# bedrock

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## GAME ON

# Why pretend play matters

The professional voice of the Independent Education Union of Australia

# 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 aliened 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:

Independent Education Union of Australia

bedrock

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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




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# Editorial

**The final edition of *Bedrock* for 2026 is packed with stories reflecting another busy and rewarding year for IEU members.**

Early childhood teachers and educators play a vital role in supporting children's transition to school. We spoke with Charles Sturt University emeritus professor Sue Dockett about how staff can help ensure children get the best possible start (page 16).

IEU member and kindergarten assistant Alice Drake shares why she is passionate about working in Queensland's first bilingual Auslan kindergarten program, which provides an inclusive learning environment for deaf and hard of hearing children (page 18).

Discover the unique professional learning offered through the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch environment conference, where members enjoyed a day of "Wild Learning" and gained practical teaching tools while getting up close to creatures great and small (page 20).

Read about an innovative program that is helping deliver high-quality early childhood services to First Nations children and families (page 10).

IEU member Felicity Barclay has drawn on decades of experience as a preschool director to write a practical guide to teaching children patience. Read about her professional journey on page 11 and find the guide on page 12.

New research shows staff often speak differently to children based on gender. Learn why language matters and how "mental state language" can support equitable developmental opportunities for all children (page 14).

A stable workforce is essential to high-quality early learning. A recent report from think tank The Front Project explores how better pay and conditions can help attract and retain staff, and outlines recommendations to strengthen the sector (page 8).

Pretend play is more than fun. Researchers from the University of Sydney explain how it supports healthy child development and positive mental health and share practical tips for encouraging imaginative play (page 6).

We hope you enjoy this edition. Remember, our union is always just a phone call or email away if you need advice or support.

**Terry Burke**
Secretary
IEU-QNT Branch

**Carol Matthews**
Secretary
IEUA NSW/ACT Branch







**National: Federal funding boost locks in long day care pay rises**

The union welcomes the federal Labor government's doubling of its investment in the long day care sector with a further $3.6 billion that guarantees pay rises gained over 2024-2025 will stay in place until 2028.

"This is great news for the long day care workforce who deliver high-quality early learning," says IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews. "They are no longer facing a pay cut that would have seen many leave the sector."

The Early Childhood Education Worker Retention Payment is provided through a multi-employer agreement negotiated by the IEU, United Workers Union, Australian Education Union and the federal government.

The payment has expanded to cover about 200,000 staff across more than 10,000 providers throughout Australia.

The initial funding delivered a 15% pay rise – with 10% in December 2024 and another 5% a year later.

The funding extension not only guarantees this pay rise stays in place but also caps fee increases – a relief to parents in a cost-of-living crisis.

"Highly skilled early childhood teachers and educators had been leaving in droves to take up roles in schools and other sectors where the salaries and conditions were better," Matthews says.

The extension of federal government funding will help ease critical workforce shortages in long day care centres across the country.

"For a highly feminised sector, this is also a vital step towards closing the gender pay gap," Matthews says.

Importantly, the funding also requires providers to meet the National Quality Standard from mid-2027.

"Children's safety must be prioritised and not sacrificed for the sake of profit," Matthews says.



**NSW/ACT: New safety measures should help reduce risk of offences**

The IEU is shocked and saddened by the extent of the alleged offending by Sydney childcare worker Hamish Alexander Edward Tait.

The Australian Federal Police in July named 62 childcare and early education centres, mainly in north-western Sydney, where Tait worked or attended between 2009 and 2025. He has been in custody since July 2025.

Police have laid 329 charges against Tait, alleging he abused 158 children. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that, if found guilty, Tait will have abused more children than any other childcare worker in the country's history.

"It's hard to comprehend the children's suffering and the distress parents would be feeling," said IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

"The IEU supports measures introduced by state and federal governments over the past year aimed at improving safety to ensure children are safe at all times and parents can have confidence in the sector."

The IEU has also repeatedly called for clear guidelines to ensure that a member of staff is never left alone with a child.

Matthews spoke to Nine News reporter Damian Ryan about the horrific alleged offences and new child safety measures implemented over the past 12 months.

"Services should have measures in place so that all staff are absolutely aware about the [child safety] risks," she said.

Matthews also spoke to ABC radio host Stefan Posthuma about lifting quality in the sector by improving pay and conditions.

