

# bedrock

issue 1 | Vol 29 | 2024



## A brighter future for refugees in Lebanon

Lebanon is host to the largest number of refugees per capita  
and per square kilometre of any country in the world

## Uluru Statement from the Heart

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

*This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.*

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. *This is the torment of our powerlessness.*

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a *rightful place* in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: *the coming together after a struggle*. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

Endorsed by:



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## TERMINOLOGY

The union acknowledges regional  
differences in some terms. Please  
bear these in mind as you read:

**QNT** – Kindergarten

**NSW/ACT** –  
Preschool/Early childhood centre



## Digital play

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number of refugees per capita  
and per square kilometre of any  
country in the world

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It's been over a decade since the  
Educational Leader position was  
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### Emotional intelligence

Complex issues, long days and  
occasionally demanding parents  
make this a crucial quality.

### Inclusion creates opportunity

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### Cultural practices the core of early childhood education

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Rachael Phillips

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### Body Blocks helping kids embrace body positivity

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# Editorial

**Our union looks forward to bringing members the latest news, research and resources relevant to their professional practice through our three editions of *Bedrock* in 2024.**

Read about the Federal Government's expansion of the Connected Beginnings program, which will provide support to ensure an extra 4500 First Nations children are school-ready (p15).

Hear from an incredible trio of women who run an early childhood education program for displaced children living in refugee camps in Lebanon (p6).

In this edition, our journalists note that it has now been a decade since the Educational Leader position was introduced in NSW.

Being an Educational Leader is a critical role in early childhood centres across the country; however, the experience of being an Educational Leader in NSW varies widely, as do their working conditions (p8).

We look at the groundbreaking new program designed by experts to help foster healthy attitudes towards body positivity and food among children (p21).

Early education specialist and IEUA member Janelle Gallagher reflects on inclusion and discriminatory practices within the sector – while many children and families are nurtured and feel a sense of belonging, others report the opposite (p12).

This edition also explores the concept of digital play – with today's children growing up in a society where digital technology is ubiquitous and smaller, virtual worlds form part of the broader everyday environment (p18).

We hope you enjoy the first edition of *Bedrock* for 2024 and know that our union is continuing to advocate for early childhood education sector members' voices at the highest levels.

**Terry Burke**  
IEU-QNT Secretary

**Carol Matthews**  
IEUA NSW/ACT Secretary

# bedrock UPFRONT

## ACCC report: better pay, better outcomes

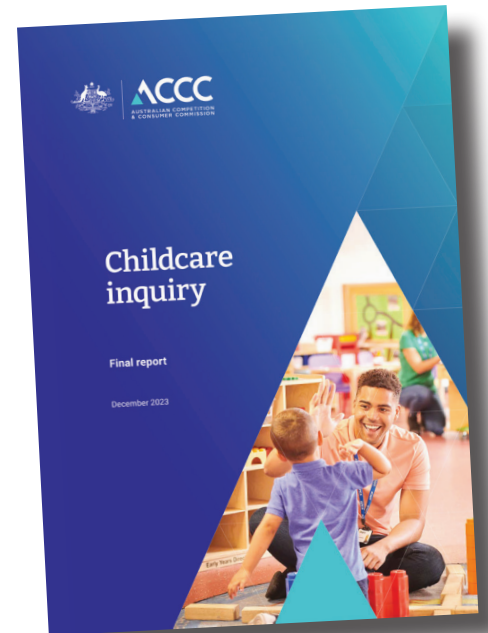
In January, after a year-long inquiry, the ACCC released its report into 'childcare markets'. It found the availability and quality of staff delivering ECEC services has a significant impact on the quality, reputation and profitability (through influencing occupancy) of a service, with a stable tenure and continuity of staff also contributing to service viability.

It also found that rural, regional and low socio-economic status areas are underserved.

The ACCC has recommended government influence the location of centres, rather than leave it to the market, so remote areas are not underserved.

The IEU supports the findings that continuity and quality of staff have a direct impact on the reputation, viability and quality of a service.

It is hoped these findings support the bargaining application before the Fair Work Commission for multi-employer enterprise agreements for the early education and care sector (see below).



## Long day care: Supported bargaining update

Negotiations for a supported bargaining agreement (SBA) to cover teachers and educators employed in long day care services run by 64 employers in NSW continued in February.

Everyone agrees significant pay increases and access to professional development are required to improve workforce attraction and retention, professionalism and service quality. The IEU is pushing hard for the SBA to provide for increased planning/non-contact time to help teachers to manage workload pressures. Federal Government representatives attended further meetings in February.

It is envisaged that the SBA will include the *Educational Services (Teachers) Award* conditions in addition to:

1. A substantial pay rise (unions are seeking a 25% increase on award rates of pay).
2. Greater access to paid time professional development.
3. A two-hour minimum engagement for part-time teachers.
4. Improved pay progression. If proficiency cannot be secured through no fault of the teacher, they may still progress to a higher classification.
5. Support for teachers to mentor early career teachers.
6. Access to long service leave in periods of at least one day.
7. Confirmation that no employee will suffer a reduction in their rate of pay or conditions where these are superior to those contained in the agreement.
8. A pathway to dispute resolution by the Fair Work Commission for issues arising in the SBA or National Employment Standards.
9. Recognition of union delegates.
10. Employer provision of ICT (computers, tablets) for work purposes.



### QNT collective bargaining update

Collective bargaining for IEU-QNT members employed in affiliate community kindergarten and preschool services will continue throughout 2024, with members encouraged to voice their key concerns.

IEU-QNT Assistant Secretary Nicole Kapernick said members' active involvement in recent collective bargaining has achieved significant protections for:

- classifications
- remuneration
- superannuation
- hours of duty, and
- allowances.

"In addition to the above, most affiliate kindergartens/preschools with active IEU members have collectively bargained for further improvements to working conditions and wages," Nicole said.

These benefits include:

- superannuation employer contributions of up to 12.75%
- conversion of Senior Teacher allowance to a substantive salary

- introduction of Experienced Senior Teacher classification
- inclusion of a Senior Assistant's allowance, and
- up to 20 days paid pandemic leave.

Nicole said collective bargaining for replacement agreements in C&K Branch services and Lady Gowrie Branch services would commence in the latter half of 2024.

"We strongly encourage IEU members employed by C&K and Lady Gowrie to become actively involved in bargaining and to contribute feedback to the surveys that will be forthcoming to inform the employee log of claims," she said.

"The active engagement of members in the collective bargaining process contributes to our collective strength and will achieve better pay and conditions.

### Safety report

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) has released the Review of Child Safety Arrangements Report under the National Quality Framework (NQF).

The Report made 16 recommendations regarding physical and online safety, child supervision and staffing requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings.

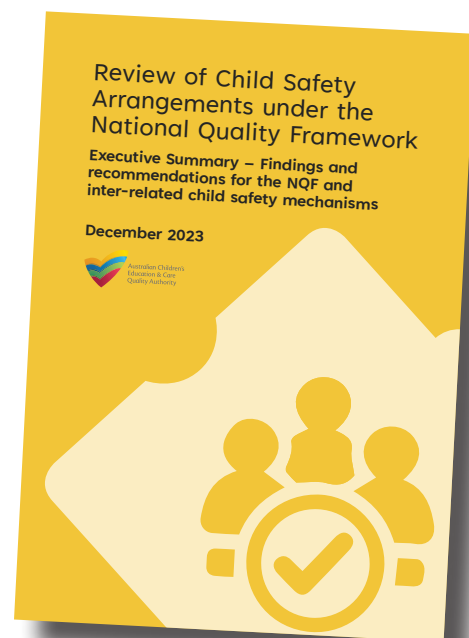
Education Ministers across Australia were presented with the Report in December 2023 and requested senior officials to consult with the ECEC sector about the report's recommendations.

