprises families and represents the family body, endorsed KCCC moving to a multi-age grouping model which was introduced in 2016.

What does this look like now?

Having children of varying ages in a group encourages educators to see children as individuals and tailor programs to address their individual needs. This supports the development of personalised learning with the CHILD IN FOCUS.

The feedback received from educators and families has been largely positive and the model embraced by our dedicated and empowered staff. Staff have undertaken action research projects which enable continued reflective practice with a focus on each child. Educators have and continue to share stories about their own professional and personal growth and how this impacts on their practice.

There are many benefits for children, including increased language and social skills, greater sense of agency and individualised planning.

Our recent rating of EXCEEDING the National Quality Standards has certainly validated that transformation is quite possible.

The strengths of the service now include effective curriculum decision making that promotes a child focused approach in the program. A clear and ongoing cycle of planning that includes the elements of observation, interpretation, implementation and evaluation is evident in the programs. The structure supports effective critical reflection to occur at individual, service and system levels that consistently drive the program.



Moving forward

The teams at KCCC will continue to undertake action research projects, ensuring that we continuously practise critical reflection.

Some of the actions we have already reflected on and have in place for 2017 to strengthen the integrated service delivery include:

- The implementation of an Outdoor/Excursion Educator who supports Educators to effectively collaborate ideas about children's learning in the integrated yard and extend on planning possibilities. The Educator facilitates regular planned small group excursions which support strengthened relationships and connections with the local community.
- Partnerships with the Wurundjeri tribe Elders where the elders will work with educators and children about cultural competencies and strengthen the community connection within the service, learning about our connection to our place, bringing the whole community together.
- The implementation of Story Park, where families have further opportunity to be involved in their child's program and planning through an online interactive forum.
- Effectively utilising educator's strengths across the service on projects where educators have the opportunity to share their areas of expertise with the full service. Examples include:



- a cooking program where one educator shares her knowledge and passion and provides opportunities for the children from all rooms to partake
- sharing the knowledge and skills of educators who speak another language to run language group times and story times across rooms.
- continuing to ensure our roster development provides opportunity for excursions/projects to occur across the centre, where children are provided the opportunity to partake in an excursion or projects with a range of children from across the whole centre. This provides opportunities for siblings and peers to engage with each other in smaller group settings.

We will continue to critically reflect on the ways in which we can strengthen integrated service delivery with a focus on the rights of each child at KCCC.

Learn more about the KCCC journey to integrated service delivery at the 2017 Early Childhood Education Conference

Learn how moving to an integrated service delivery model with multi-age grouping has resulted in the children and educators at Kensington Community Child Care Co-operative feeling proud, engaged and empowered.

When: Friday, 26 May at 3.30pm

Where: 2017 Early Childhood Education Conference – together we grow *the child in focus*, Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne.

More information: for program information and to register for the session go to www.togetherwegrow.com.au

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