Matthews said university-educated early childhood teachers were "still earning significantly less" than their colleagues in primary schools even though they have the same qualifications.

"Stable employment really assists with ensuring that child safety is maintained," she said.



**QNT: Multi-employer agreement rollout continues**

The landmark multi-employer agreement (MEA) in Queensland's early childhood education sector continues to gain traction. As *Bedrock* went to press, more than 30 centres were in discussions with our union about becoming part of the MEA.

The MEA aims to bring centres in line with modern employment conditions while drawing on the best features of multiple collective bargaining agreements across the kindergarten sector.

It was established to help every kindergarten provide high-quality, fair and contemporary employment conditions for staff while remaining financially sustainable.

The MEA covers staff including teachers, assistants, clerical staff and support workers, recognising the vital contribution each role makes to a thriving kindergarten community.

The MEA also reduces workload for centres, committees and staff.

Individual and single-site collective agreements can be time-consuming and complex to negotiate and update, particularly for volunteer committees and staff already managing significant workload pressures.

The streamlined approach of the MEA ensures processes are clearer, simpler and more efficient, enabling implementation to be completed in a much shorter timeframe than previous bargaining processes.

IEU-QNT members can learn more at MyIEU: bit.ly/4z1WPMQ




**QNT: Queensland's new reportable conduct scheme**

A new reportable conduct scheme took effect in all applicable Queensland organisations, including schools and kindergartens, on 1 July 2026.

The scheme follows the commencement of the *Child Safe Organisations Act* 2024, introduced by the Queensland government.

It is part of a broader strategy to embed a culture of child safety and accountability across Queensland – early childhood education staff have long advocated for this.

The reportable conduct scheme applies to businesses and organisations that care for, supervise or exercise authority over children and are listed in the Act, including kindergartens.

However, the scheme does not replace the already existing mandatory reporting obligations on staff in kindergartens.

These existing obligations appear, at times, to conflict with the requirements of the new scheme and present challenges for employers and members.

By now, employers should have provided employees with advice on how the new reportable conduct scheme is being implemented.

IEU members who are subject to allegations at work, including reportable conduct, or who have questions or concerns about the scheme are reminded to contact our union for assistance as soon as possible.

IEU-QNT members can learn more at MyIEU: bit.ly/4w9VWzi



# GAME ON

## How pretend play enhances mental health

**Pretend play is an important developmental process that helps lay the foundations for positive mental health, writes Emily Campbell.**

New research from the University of Sydney found toddlers who engage in pretend play have significantly fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties in primary school.

Dr Fotini Vasilopoulos from the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use and the CREATE Centre led the interdisciplinary study, which analysed data from more than 1400 children participating in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

Pretend play abilities were assessed by early childhood education staff over a year-long period when children were aged between two and three years.

The research focused on how well a child was able to:

- do simple pretend play like feeding a doll or stuffed animal
- pretend one object is a substitute for something else, like using a towel as a blanket or a box for a house
- do peer pretend play like role-playing in costumes and playing house.

### Positive mental health

Mental health outcomes were measured using reports from parents and early childhood education staff on emotional and behavioural difficulties, collected when the children were aged four to five years and again at ages six to seven.

Vasilopoulos says the research shows that stronger pretend play ability in two- to three-year-olds is associated with better mental health outcomes later in childhood. The findings held even after accounting for participants' socioeconomic background, maternal mental health, language ability and the security of their relationship with their parents.

"We found that differences in pretend play ability very early in life were linked to differences in mental health outcomes several years later," Vasilopoulos says.

"These findings are especially relevant today, when many children spend more time on screens, take part in more structured activities and have fewer opportunities for free, imaginative play."

### Vital role

During pretend play, children act out imaginary situations, which is often viewed as purely recreational.

However, Vasilopoulos says the findings suggest pretend play may have a more vital role in children's mental health development than previously recognised.

A child's ability to pretend play typically emerges between the ages of 15 to 18 months, and by 20 months, children begin imitating life around them.

"By the time they reach age four or five, the play is complex and involves interacting with others and acting out characters," Vasilopoulos says.

Despite mental health difficulties reportedly impacting about 14 per cent of Australian children, prevention efforts tend to focus on later childhood or adolescence.

Vasilopoulos's study shifts attention to the earliest years of life, when foundational developmental skills emerge rapidly before many children begin formal schooling.

"Most interventions target problems after they emerge, rarely addressing the developmental foundations that could prevent them," she says.