Advice on implementing the Report's recommendations will be presented to Education Ministers in early 2024.

Although the NQF is internationally recognised for providing a robust regulatory scheme for ensuring children's health, safety and wellbeing, the report indicates more can be done to ensure the NQF remains contemporary and fit-for-purpose.

"This report highlights the NQF can be better, and the Australian Government is committed to making it better so our children have a positive, rewarding and safe early childhood education," Minister for Early Childhood Education Dr Anne Aly said.

IEU members can access the full report and read the recommendations online at [acecqa.gov.au/child-safety-review](https://acecqa.gov.au/child-safety-review)





# A brighter future for refugees in Lebanon

**Lebanon is host to the largest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometre of any country in the world. It makes childhood a luxury, writes Katie Camarena.**

The United Nations (UN) estimates 1.5 million refugees live in Lebanon and, with the country lurching from one crisis to another, the situation for both Lebanese nationals and refugees is difficult.

There was a further influx of refugees from Syria after 2011, but Lebanon has been impacted by political and financial meltdown, the August 2020 blast in Beirut's port, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The UN reports that 80 per cent of Lebanon's population is living in poverty. From late 2019, Lebanon's currency spiralled into freefall with its value depreciating by 90 per cent and resulting in the economy becoming more reliant on US dollars.

Yet with every crisis, organisations supporting Lebanon's most vulnerable people step up and find the strength to work even harder for their community. This is the case for Sara, Mirna and Suha – three women committed to the future of children at Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp.

## **Spotlight: Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp, Beirut**

Bourj al-Barajneh was established in 1948 by the League of Red Cross Societies. With an initial population of 3400 refugees from northern Palestine, it burgeoned to 40,000 in 2017. The camp is located on less than one square kilometre of land, making it one of the most densely populated places on the planet.

## **Building hope through early education**

For the children in refugee camps, childhood is a luxury. Incidences of deprivation, violence, child labour and early marriage can be prevalent. Meanwhile, chronic unemployment and lack of further study can lead to young adults passing their time drinking, smoking and taking drugs.

Refugees cannot take permanent jobs or own land and official access to electricity, phones and water is restricted. The camp is crowded, nutrition is poor, and family violence

adds to the stress of daily life. Badly constructed buildings stretch ever upwards towards the sky while electricity wires dangle dangerously low as they interweave with leaky water pipes at ground level.

Set against this backdrop, early childhood teacher Sara works hard to prepare Bourj al-Barajneh's youngest refugees for admission to school. Sara teaches basic Arabic, English, numeracy, science and life skills – all crucial to enrolling in a UN primary school when the children are six.

Sara herself attended the UN refugee school before completing in-service training to become a teacher. She has three daughters and has worked at the early childhood centre for 17 years.

Teachers are trained in class management, life skills training, and case management. Teachers like Sara develop special skills to identify problems and disabilities and to help students deal with the situations they face in their personal lives so that they can learn and thrive in the classroom.

Mirna, a psychologist, says that early childhood education helps parents as well. "Many parents don't have a good education, so they learn from their children," she says. "When students go home and start pronouncing letters and connecting them to form words, they are helping their parents learn. This makes the children feel happy with themselves," Mirna adds. This is particularly relevant for children from Kurdish or Syrian backgrounds.

Suha is the coordinator for APHEDA's early childhood project with the Palestinian Women's Humanitarian Organisation (PWHO), which grew from work among Palestinian women and children in Lebanon since 1984. PWHO now works with Syrian families who arrived after 2011. PWHO's programs focus on early education and women's empowerment in three refugee camps in Beirut (Bourj al-Barajneh, Shatilla and Mar Elias).

## **Teaching through trauma**

Refugees have restricted access to employment. This is a source of both frustration and stress which can manifest in



**Opposite page:** Refugee children in Bourj al-Barajneh. **This page, clockwise from top left:** Sara's classroom; Mirna; Sara and Suha; streets of Bourj al-Barajneh; indoor playground.



incidents of domestic violence. All refugees struggle with unemployment but recent arrivals from Syria are most vulnerable as they are still establishing their lives in the camp and trying to fit into already crowded spaces.

“Sometimes men can’t find work to support their family. There are two, three or even four families living together. This affects relationships between husband and wife. Between brothers. Between parents and children,” Mirna says. She describes how this plays out in the classroom. “I have some cases of children who see their father hitting their mother. This leads to that child coming to class and not integrating in activities.”

To help address these issues, Sara uses strategies like circle time to build trust with her students. They talk about things that happen to them at home. Sara also uses drawing to help children express feelings and to understand more about their situation. These strategies help identify trauma with cases then referred on to Mirna.

Mirna helps train and support teachers to use psychosocial support activities developed by the United Nations refugee school, while Suha ensures staff are updated on any new developments. Though children are the primary target of these activities, they have a positive impact on the whole community. Both Mirna and Suha work closely to support families through home visits and weekly meetings over coffee at the centre.

Sara uses many resources to teach her class including arts and crafts, videos, flashcards and picture books. She makes the children feel proud by displaying their work on the wall for everyone to see. The current class theme is ‘winter’ so the walls are decorated with penguins. Sara is teaching the children about winter vegetables and how soup is important for their bodies to feel warm. PWHO also provides a healthy breakfast daily as it “helps children concentrate and feel less hungry,” Mirna says.

International donors fund health, nutrition, youth and women’s projects in the camps. Funds from Australia also support after school retention classes for children having

difficulty in primary school. There is a special class for 20 children with serious disabilities who cannot access Lebanese services.

### Space to play

In the camp, access to safe outdoor spaces is a challenge. Twice a day, Sara’s class navigate a series of stairs in single file to access an indoor playground on the third floor. A slide, see saw, and swings await them in a sparse concrete room with high windows covered with safety cage.

Children in Sara’s class participate in growing vegetables six times a year with support from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to take them by bus to a parcel of land outside the camp. Meanwhile, another project funded by Australian donors takes 100 children out of camp each week to learn to play football.

### Workloads and wages

Sara works around eight hours per day, six days per week, year-round. Leave is only taken on public holidays like Eid ul Fitr and Christmas Day. It is illegal for refugees to own or rent outside of the camp so most staff live in the camp. Sara and her colleagues are paid by PWHO in US currency. Inflation is excruciating but the wage is enough to cover rent and food. Early childhood teachers in camp have the added pressure of ensuring that children learn enough to be able to enrol in school.

Early education delivered by teachers like Sara with psychosocial support from Mirna plays an essential role in giving refugee children a brighter future.

**PWHO’s early education program is funded by Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA, the Australian Government, unions and individual donors. APHEDA is the global justice organisation of the Australian union movement and began work in the refugee camps in 1984.**

**The IEU extends our thanks to Suha, Mirna and Sara, and to Ken Davis (APHEDA).**

# Educational Leaders

# A tale of two teachers

## Time and support make a dramatic difference for Educational Leaders, writes Lucy Meyer.

It's been over a decade since the Educational Leader position was introduced to the sector in NSW. Established in 2012 by The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), it's now a critical role in early childhood centres across NSW. But the experience of being an Educational Leader varies as widely as the conditions.

While some Educational Leaders receive extra pay, hours, and support from their employer, many others don't.



Tessa McGavock is the Educational Leader and Director at Western Sydney University Early Learning Penrith. The IEU member, who has been teaching for over 46 years and working as an Educational Leader for 12, receives no additional pay for the role. The enterprise agreement for her centre was approved before the Educational Leader allowance was introduced in late 2022. McGavock is not alone, with many centres falling into this category. McGavock feels strongly that all Educational Leaders

should be compensated for the work.

On the other side of Sydney, another IEU member, Kirsten Hoolahan is working under very different circumstances. Hoolahan, a teacher at Gordon Community Preschool, has served as the Educational Leader for just over a year. While her workplace doesn't have an enterprise agreement, thanks to the backing of her director, Hoolahan receives an allowance on top of her teaching wages.