"Pretend play can be easy to overlook, yet it plays an important role in supporting children's mental health."




## Embodied cognition

A child's emotional regulation, defined as the ability to manage and respond to emotions, has long been recognised as an important factor in mental health during childhood and adolescence.

In this case, Vasilopoulos says emotional regulation does not explain the link between pretend play ability and later mental health, challenging common assumptions about how play supports wellbeing.

"When emotional regulation was taken into account, the association did not hold, suggesting other, less understood developmental processes may be involved," she says.

The research team say the concept of "embodied cognition" could potentially explain the link between pretend play and mental wellbeing.

Vasilopoulos says embodied cognition theory posits that thinking does not only happen in heads, but in bodies and the way they move through the world.

"For example, when children learn to count with their fingers, the physical action is part of how the mathematical concept takes shape in their minds," she says.

"Similarly, playing, imagination and acting things out aren't just fun – they are helping children learn how to think, feel and respond to their environment."

During pretend play, the research suggests children possibly engage motor brain regions thought to play a role in attention and anxiety.

This potential connection highlights how much remains unknown about the impact of pretend play on mental health.

## Encouraging pretend play

Vasilopoulos says pretend play does not need to be complicated or instructional.

"Allow pretend play to be for play's sake, not just for learning outcomes such as play-based learning," she says.

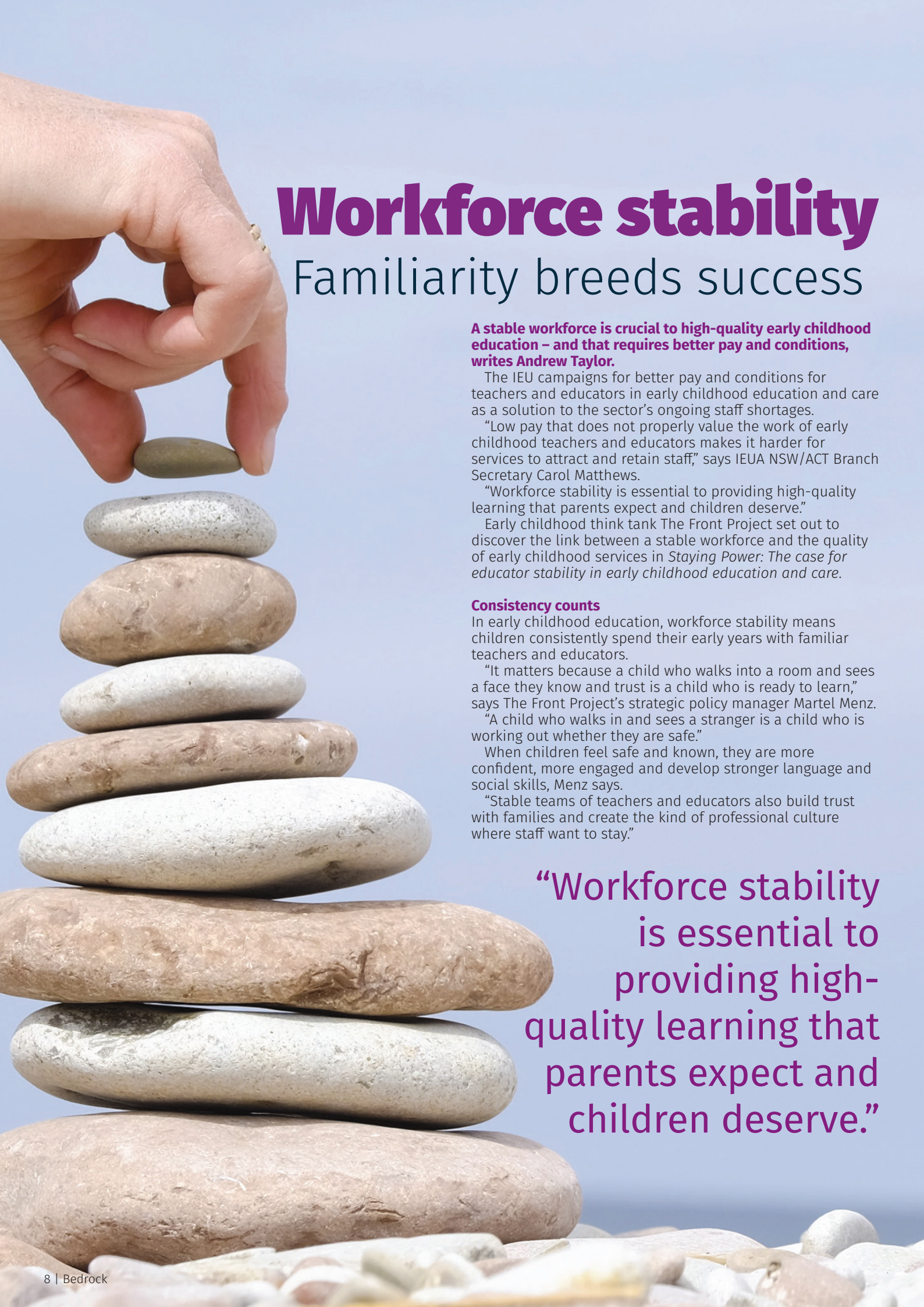
"Using this kind of gentle, child-led involvement may be one practical way to build the pretend play abilities our research links to better mental health outcomes later in childhood."

Vasilopoulos advises IEU members to support and encourage children's pretend play by:

- Letting play unfold for its own sake, rather than turning it into a teaching moment. If a child makes a mistake while counting or naming things during play, the priority is to keep the play going rather than interrupting to correct them.
- Following the child's lead when joining in, much like a game of tennis. Waiting for the child to "serve" first helps keep play child-led, though gentle prompts can help if a child is unsure how to begin.
- Responding to children's play with simple observations or open-ended comments instead of instructions. Describing what is happening in the play, or wondering aloud what might happen next, can enrich play without directing it.
- Stepping inside the play rather than directing it from the sidelines. Adults can ask children what role they would like them to take on, or suggest being a low power character, such as a confused visitor or a forgetful customer.

## More information

Read the full study: bit.ly/449xdzI



# Workforce stability

## Familiarity breeds success

**A stable workforce is crucial to high-quality early childhood education – and that requires better pay and conditions, writes Andrew Taylor.**

The IEU campaigns for better pay and conditions for teachers and educators in early childhood education and care as a solution to the sector's ongoing staff shortages.

"Low pay that does not properly value the work of early childhood teachers and educators makes it harder for services to attract and retain staff," says IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Secretary Carol Matthews.

"Workforce stability is essential to providing high-quality learning that parents expect and children deserve."

Early childhood think tank The Front Project set out to discover the link between a stable workforce and the quality of early childhood services in *Staying Power: The case for educator stability in early childhood education and care*.

### Consistency counts

In early childhood education, workforce stability means children consistently spend their early years with familiar teachers and educators.

"It matters because a child who walks into a room and sees a face they know and trust is a child who is ready to learn," says The Front Project's strategic policy manager Martel Menz.

"A child who walks in and sees a stranger is a child who is working out whether they are safe."

When children feel safe and known, they are more confident, more engaged and develop stronger language and social skills, Menz says.

"Stable teams of teachers and educators also build trust with families and create the kind of professional culture where staff want to stay."

> "Workforce stability is essential to providing high-quality learning that parents expect and children deserve."

Menz says research shows that children learn best when they feel safe "and they feel safe when the adults around them are familiar and consistent".

"Poor staffing practices break that consistency," she says. "A child who spends their early years adjusting to new faces is a child spending cognitive and emotional energy on working out whether they are safe, rather than on learning."

Children's learning and development – language, social skills, confidence and the ability to regulate emotion – requires repeated, warm interactions with trusted adults over time.

"A casual teacher or educator who has never met a child before cannot, in a single shift, provide what a known and trusted educator builds over months," Menz says.

"When rosters are unstable, when casuals rotate through, when experienced teachers and educators leave and aren't replaced, those developmental building blocks simply don't get laid down in the way they should."

## Acute staffing shortages

High turnover, an excessively casualised workforce and chronic understaffing are the main challenges when it comes to stability and consistency in the early childhood sector.

More than 25 per cent of teachers and educators are employed on a casual basis in long day care services, compared with less than 20 per cent of workers across the broader economy, Menz says.

"And 77 per cent of educators report their long day care service operating below minimum staffing levels at least weekly."

In the worst cases, Menz says some services are stuck in a "revolving door".

"Staff leave, gaps open up, remaining teachers and educators absorb the load and eventually they leave too," she says. "It is a cycle that grinds down even the most dedicated people."

Staying Power estimates an additional 21,000 qualified early childhood professionals are needed to meet existing demand and support sustainable working conditions in the sector.