Hoolahan also credits her director with allowing her to work directly with children three days per week and as an Educational Leader for the other two — a proposal Hoolahan advocated for. When asked whether it's possible to do the work in less than two days, Hoolahan responded: "I'd say it's possible, but not possible to do it well."

You need time, she believes, to keep up to date with the latest research and professional development, guide other teachers, be a sounding board for colleagues and communicate with your team.

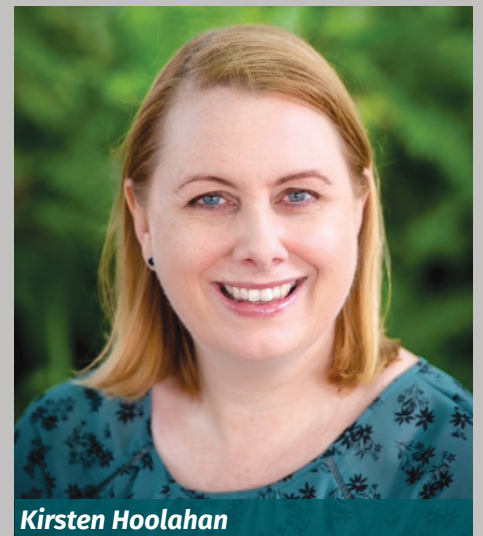
## Time is of the essence

The amount of time Hoolahan has for the position is rare, said Early Childhood Education and Care Organiser at the IEU's NSW/ACT Branch, Lisa James. Inadequate time is the single biggest problem James hears about from members in the role, with many only allocated the minimum two hours in the award to fulfill their duties. "Reviewing documentation of children's learning, overseeing the program for the centre, mentoring the other teachers and educators and researching best practice in two hours is just an impossible thing to do," James said.

McGavock is not given any additional time for her Educational Leader work. "It's part and parcel of what you do as a Centre Director here," she said.

She works full-time as a Director and Educational Leader while completing a PhD at the University of Western Sydney and contributing to academic work at the university.

To McGavock, there's a discrepancy between what is expected of Educational Leaders and what is possible on any given day. When she read through ACECQA's Educational Leader Resource Guide, McGavock was surprised to see that a sixth of her time is supposed to be spent on research, a sixth on mentoring, and so forth. In the fast-paced and unpredictable environment of early childhood education "you can't really break down a day like that," said McGavock. She's passionate about evidence-based research, but she knows research takes time. "I don't get five minutes uninterrupted in a month."



While McGavock has the skills, dedication, and experience to manage it all, she knows that less seasoned teachers often don't. "I just see these youngsters, these young, mostly young women trying to negotiate this exceptionally stressful space, with very little support from management quite often."



## Teacher burnout

According to McGavock, the stress and burden of the Educational Leader role are contributing to teacher burnout and the loss of good teachers from a sector that desperately needs them.

McGavock is a member of a Facebook group for Educational Leaders. Teachers share experiences, ask for advice, and pool resources. Too often, McGavock said, she sees posts from young Educational Leaders who are clearly drowning.

“I’m so new and so lost,” wrote one member recently. “I’m doing everything at home as I never get time off the floor and [I’m] mentally struggling.”

McGavock has seen too many posts of Educational Leaders not getting paid, not getting any time off the floor, and not getting any support from management.

She thinks the frequency of such posts speaks to a wider problem with the Educational Leader role. “I just have to actually disengage from that forum completely because it makes my blood boil,” she said.

By contrast, Hoolahan has been fortunate to have a very rewarding and positive experience as an Educational Leader. “I think the role is very different in every service,” she said. Hoolahan has some layers of support many lack.

Her director encouraged Hoolahan to join an Educational Leaders networking group, which has been

# “The role of an Educational Leader is to support, nurture, mentor, role model and empower your educators.”

an invaluable resource. She also spoke with the centre’s Board of Management about the significance of the role, advocating on her behalf for more time. Hoolahan has a director who is “great to bounce ideas off or ask for advice or support if and when you might need it, however she also allows you the freedom of being a professional”. It’s a refreshing experience for Hoolahan, who hasn’t always enjoyed such autonomy in the workplace.

As a director herself, McGavock takes pride in championing and motivating her staff. She would love to see all employers step up to support Educational Leaders. What’s needed,

she said, is adequate compensation, release time, less pressure, and regular training with enough time to really develop skills. She’d also like to see ACECQA make some changes. “I think they need to be more realistic,” she said.

While their experiences in the role of Educational Leader differ, McGavock and Hoolahan share a passion for teaching and a belief in the potential of the Educational Role to make a real difference for their teams.

To McGavock, “the role of an Educational Leader is to support, nurture, mentor, role model and empower your educators”. Hoolahan believes every service can make the position their own. She views it as “an opportunity to advocate for the sector” and to be a “professional disruptor” who gets people thinking.

“No matter what, the union believes it’s important that all Educational Leaders are paid properly,” said James.

What’s more, the role needs to be “resourced properly so teachers actually have time to be Educational Leaders, and to fulfil all of those important responsibilities.”





# in a leadership position

**Demanding parents, children with complex issues and needs, long days and interpersonal conflicts make emotional intelligence (EQ) a crucial component of an ECEC leader's role, Katie Fotheringham writes.**

Working in the ECEC sector in a leadership role, such as an Educational Leader in NSW/ACT or a Kindergarten Director in Queensland, can feel like navigating a labyrinth of multifaceted challenges that can be extremely emotionally draining for workers.

IEU-QNT Assistant Secretary Nicole Kapernick said critical awareness of EQ could be the difference between a team plagued with burnout and high turnover rates versus a high-performing, longstanding team.

"Although it may seem like there are more important things to consider day-to-day, being in tune with yourself and your colleagues' EQ can be a major contributing factor in fostering a thriving and nurturing work environment," Nicole said.

## **What is emotional intelligence?**

EQ consists of recognising, understanding and managing others' emotions as well as your own.

It involves a set of skills and competencies that contribute to building strong relationships, navigating social complexities, and making thoughtful decisions.

Emotional intelligence is a multifaceted construct encompassing several key components:

- **Self-awareness:** Recognising your emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and their impact on others. Self-aware individuals are attuned to their strengths and weaknesses and how their emotions influence their thoughts and behaviours.

- **Self-regulation:** Managing your emotions effectively and maintaining composure under pressure. Individuals with high self-regulation can adapt to changing circumstances, remain composed under pressure, and resist impulsive reactions.
- **Motivation:** Motivated individuals with high EQ are driven by a passion for their work or goals. They have a clear sense of purpose and are often resilient in the face of setbacks.
- **Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Empathy involves recognising and responding to the emotions of others with sensitivity and fostering positive interpersonal relationships.
- **Social skills:** In the context of emotional intelligence, social skills include effective communication, conflict resolution, and the ability to build and maintain relationships. Individuals with strong social skills can navigate social situations successfully and work well in collaborative settings.

## **Building trust and relationships**

Nicole said ECEC leaders interact with a diverse range of individuals, including children, parents, educators, and support staff.

"Developing and maintaining positive relationships with these stakeholders is paramount," Nicole said.

"Emotional intelligence equips managers with the skills to navigate and manage interpersonal dynamics effectively.

"By understanding the emotions of others, ECEC leaders can foster a supportive and collaborative environment, thereby enhancing the overall quality of the work environment and educational experience.

# “Emotional intelligence equips you with the ability to manage stress effectively, maintain a positive attitude, and make rational decisions even under pressure.”

## Effective communication

Nicole said communicating clearly goes a long way in ECEC.

“ECEC leaders with high emotional intelligence excel in communication by being attuned to the needs and emotions of their team members,” Nicole said.