Services that cannot fill job vacancies rely instead on casual or agency staff, apply for staffing waivers and pile additional work on their staff.

Menz says almost one-quarter of early childhood teachers leave to become primary school teachers "not because they don't love the work, but because pay and conditions make it hard to stay".

## Union's role

*Staying Power* paints a sobering picture of a sector under strain, but Menz points to positive initiatives such as the Worker Retention Payment (WRP) scheme, which has delivered a 15% pay rise to nearly 200,000 workers in long day care centres across Australia.

These long-overdue pay rises were funded by the federal government after the IEU and other unions reached an historic sector-wide multi-employer agreement in 2024.

The federal government in June doubled its investment in the long day care sector with a further $3.6 billion that guarantees the pay rises will stay in place until 2028 after a strong campaign by the IEU and other unions.

*Staying Power* also found union-negotiated agreements are a vital feature of services ranked as high-quality under the National Quality Framework.

"Our analysis of exceeding-rated services shows that enterprise agreements make a real difference," Menz says.

"Around two-thirds of 'exceeding' centres employ staff under a registered multi-employer or enterprise agreement, offering above-award pay, planning time, professional learning and career pathways."



*The Front Project's strategic policy manager Martel Menz.*

In contrast, Menz says the majority of lower rated 'working towards' centres rely on awards or individual arrangements.

"Better pay and conditions, embedded in binding agreements, is the most reliable lever we have," she says.

Menz says high-quality services prioritise staffing, relationships with children and governance and leadership – not maximising profit.

"They design consistent rosters, so children see the same faces," she says. "They invest in higher than minimum ratios. They support staff with quality professional development, protect planning time and build genuine team culture."

### How to build a sustainable workforce

1. Provide sustained, transparent funding for wages and conditions: Stable funding is critical to reducing turnover, reliance on casual staff and ongoing workforce churn.
2. Strengthen workforce stability requirements and incentives: This could include new reporting requirements on employment mix and targeted support for services transitioning to more stable staffing models.
3. Reform the use and oversight of staffing waivers: This includes clearer escalation pathways, closer monitoring of services with persistent waivers and targeted workforce support to help services return to compliance rather than normalising non-compliance.
4. Target intensive support to services persistently rated 'working towards': Ongoing quality issues are often linked to workforce instability and require coordinated intervention.
5. Improve career pathways, leadership capability and retention: Strong leadership and visible career pathways drive retention by supporting early-career teachers and educators who are most at risk of leaving, while also valuing experienced staff whose expertise is essential to mentoring and sustaining high-quality practice.

# First Nations children

## Community-led support makes a difference

**An innovative program is helping to deliver high-quality early childhood services to First Nations children and families, writes Ella Doyle.**

Catherine Liddle knows the importance of early childhood education services for First Nations children.

"These services aren't just classrooms," she says. "They're culturally rich spaces that nurture our children and build their confidence to start their learning journeys."

As chief executive of SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children, the national peak body for First Nations children and families, Liddle advocates for systemic and institutional change in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Data from the Productivity Commission's 2026 Annual Data Compilation Report shows the gap has been closed on preschool enrolments.

However, there is still work to do to improve the quality and cultural relevance of early childhood education as outlined in Target 4 of Closing the Gap.

### Community voices essential

The Early Years Support program was established in 2021 to support high-quality, responsive early childhood services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families around Australia.

It supports more than 70 early childhood services run by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCO) such as Awabakal Community Preschool in Glendale, NSW.

The Coalition of Peaks, which represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations such as SNAICC, says community control is essential to Closing the Gap as First Nations peoples have an intrinsic understanding of the services their communities need.

In early childhood education and care, this means providing culturally safe learning environments while also strengthening communities and families.

Early Years Support assists ACCO-led early childhood services to enable children to thrive by responding to local community priorities.

It aims to strengthen service provision with support for:

- service design, governance and operational readiness
- quality improvement and compliance with national standards
- workforce development, retention and wellbeing
- access and equity for children and families
- funding, sustainability and service growth
- advocacy at local, state and national levels.

### Calls to renew funding

The federal government has pledged $2.3 million for Early Years Support over two years to December 2026.

Liddle says that, with demand growing and hundreds of children still on waitlists, it is essential that this trusted model continue to be supported and expanded.

"Early Years Support is delivering exactly what the Closing the Gap reforms are designed to achieve – strong, community-led services that support our children to thrive," she said in 2025.