“They can convey information with empathy, clarity, and understanding, promoting a sense of trust and openness among staff and parents.

“This skill is particularly crucial when addressing sensitive matters or managing conflicts within the team,” she said.

## Conflict resolution

Conflict is inevitable in any workplace, but handling it appropriately can make a huge difference.

Nicole said leading with emotional intelligence can help resolve conflict by diffusing tense situations, mediating conflicts, and creating a positive work environment.

“Not only does this improve culture amongst staff, but it also creates a better care environment for children,” she said.

## Stress management

Early childhood leadership can be demanding, and stressful situations can arise unexpectedly.

Nicole said effective decision-making is a key aspect of managerial roles, and emotional intelligence is pivotal in this process.

“Managers with a high level of emotional intelligence can assess situations objectively, taking into account the emotions and perspectives of all stakeholders,” Nicole said.

“This leads to more informed and thoughtful decision-making, fostering an environment where all members feel valued and respected.

“Emotional intelligence equips you with the ability to manage stress effectively, maintain a positive attitude, and make rational decisions even under pressure.

“This resilience is crucial for personal wellbeing and effective leadership,” she said.

## Employee engagement and retention

Nicole said the ECEC sector can be taxing, and staff may face various ongoing challenges in their roles.

“A leader with emotional intelligence is adept at recognising signs of stress or burnout among staff members,” Nicole said.

“By demonstrating empathy and offering support, they contribute to a positive workplace culture that prioritises the wellbeing of the entire team.

“This, in turn, leads to increased job satisfaction, retention, and a more productive work environment,” she said.

## Becoming a more emotionally intelligent leader

Like any skill, effective emotional intelligence takes time and practice to develop.

You can employ several simple strategies to hone your emotional intelligence skills in the workplace.

- 1. Self-reflection:** Regularly take time for self-reflection to examine your own emotions, reactions, and decision-making processes. Consider journaling as a tool to document and analyse your emotional responses in various situations.

- 2. Active listening:** Practice active listening when engaging with children, parents, and staff. Give your full attention, show empathy, and strive to understand their perspectives. Avoid interrupting and make an effort to validate and acknowledge the feelings of others.

- 3. Empathy development:** Actively seek to understand the emotions of those around you. Put yourself in their shoes to comprehend their experiences and feelings. Encourage open communication amongst team members, allowing others to express their emotions without judgment.

- 4. Mindfulness practices:** Engage in mindfulness exercises or practices to stay present in the moment. This can help you manage stress and respond more effectively to various situations. Mindful breathing, meditation, or yoga can be integrated into your routine to promote emotional awareness.

- 5. Conflict resolution skills:** Develop effective conflict resolution skills. Address conflicts calmly and rationally, considering the emotions of all parties involved. Encourage open communication and facilitate a resolution that is fair and mutually beneficial.

- 6. Build a positive work environment:** Foster a positive and supportive work environment for your staff. Recognise and celebrate achievements, fostering a sense of accomplishment and motivation. Be approachable and create opportunities for open dialogue, encouraging team members to share their thoughts and concerns.

- 7. Adaptability:** Cultivate adaptability in the face of change. Understand change can evoke various emotions in yourself and others, and be prepared to navigate these transitions with a positive attitude. Demonstrate flexibility and resilience, modelling these qualities for your team.

- 8. Continuous learning:** Stay committed to continuous learning about emotional intelligence. Share your knowledge with your team, fostering a culture of ongoing learning within your early childhood education setting.

- 9. Feedback and growth:** Solicit feedback from others about your leadership style and be open to constructive criticism. Use feedback as an opportunity for personal and professional growth, adjusting to enhance your emotional intelligence.

- 10. Lead by example:** Model the emotional intelligence you wish to see in others. Demonstrate self-awareness, empathy, and effective communication in your daily interactions. Inspire your team by embodying the values and behaviours associated with high emotional intelligence.

# Child Care Package Evaluation Report

# Inclusion creates opportunities

**Early childhood education in Australia prides itself on its significant impact on the lives of children and families in the communities served, IEUA NSW/ACT member and early education specialist Janelle Gallagher writes.**

While many families and children have an enriched experience, where children and families are nurtured and feel a sense of belonging, others report the opposite.

The Childcare Package Evaluation 2021, completed by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, found that discriminatory practices were occurring for children with additional needs in early learning services across Australia. The practices are often exclusionary and unintentional. Nevertheless, they negatively impact the child, family, and community.

Often, families recount stories where a child has been excluded from enrolling in an early learning service. The reason for declining the child's enrolment is "the additional burden of children with high care needs or the inability to accommodate specific

needs due to lack of skills to care for children with high needs" (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2021).

The adverse experiences of parents with children with additional needs in accessing early education and care are not new. One parent reporting in the Department of Education/ORIMA Research survey said: "Seven childcare services turned us down, saying he was too much work". To download the survey see: [bit.ly/3utiTur](https://bit.ly/3utiTur)

Early education and care can and must do better.

Embedding inclusion into early learning services is not complicated. It is as simple as this: "Every child has the right to access, participate, and be included in all aspects of community life, including children's education and care."

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)* is a law that protects Australians from discrimination based on disability. The DDA makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of the person's disability. This includes discrimination in the context of accessing and participating

in children's education and care services. All children's education and care services (including family day care) must comply with the DDA.

## **Equity and the EYLF**

The vision of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) V2.0 (p6) says 'All children engage in learning that promotes confident and creative individuals and successful lifelong learners'. It outlines the expectation for all children and is further unpacked under the updated Principle of Equity, Inclusion, and High Expectations (EYLF p17).

However, educators must first understand the term equity. Equity refers to fairness and is different from equality, where everyone 'gets the same.' Equity recognises diversity and different starting places and takes action to address the imbalance. The ongoing process calls upon educators to reflect critically and be responsive to unintentional or intentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures.

This requires a commitment from



educators to ensure every child's right to an equitable early learning experience. This is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### Professional responsibility

It is a professional responsibility for all educators, approved providers and management within an early learning service to implement inclusive and participatory practices in their services.

Unpack how your service currently supports inclusion. Is there a statement within the service philosophy? What is your philosophy on inclusion, and how does this guide your practice?

In the EYLF V2.0 (p65), inclusion is defined. It outlines clear expectations, regardless of children's social, cultural, and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, sexual identity, family circumstances, and geographic location) on curriculum decision-making processes.

Leadership within the service has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure inclusion for all children and their families. As part of the National Quality Standards in Quality Area 6, collaborative partnerships with families and communities, element 6.2.2 discusses access and participation, asking services to implement effective partnerships to support children's access, inclusion, and participation in the program.

Services must begin by closely examining and questioning current inclusion practices. Educators may consider the actions they can implement immediately.

### Discourse around difference

In her book *Inside the 'Inclusive' Early Childhood Classroom, the Power of 'Normal'*, 2017, Karen Watson offers wise words to guide educators. She suggests stop applying labels, stop looking for new labels for children who don't conform, and consider the discourse

around difference, which promotes difference as a problem and something that needs to be fixed or changed. And remove the 'norm' as a measurement to privilege those who conform.

Challenge the idea of 'sameness'. Be responsive to unfair encounters of exclusion and diverse perspectives on issues of inclusion witnessed and encourage others to identify unfair behaviour. Begin open and transparent conversations with colleagues around difference and be comfortable in the uncomfortable space of not knowing. Karen calls this the "elephant in the room".

Her final recommendation is that we could stop our incessant obsession with developmental discourses that construct and maintain the privileged 'normal' and the subjugated 'not normal'.

**“Stop applying labels, stop looking for new labels for children who don't conform, and consider the discourse around difference.”**

Consider these suggestions as a starting point in your service. Read widely about inclusion and consider how you position children in this discourse.