### Tangible impact

It is too early to determine the impact of Early Years Support on long-term learning outcomes, but a 2025 report found it strengthened the First Nations community-controlled early childhood sector.

The report commissioned by SNAICC found Early Years Support is "a highly valued and effective initiative" that improves service quality, reduces administrative burden on community leaders and builds strong, culturally safe relationships across services.

Liddle says the findings confirm what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have always known.

"When First Nations organisations lead the way in early childhood education, our children thrive," she says.

The report also found Early Years Support encourages knowledge sharing and networking across the sector by hosting gatherings and networking meetings as well as helping teachers and educators attend industry events.

Additionally, the work of Early Years Support staff has had a positive impact on employee wellbeing.

"These are the services that are best placed and are proven to get the best outcomes for our children and families," Liddle says.

"This sector is instrumental in closing the gap for our children, particularly when we consider key outcomes around developmental readiness for school and family support."

### More information

bit.ly/4xls8ky





*Above, First Nations peoples have an intrinsic understanding of the services their communities need; right, SNAICC chief executive Catherine Liddle.*

"The more people who join their union, the more opportunity the union has to bring about real change."



## Felicity Barclay

# A LOVE OF VARIETY

**This early childhood education and care leader relishes the opportunity to shape future generations, writes Tania Yardley.**

Felicity Barclay became the director of an early childhood centre at a young age, initially combining teaching responsibilities with her leadership role.

"One minute you're jumping around like kangaroos to music," she says.

"And the next you're dealing with a parent who's crying in your office because they've just found out their child's been diagnosed with a developmental delay."

For the past 27 years, Felicity has been the non-teaching director of Gordon Community Preschool.

Felicity says she loves the variety of a role that can be hard to define.

"There is an intellectual rigour," she says. "You use your brain, you're thinking about psychology, there's human relations, there's pedagogy, there's policy."

At the heart of Felicity's work is communication – with teachers and educators, parents, the board and the community.

"It's a very people-driven job," she says.

After a brief period working in a for-profit preschool, she says, "I decided the community-based sector was really where I wanted to be."

"I don't think that preschools and childcare should be corporatised," she says.

"All children have a right to a high-quality early childhood education."

### Important job

Gordon Community Preschool is currently rated as exceeding the National Quality Standard by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority.

Felicity and her team strive to improve systems to ensure they align with best practice.

This includes a regular weekly meeting with the educational leader and assistant director, along with scheduled time working on a self-assessment tool to make sure the national quality standards are "embedded in our practice".

Continuous improvement extends to all staff, she says. "We utilise our staff meetings for professional development."

This can mean watching a webinar together, going through child safety standards or exploring research on neurodiversity.

Felicity also has a passion for the written word and has created articles and guidelines for staff and parents to use.

### Impactful work

Like many in her profession, Felicity is deeply aware of the impact her work has on children, families and the community.

"I've always thought that early childhood education is a really important job," she says.

"Contrary to what [One Nation leader] Pauline Hanson has recently said, I think we do need qualified teachers looking after these future generations."

Felicity views her work as helping to shape the lives of young children through the programs and care at the preschool.

"It's a privilege to be involved in this area," she says.

"We're supporting children in learning about social skills and values and being part of a community."

### Collective action

An IEU member since 2007, Felicity grew up in a strong union family.

"My grandfather was a boilermaker and a welder, and he was a very proud union man," she says. "I think conditions will only change if we join together as a collective.

"The more people who join their union, the more opportunity the union has to bring about real change. That's important for our profession."

When she is not working, Felicity enjoys cooking, reading, playing piano and gardening.

"And I like to spend time in the sunshine with my cats and my partner," she says.

### More information

See *Teaching patience*, pages 12-13.



# Teaching patience

## How to help children learn to wait

# “Skills like patience, waiting your turn and impulse control are part of a developmental process that takes time.”

**An IEU member draws on her decades-long experience as a preschool director to write a guide to teach children how to be patient, writes Tania Yardley.**

Fidgeting in the queue at the post office. Cursing on an endless call-centre hold. Many adults are guilty of acting up at least a little when we’re waiting.

If we find patience hard to master, it is no wonder preschoolers do too.

Gordon Community Preschool director Felicity Barclay is often asked how to teach young children this vital skill.

“I wrote this guide to give teachers some ideas to use in the classroom and in conversations with families,” she says.

Drawing on her extensive experience, here are Felicity’s top tips for teaching preschoolers how to be patient.

### 1. Growth and development

Executive function is a set of mental processes and cognitive skills that are primarily managed by the brain’s frontal lobes.

They enable individuals to plan, focus, pay attention, remember instructions and multitask.

“It is important to remember that skills like patience, waiting your turn and impulse control are part of a developmental process that takes time,” Felicity says.

### 2. Practise waiting in fun ways

Learning to wait is a skill. Most adults have learnt that “good things come to those who wait”, Felicity says.

“We can give children opportunities to practise waiting in ways that are fun and that will help them begin to make the connection that waiting often brings its own reward.”

Try asking a child to build a tower of 10 blocks, then waiting until the count of three to knock it down. Taking turns playing board games or throwing a ball in a bucket helps children learn to wait.

### 3. Setting boundaries

Teachers can set boundaries and explain them to children, so they know when they are expected to wait at preschool.

Parents can also learn to set boundaries.

“For example, when mum or dad are on the phone, it’s time to wait,” Felicity says. “When mum is working at her desk or when dad is talking to a teacher – these are times when we expect you to wait.”

Felicity’s advice to parents is to choose a quiet calm time to talk with their child about their expectations.

“It may help your child if you both come up with a few ideas as to what they can do while they are waiting,” she says.

For example, children could look at a book, do some drawing or play with Lego.

### 4. Waiting in conversation

“Practise waiting while you are in conversation with children, ‘It’s your turn to speak, then my turn to speak’,” Felicity says.

Teachers can have children use a talking stick or talking spoon. If a child is holding the spoon, it’s their turn to talk. If they do not have the spoon, it’s their turn to listen.

### 5. Positive reinforcement

The activities suggested offer the opportunity to reinforce positive waiting behaviours. For example, by saying ‘Good job! You were very patient. Good waiting.’

“It’s important to notice children being patient so that you can acknowledge or praise them straight away,” Felicity says.

### 6. Visual reminders

Visual timers can be a helpful resource when children are learning to wait.

Teachers can use a sand timer to show how long to wait. A colour-coded children’s clock can also be useful.

“When the clock’s hands are in the blue zone, then it’s lunch time,” Felicity says.

A chart with the day’s schedule may also help.

### 7. Model patience, calm and positive waiting behaviours

Children learn from what they see. If parents are frustrated while waiting their turn at traffic lights or push to the front of a line, they are not setting a positive example of waiting behaviours.

“Don’t be too hard on yourself though,” Felicity says. “We are all human.”

She suggests taking time to demonstrate being patient and calm. Both parents and teachers can show children how to take deep breaths while waiting in a queue.

### 8. Consider the environment or setting

Finding a quiet place to wind down that is not full of noise or stimuli might help some children to calm down.

“If a child is having a meltdown about waiting, offer them a solution,” Felicity says. “You could say, ‘Shall we step outside and take a break for a bit?’”

Coaching a child about strategies to use while waiting is best handled at a quiet time, “not during a wobbly or a tantrum”, she says.

### 9. Breathing exercises

Simple breathing exercises are a helpful tool that will potentially support children throughout their lives.

Examples include:

- Teddy bear belly breathing: The child lies down with a soft toy on their stomach, watching it rise and fall to encourage deep breathing.
- Flower and candle: Inhale deeply through the nose to “smell the flower” then exhale slowly through the mouth to “blow out the candle”.

### 10. Recognise that waiting is hard

Felicity says it is important to let children know in the moment that waiting is hard.

“The role of a supportive adult is key in helping children to learn to tolerate longer periods of waiting,” she says.

It can help to acknowledge a child’s feelings of frustration, provide reassurance at times of waiting and set realistic expectations.

“Remember, young children are still learning and developing,” she says. “They don’t need your judgement; they need your support and guidance.”

# WORDS MATTER

## Language leads to different outcomes for boys and girls

**Early childhood education staff speak differently to young children depending on their gender, writes Emily Campbell.**

Researchers from the University of Queensland (UQ) analysed 182 interactions between staff and toddler groups during playtime at a range of early childhood education and care centres throughout Queensland.

Elizabeth Brook, an honours student in psychology, co-led the study, which drew on data from The 10,000 Hours project longitudinal study conducted by UQ's Queensland Brain Institute.