Self-reflect because, as humans, we all have blind spots and implicit bias. Upskill educators by participating in training that explicitly unpacks the

unintentional bias in our practices, including our language and ways of working.

Inclusion is much more than just attending an early learning service. It means full participation for the child and their family. This can be achieved through intentional adaptations to the curriculum, the environment both indoors and out, as well as resources like tables, chairs, easels, swings, and bikes, to name a few.

There are many resources to guide and support teams in their journey. The right for children and families to self-determination and to have agency over how inclusion is implemented requires service management and educators to pause, listen, and act. Our job is to listen with our ears and eyes and see what is really happening for the children. Feel their joy, their stress, and their every emotion as they and you learn together new ways to support and adapt your program and resources.

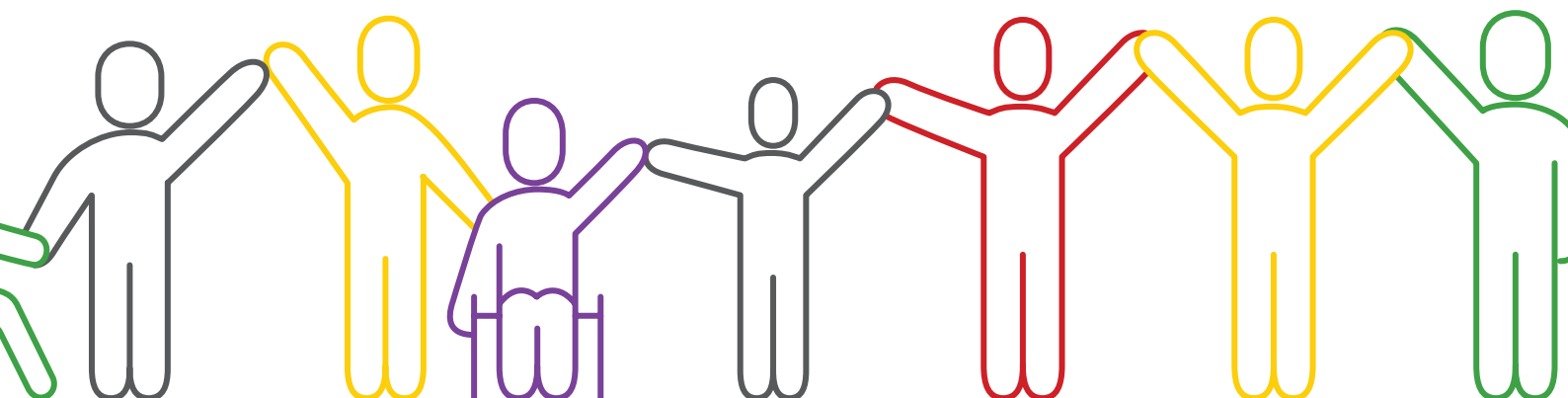
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# The power of the teaching profession

**Beverley Gowenlock has been an IEUA NSW/ACT member and early childhood teacher for 40 years. Here, she reflects on her long and interesting career.**

My interest in teaching began back in fifth and sixth grade, when I was fortunate to have an inspiring teacher who made a lasting impression on my desire for learning.

In addition, because my father was a TAFE teacher, there were many conversations at home about the satisfaction of observing the growth of knowledge shown by his students.

These experiences fostered my interest in the teaching profession. I enjoyed spending time with young children and observing their curiosity and discoveries.

After completing high school, I decided teaching would be my career. The importance of the teaching profession and the power of knowledge cannot be underestimated and is essential for future generations in any society.

When I first joined the IEU, I was employed at KU Children's Services as a Co-Director for their mobile preschool, assisted by an educator.

We would begin the day by loading up a Volkswagen Kombi van with folding tables, stackable chairs and other preschool items like puzzles and blocks, then drive to a location where there wasn't an existing preschool.

These locations were in north-west Sydney and included Galston, Glenorie and Mount Kuring-gai.

Most of these community halls often had existing outdoor climbing equipment to which we could add jumping boards, then create a preschool environment inside with other equipment.



## Landmark decision

Parents who used this mobile service formed community groups to lobby the council to build a preschool and this eventuated in two of the areas mentioned. These preschools are still operating.

When my two children began attending primary school, I began three years of casual teaching in my local area, followed by a full-time position at St John's Uniting Church Preparatory School at Wahroonga, for seven years.

When I realised it was a time for a change, I applied for a one-year maternity position at Norwood Community Preschool in Asquith [licensed for 25 children a day] as a Teaching Director.

This became a job share. In the mid-90s, job sharing was in its infancy, so it was a landmark decision by that parent committee.

It required lots of communication on our programming and agreements on each other's areas of responsibility; however, I thoroughly enjoyed the 23 years working with Karin Watts until my retirement in 2019.

Living in the local area, it was great to see former students who are now adults, or their parents, and discover what they have achieved.

That is one of the wonderful things about this profession – to know one could have made a difference.

I would like to thank the IEU for 40 years of support for teachers in the early childhood education and care sector.

I am grateful for the improvements the union has achieved and look forward to future ones for all teachers. I would recommend everyone be a member for the benefit of all.

“That is one of the wonderful things about this profession – to know one could have made a difference.”

# Ensuring First Nations children are school-ready



**The Australian Government has announced the expansion of the Connected Beginnings program with six further sites, supporting an additional 4500 First Nations children, Katie Fotheringham writes.**

Minister for Early Childhood Education Dr Anne Aly announced the program as part of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day celebrations.

New Connected Beginnings projects will be established in:

- Maryborough (QLD)
- Hervey Bay (QLD)
- Cairns (QLD)
- Bundaberg (QLD)
- Rockhampton (QLD)
- Broken Hill (NSW)

The new locations – five in Queensland and one in NSW – will bring the total number of Connected Beginnings sites to 40 across Australia, supporting 16,400 First Nations children.

“All children, no matter their background or where they live, should be able to access the transformational benefits of quality early childhood education and care,” Dr Aly said.

“Children who access early childhood education do better on key measures throughout life, including improved literacy and numeracy skills and better health outcomes, and they go on to higher paying jobs.

“The Connected Beginnings program has been structured so that communities are empowered to design and deliver the program in a way that supports their individual needs and aspirations,” she said.

## Community initiative

The Connected Beginnings program is a community-led initiative in partnership with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) National Voice for our Children and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO).

The program connects First Nations children aged 0-5 with a range of early childhood education, health services and family support services to assist them in achieving the learning and developmental milestones necessary for a positive transition to school.

At current locations, the average attendance of First Nations children in centre-based care has risen by more than 10 per cent from 2019 to 2022.

Additionally, there has been an uptick in the number of children meeting developmental benchmarks across all five Australian Early Development Census domains.

Connected Beginnings collaborates with First Nations communities to ensure that activities are delivered to First Nations people in their own spaces and on their Country.

The funding for new sites is part of an \$81.8 million government investment, aiming to expand the national program to 50 sites by 2025.

To further ensure that First Nations children can access the transformative benefits of quality early childhood education and care, the government has increased the number of hours of subsidised care First Nations children are eligible for to a minimum of 36 hours every fortnight.

## An important initiative

IEU-QNT Branch Secretary Terry Burke said it was critical that our government took initiatives like Connected Beginnings to support our First Nations children.

“Programs like Connected Beginnings contribute to the Closing the Gap early childhood education targets,” Burke said.

“Our union is committed to ensuring every child in Australia has access to the same quality of education and care, no matter their cultural background or location.

“The expansion of Connected Beginnings to new sites means more much-needed, place-based and community-led efforts to support First Nations children to thrive in their early years,” he said.



# Cultural practices the core of early childhood education

**Award winning Director of Birrelee Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service Rachael Phillips**

**Winning an award was a testament to her community, her culture and all early childhood professionals, centre director Rachael Phillips told Sue Osborne.**

Rachael, Director of Birrelee Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service at West Tamworth, NSW, is a proud Gomeri woman.

She was recognised in the 2023 HESTA awards in Individual Leadership for advancing education for First Nations children and advocating for more culturally appropriate early childhood settings.

Throughout her career, Rachael has worked with and for the local Gomeri community, and she attended Birrelee as a child.

"Education has always been a part of me. My mum is an Aboriginal Education Officer at the high school I attended, and my sister worked at Birrelee. Since high school, I knew I wanted to be an early childhood teacher," Rachael said.

## History of segregation

Birrelee has a 40-year history, being one of the original services set up for Aboriginal children because of a history of segregation in the town. Moree had some of the harshest segregation rules in Australia,

described in *The Guardian*, 14 February 2021:

"For generations in the town of Moree, on Komilaroi country, segregation began at birth.

"At the back of the Moree District Hospital, the McMaster Ward was where Aboriginal babies were born. The ward also provided all the necessary care for Aboriginal people and was staffed by Aboriginal nurses.

"Moree is synonymous with the strong will, determination and resilience of its people, who in the face of some of Australia's harshest forms of segregation and racial discrimination have created a tightknit and proud community."

Rachael, 38, and her sister, 41, were the first children in her family to be born in the general part of Moree Hospital rather than the McMaster Ward.

Rachael said people forget these things quickly.

"This award gives me an opportunity to talk about history and truth telling," she said.

"Aunties and uncles started this early childhood service because the children had nowhere else to go. They managed to get a room in one of the local churches."

"Being an award winner is such a great achievement, especially in an industry where there are so many amazing leaders."





**Children at Birrelee Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service are proud of their culture**

Rachael said there were about 30 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's services (MACs) set up around Australia. She said the rich history of the centre is part of its being and what makes it so relevant for the children and families.

### **Sharing stories and social connection**

Rachael says she loves being able to share the stories of the centre's beginnings, and being able to provide a culturally enriched curriculum as well as a culturally safe service.

The centre serves 36 children with 15 staff. The area has low socio-economic status and the centre provides a free bus, all meals for the day, and a starter pack on enrolment that includes a backpack, shirt, hat, lunch box and a drink. Fees are low.

"We're the bridge between families and access to other agencies and services," Rachael said. "Dentist checks are done here. We have an occupational therapist who visits."

Teaching Gomeri, and teaching in a way that has been part of cultural practice for 60,000 years, allows the centre to achieve its National Quality Framework and Early Years Learning Framework goals.

"It happens intrinsically. The sense of belonging and community comes from the cultural practice.

"I've seen children that come from a traumatic background feel deadly because they pick up the Gomeri language quickly. Once they start to pick up the language, they become more connected, more social.

"Literacy, social connection, mathematical thinking, it's part of the way we tell stories, make things, sing and dance, and has been for thousands of years."

### **Opportunity to grow**

Being selected as a winner presented Rachael an opportunity to keep growing as a leader and teacher.

She plans to use the prize money to visit and collaborate with remote communities and First Nations schools where cultural practices thrive.

"This is not about me furthering my career, this is a chance for me to bring knowledge back to my community," Rachael said.

Rachael has been accessing the services of a business and leadership mentor for the past five years so she can provide "the best, most transparent service to my community".

She also serves on several boards which offer advice on Aboriginal early childhood education.

Rachael said her win was a tribute to all leaders in the early childhood sector, who do not always receive the recognition they deserve. It also recognised the strong community and its history.

"Being an award winner is such a great achievement, especially in an industry where there are so many amazing leaders, including those I look up to and have admired my whole career.

"Although this award highlights my individual leadership, there are many people who have helped shape who I am as a person and as an early childhood education professional.

"From my family, colleagues, community, and ancestors, I am thankful for every experience and opportunity I have received.

"I have experienced and witnessed the importance of culturally strong and safe practices in the education setting and truly believe that cultural practices and values should be the core of early childhood education," Rachael said.

### **Reference**

*The Guardian* 14 February 2021 <https://bit.ly/3SNVNBG>

# DIGITAL PLAY

## Overcoming uncertainty and embracing opportunities

**Children are growing up in a society where digital technology is ubiquitous and smaller, virtual worlds form part of the broader everyday environment, Emily Campbell writes.**

Even in our digital world, many early childhood education staff may remain reluctant to embrace digital play and embed it within educational contexts.

### **Benefits of play**

Professor Louise Paatsch from Deakin University and Chief Investigator at the Australian Research Centre's (ARC) Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, said in a contemporary digital age, play is still fundamental to every

child's thriving development.

"Play is at the very heart of childhood, and is a central tenet of early childhood education and, in more recent times, has become a focus for the early years of schooling curriculum and pedagogy," Professor Paatsch said.

"Children live in a digital society where digital play is part of their everyday diverse worlds, including home, education settings and within the contexts of informal learning such as museums, galleries and theme parks," she said.

Play is important for children's learning and development, including

activities from physical play to block and game play, as well as pretend, imaginative or symbolic play.

"Play, particularly pretend play, involves multiple areas of the brain, including areas responsible for higher-order thinking, creativity, imagination, self-awareness, emotion, pleasure and motor control," Professor Paatsch said.

"There is a strong link between a child's pretend play abilities and language acquisition, narrative, literacy and social and emotional development because these abilities develop through social interactions with others in the play."

Professor Paatsch said when children engage in play, their stress and anxiety levels decrease and their happiness, joy and social awareness increase.

"Digital play can encompass that and is there to support children to socialise, co-construct, problem solve and provide all those benefits too," she said.

### **Digital play categories**

According to Professor Paatsch, the term digital play includes a range of activities.

"When we refer to digital play, people tend to think it means online gaming, but it can involve the use of digital technologies and non-digital resources where children create, explore and actively engage in meaningful activities," she said.

"Digital play can include working digital technologies or non-working technologies, such as children playing with a broken keyboard or old mobile phones.

"Another category we refer to is representational digital play, where young children might pick up a block and pretend it's a mobile phone or use a piece of paper and pretend there's a QR code or that it's a tablet," Professor Paatsch said.

Children who have additional needs or are living with a disability can also benefit from digital play.

"Digital play has the potential to support young children with



communication and visual difficulties too because it opens up accessible learning and play opportunities for children with diverse needs,” Professor Paatsch said.

Professor Paatsch said many adults, including early childhood education staff, tend to avoid exposing children to digital play despite the potential benefits.

“This occurs even though early childhood education frameworks and curriculum guidelines mandate that teachers support young children to explore, use, design and produce digital technologies for personal and social needs that encourage confidence, problem-solving, creativity and new ways of thinking,” Professor Paatsch said.

### Concerns about screen time

There are many factors that could explain adults’ apprehensiveness about helping facilitate children’s digital play.

Professor Paatsch said uncertainty regarding how much screen time is appropriate for young children and whether the benefits outweigh the risks is a common concern.

“Concerns around excessive screen time is something of which early childhood education staff are probably mindful,” she said.

“There’s a focus on the philosophy of technology regarding the good versus bad, rather than looking more broadly and from a critical perspective to ask how digital play can support and add value to children’s lives.

“It could also be their reluctance to confidently know how to embed digital into play, whether through the working, non-working or representational digital forms,” Professor Paatsch said.

Nervousness and negativity around digital play can close off opportunities.

“Understanding children’s digital play in their diverse social worlds and the pedagogical implications of the digital aspect of digital play is now an urgent challenge for all,” she said.

### PD essential

Early childhood education staff should be afforded more professional development opportunities to combat anxious and negative attitudes towards digital play.

“There is a need to support early years educators, parents and the community to develop a more confident and dynamic understanding

of digital play and its role in children’s learning,” Professor Paatsch said.

“I believe there is a need to create a suite of professional development opportunities for early childhood education staff to support them to understand what digital is.

“Digital networks enable people to connect, share, communicate and retrieve, and play-based learning can support children’s understanding of that,” she said.

Digital technology offers immense opportunities for learning in play but presents risks for young children.

There are plenty of avenues for early childhood education staff who want to learn more about digital play and improve their confidence in incorporating it into children’s play.

Professor Paatsch said a great starting point was for staff to familiarise themselves with Early Childhood Australia’s (ECA) Statement on young children and digital technologies, which was launched in 2018 but is currently being updated to reflect the rapidly evolving landscape of childhood in the digital era.

“The Statement provides an overview of existing research relating to young children and

digital technologies covering four known areas of importance in early childhood education:

- relationships
- health and wellbeing
- citizenship, and
- play and pedagogy.

“It was developed in response to an increasing need for guidance for early childhood education professionals on the role and optimal use of digital technologies with, by and for young children,” she said.

Professor Paatsch suggested some other useful resources for staff to improve their understanding of digital technology in the context of play-based education.

“The Playing IT Safe program run by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner has some excellent resources to educate children of all ages and support them in developing online safety and digital literacy skills,” she said.

“ECA’s website also has plenty of helpful information, as does the ARC’s Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, which can be freely accessed online too,” Professor Paatsch said.



### The ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child recently launched a world-first longitudinal study of young children’s engagement with digital technologies, which seeks to understand and explore digital technologies’ impact on children from six months of age.

The Australian Children of the Digital Age (ACODA) study shed light on how technology use correlates with different aspects of a child’s life. Digital technologies are changing childhood and have implications for young children’s health, education, wellbeing and social connection. The study is expected to run for at least four years, with families of children between six months and five years invited to participate. The study aims to fill existing research gaps regarding the uncertainty surrounding the role of digital technology in supporting children’s growth and development. It aims to provide actionable insights by identifying the benefits and concerns associated with technology use among young children.

For more information on the study, visit <https://acoda.org.au/>



Lee Cameron, Director, left, and Sarah Davies, CEO, Trauma Informed Programs, at the Alannah & Madeline Foundation

# Trauma-informed practice A guide for early childhood services

**A new pilot guide launched by the Alannah & Madeline Foundation will help early childhood education organisations to better support children who have suffered from trauma.**

The *Trauma Informed Practice: A Guide for Early Childhood Organisations* (TIO Practice Guide) was developed in collaboration with Monash University's Health and Social Care Unit, to educate ECEC staff about the impacts of trauma on children and assist them to embed trauma-informed approaches into their operations.

## **Trauma public health concern**

Childhood trauma is a prevailing concern, with the Australian Child Maltreatment Study 2023 reporting that more than 62 per cent of children and young people are affected by trauma.

The Director of Trauma Informed Programs at the Alannah & Madeline Foundation, Lee Cameron, said the TIO Practice Guide would be an invaluable resource for ECEC staff and children.

"Through our work directly supporting frontline ECEC professionals, the Alannah & Madeline Foundation's Trauma Consultancy (TraCS) team recognised the need for trauma-informed approaches to be embedded within organisations," Cameron said.

"There is a clear need for a holistic approach, because we cannot rely on solely adopting an individual, child-orientated practice.

Trauma during childhood can have profound and lasting adverse effects on a child's cognitive, social and emotional development. It is widely accepted that high-quality early years education plays a crucial role in identifying issues early on and acquiring appropriate assessment and support for trauma-affected children and families.

Despite this, ECEC staff face challenges, including limited training in understanding and responding to trauma and vicarious trauma arising from exposure to children's traumatic experiences.

Such challenges are exacerbated by problems including workforce shortages, high staff turnover and burnout in the sector.

By promoting trauma-informed practices within ECEC, the resource provides a pathway to better outcomes for children, families and staff.

## **Improving outcomes for staff and children**

There are many benefits of implementing trauma-informed practices in ECEC settings.

Staff will be equipped to better understand and interpret challenging behaviours, foster resilience, promote emotional regulation, empower children and create a safer environment.

Cameron said the TIO Practice Guide offers a comprehensive solution by addressing both individual staff training and structural organisational issues.

"For ECEC professionals to be able to effectively practise in a trauma-informed way, simultaneous organisational-level action and support is required," she said.

The TIO Practice Guide is the latest in a suite of resources developed by the Foundation's TraCS team, which was established to support ECEC staff working with children aged three to five years who have been affected by trauma. It aims to:

- increase understanding of trauma and its impact on staff, children, and families in ECEC
- ensure well-supported staff delivering ECEC programs
- foster supportive ECEC environments for staff as well as children and families
- acknowledge and respond to vicarious trauma experienced by educators and staff.

The TIO Practice Guide contains comprehensive advice using authentic case studies to explore how trauma-informed practices can help children thrive. It was rigorously tested by 17 staff members from five ECEC organisations across Victoria before its launch.

The Alannah & Madeline Foundation said positive feedback from participants in the testing phase highlighted the TIO Practice Guide's usefulness, with many reporting beneficial changes resulting from its implementation.

Although the TIO Practice Guide was developed specifically for use in Victorian settings, ECEC staff in other states can freely access the guide and adapt the contents to suit their needs.

To access the TIO Practice Guide or learn more about the Alannah & Madeline Foundation's Trauma Consultancy Service, visit <https://bit.ly/3QNHYBL>

# Body Blocks helping kids embrace body positivity

**A groundbreaking new program is helping early childhood education staff promote positive body image and teach healthy attitudes about food and exercise to preschool-aged children, Emily Campbell writes.**

Australian of the Year 2023 and founder of charity the Embrace Collective, Taryn Brumfitt, co-designed the Body Blocks program alongside international body image expert Dr Zali Yager.

According to Brumfitt, body image issues are increasingly impacting children at younger ages.

“Body image is so often assumed to be an issue that only affects adolescents, but it’s impacting our children at a younger and younger age,” she said.

“We know childhood is a critical period for shaping attitudes and behaviours, so we need to get in early and help them build the foundations for a lifelong positive relationship with their bodies.”

Unfortunately, research shows children aged three to five have already developed negative attitudes towards larger bodies and preferences for thinner bodies.

The Embrace Collective is concerned by this trend, given that children who have internalised such ideas about appearance at a tender age may be

more likely to engage in disordered eating or experience mental health issues later in life.

## **Modelling positive behaviours**

Dr Yager said the language used and attitudes displayed by adults influence young children’s perceptions.

“It’s about how we, as the adults around them, talk about food and movement and bodies – kids are little sponges who absorb everything around them.”

“For this age group, it’s not about sitting them down for a lesson about body image,” she said.

“It’s about how we, as the adults around them, talk about food and movement and bodies – kids are little sponges who absorb everything around them.

The Embrace Collective acknowledges that early childhood education staff are in a powerful position to empower children and assist them in building a foundation of positive body image values.

## **Range of resources**

Body Blocks draws on evidence-based practices and input from professionals, including a team of body image experts and a paediatric dietitian.

The program is free and provides resources including activities, a poster, a picture book and a song through which children can learn about how amazing their bodies are.

It also includes access to seven short, self-paced professional video modules for educators.

A large part of the program is focused on educating adults about the language they use around young children because the ways adults speak about food, movement and bodies help shape children’s perceptions.

Body Blocks by Embrace Kids is one of nine initiatives funded by the current Federal Labor Government as part of the Embrace Kids Australia package, which aims to prevent body image issues and eating disorders by improving protective factors and reducing risk factors in all environments where young people live, learn and play.

To access the Body Blocks program and learn more about the Embrace Collective, visit their website at <https://bodyimageresources.com>



**From left, Paediatric dietitian Dr Lyza Norton, body image researcher and Executive Director of The Embrace Collective Dr Zali Yager, 2023 Australian of the Year and Executive Director of The Embrace Collective Taryn Brumfitt and Body Blocks host and ABC presenter Amelia Moseley at a Body Blocks promotional event**

# Creating a positive and supportive learning environment

**Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) have released a new guide designed to help staff foster children's sense of belonging and connectedness in early childhood education (ECE) centres, Emily Campbell writes.**

The new *Encouraging a Sense of Belonging and Connectedness in Early Childhood Education and Care Guide* (the guide) contains practices that align with the Early Years Learning Framework V2.0, National Quality Standards (NQS) and Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST).

AERO CEO Dr Jenny Donovan said a strong sense of belonging and connectedness positively influences children's overall learning and development, contributing to a positive and supportive educational environment.

"From birth, children form a profound sense of belonging and connection, forged through interactions with peers and responsive adults, exposure to well-designed learning spaces and opportunities to be active agents in their own learning," Dr Donovan said.

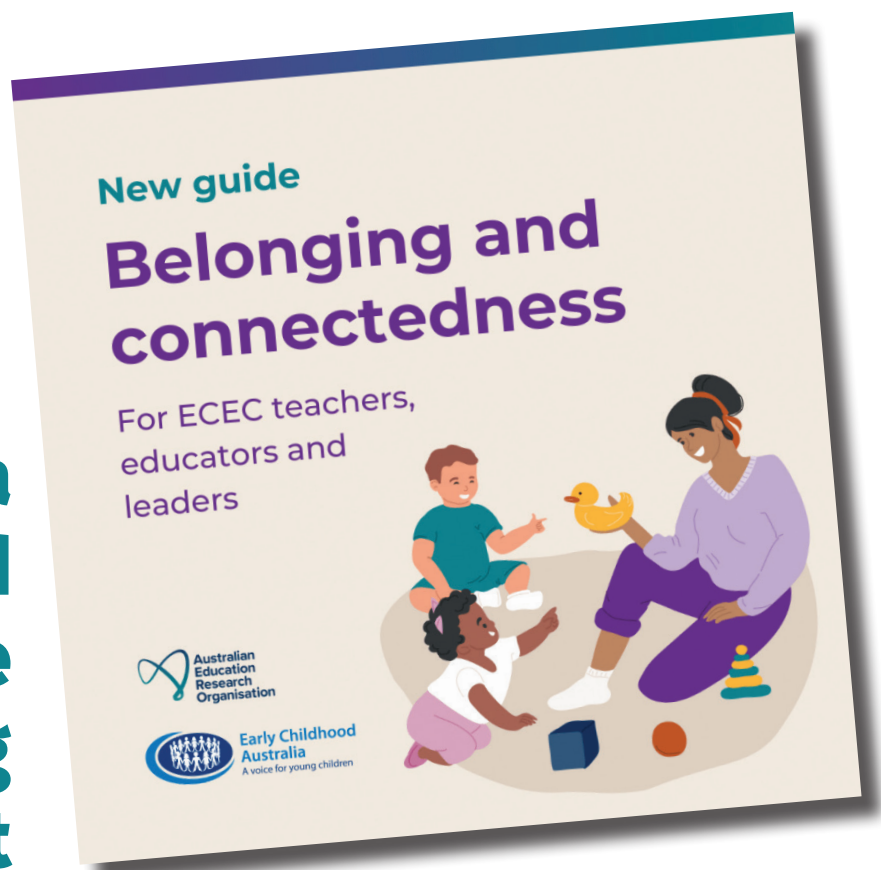
"While many teachers, educators and leaders may be familiar with or already using some of the evidence-based practices in this guide, it can still be used to support critical reflection," she said.

## Improving practice

According to AERO, for a child, a positive sense of belonging includes feeling that:

- their teachers, educators and peers like, value and accept them
- the curriculum is interesting and relevant
- they are capable of succeeding
- their cultural identity is welcome and valued, and
- they can 'be themselves' within appropriate boundaries.

Belonging and connectedness are central themes in the Early Years Learning Framework and the guide outlines



best-practice approaches for improving these in children aged from birth to five years.

Practices detailed in the guide have been assessed and classified against AERO's Standards of evidence, with AERO's review of the research and approaches, including various papers rating them at medium, high and very high confidence.

Each practice details clear strategies, reflection questions and snapshots of practice scenarios to assist staff in understanding and implementing the guide.

The practices cover how ECE staff and services can encourage a sense of belonging and connectedness by creating authentic connections with children and families, providing culturally safe and responsive environments, empowering children's agency and voice and planning for play-based learning with intentionality.

## Growing body of knowledge

The guide complements and builds on previous similar practice guides AERO has published on fostering belonging and connectedness in primary and secondary school settings.

AERO encourages ECE staff to use the practices in the guide alongside the work already being done in an ECE centre to complement existing practices and further critical reflection.

The guide has a section ECE practitioners can use for professional development to reflect on their current practice and identify areas for improvement and potential barriers within their centres when it comes to children's sense of belonging and connectedness.

Members can learn more and access the guide online at <https://bit.ly/40f75Rd>



Monique Roosen is an Industrial Officer for IEU-QNT. Lisa James is an Organiser for the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch. They answer your industrial and legal questions as they relate to state laws and regulations.

## WWCC expired, barred from work

### Dear Lisa

I'm unable to work right now as my Working With Children Check (WWCC) renewal has not come back yet. Last time it only took a few days but it's been almost four weeks and I'm wondering if you have heard of any other teachers in a similar situation who have had to take leave for an unknown time frame. The Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG) has told me there is a delay in processing. Even crazier, the Department of Education says diploma staff can continue working with an application number, however, teachers can't. NESAs has made me feel like I've done something terribly wrong. Any help would be appreciated.

Lara



Lisa James

### Dear Lara

The IEU is aware there can be delays in the turnaround time for Working With Children Check (WWCC) applications, depending on the time of year. The IEU advises members to renew their WWCC as soon as they receive notification that it is due to expire in three months.

We recommend you contact the OCG and emphasise you have been forced to take leave (and will soon need to take unpaid leave) due to the delay in processing your WWCC.

The IEU is also aware that diploma and certificate qualified educators can work if they have submitted a WWCC application as the *Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012* states that a person can engage in child-related work if they have a current application for a WWCC. However, the *Teacher Accreditation Act* is clear that teacher accreditation is automatically suspended unless a teacher has a current WWCC. Once you have a new WWCC number, NESAs will lift the suspension of your teacher accreditation and you will be able to resume teaching.

I suggest you approach your employer and ask if they will allow you to perform work at the centre, other than in a teaching capacity. For example, you could perform the role of an office-based centre director or a diploma educator working directly with children while you wait for your application to be processed.

Lisa

## Check your contract

### Dear Monique

I have recently changed jobs, and I have received a new contract at another preschool. I have concerns about the contract of employment on offer, especially the wages and hours of work they have set out. How do I know my rights before starting with my new employer?

Diane



Monique Roosen

### Dear Diane

Congratulations on being offered a job at a new preschool. Your offer of employment should set out the following information:

- whether the position is full-time, part-time or casual
- your classification, such as teacher or educator
- your rate of salary on commencement
- any applicable allowances
- if you are a teacher, your teaching load, including non-contact time and additional release time, and
- if you are part-time, the pattern of work you will have

(for example, five-day fortnight), the days of the week in which you will work, and the starting and finishing times for each day of work.

The offer may also specify other conditions regarding intellectual property, registration requirements, work health and safety and, if you are a teacher, your agreement to be appointed to the role of either nominated supervisor or educational leader.

Your wage rates and any applicable allowance will be set by either the relevant collective agreement or modern award and will be determined by your qualifications and experience. These are available on the Fair Work Commission website at [www.fwc.gov.au/agreements-and-awards](http://www.fwc.gov.au/agreements-and-awards)

If you would like to have your contract reviewed before accepting the offer, I would encourage you to contact our union and supply a copy of your contract for further advice and support.

Monique

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