"We focused on 'mental state language', which refers to thoughts, feelings, desires and perceptions, and plays a vital role in children's social, emotional and cognitive growth," Brook says.

When interacting primarily with boys, researchers found staff used more words related to perception, such as 'look' or 'hear'.

In contrast, 'desire' words such as 'want' or 'need' were used more frequently by staff when they interacted primarily with girls.

Brook says "seeing and noticing" words tends to support attention and awareness, whereas "wants and needs" words help children understand goals and intentions, which are important for social and emotional development.

"The findings suggest everyday language may expose children to different kinds of developmental opportunities, depending on gender," she says.

Consequently, girls receive greater exposure to more advanced mental state language than boys of the same age.

> "Everyday language may expose children to different kinds of developmental opportunities, depending on gender."

### Boys more vulnerable

Dr Aisling Mulvihill, a senior researcher from the Queensland Brain Institute and research co-author, says national early development data shows boys are almost twice as socially and emotionally vulnerable as girls by the time they enter school.

"What we don't know is to what extent this vulnerability is shaped by how society engages with boys and girls differently," she says.

"We don't currently have a strong research base to make any causal inferences about this."

Mulvihill says adult-child conversations about mental states and exposure to mental state language is important for all children's social and emotional development.

"When adults label mental states (perceptions, emotions, desires and cognitions) in conversations with children, they help children connect language to their inner experiences and to others' behaviours and actions," she says.

"This supports children's ability to represent their own mental states, to infer others' perspectives and to predict social behaviour."

### Why gender matters

Similar gender-related language patterns have been observed in parent-child interactions at home, but this study shows they also occur in early childhood settings where children spend a substantial amount of time.



*Boys are almost twice as socially and emotionally vulnerable as girls by the time they enter school.*

"Where those differences exist, the findings tend to suggest that girls receive more mental state language generally; and specifically more talk around desires (want, wish, hope, need) and emotions (sad, happy, excited, worried) than boys," Mulvihill says.

Mulvihill says the research should not be interpreted as a criticism of early childhood staff, who play an important role in supporting children's development.

"The research was observational rather than explanatory, meaning this study tells us what is happening, not why it is happening," she says.

"This pattern of talking differently with boys and girls is very common across everyday environments."

Mulvihill could only hypothesise as to why. "Research to date has not been able to answer this question," she says.

"Some speculate that it is related to our adherence to social roles for boys and girls, while others have speculated that it is related to the language that boys and girls elicit via their behaviour."

All the staff observed in the study were women, which is unsurprising given the highly feminised nature of the early childhood workforce.

Whether having more men working in the sector would affect the results remains to be seen, as gender-related differences in staff use of mental state language have not been investigated.

## Professional development

Notably, the researchers found that higher educational attainment and greater work experience among early childhood staff are associated with higher levels of mental state language use in interactions with children.

This raises the question of whether there is value in professional development opportunities for staff on using mental state language.

Mulvihill says some studies have examined the effectiveness of mental state language training in early childhood education.

"The results are promising, suggesting that enriching environments with exposure to this language could be helpful," she says.

"However, I am aware that programs that become an add-on to normal daily activities can place an additional burden on educators who already hold so much responsibility."

Mulvihill would like to undertake further research to investigate the effectiveness of a training module that teaches early childhood education staff to embed mental state language into everyday conversations with children.

## More information

Read the full study: bit.ly/4hQtOgZ

### Tips for IEU members

Mulvihill has advice for members to ensure children receive equitable opportunities.

"The first step is awareness that we may subconsciously be adjusting our language use when interacting with groups of boys and girls," she says.

"Regardless of children's gender, evidence highlights the importance of exposure to mental state language for children's social and emotional development."

- **Reflect:** Reflect on whether you use different words with boys and girls. Awareness is key.
- **Enrich everyday talk:** Take opportunities to think about everyday routines and how you might use mental state language. This might look like acknowledging a child's emotions at drop-off; talking about what different people like at mealtimes; explaining what our peers are thinking, feeling and wanting during moments of conflict; and talking about what book characters see, want, feel, and think.
- **Use a variety of mental state words with all children**: Talk about what they see, want, feel, and think.
- **Model thinking and feeling:** Share your own thoughts and emotions out loud (for example, "I wonder if this will fit," or "I feel proud of your effort").
- **Encourage perspective-taking:** Ask questions like "What do you think your friend wants?" or "How do you think your friend feels?"



*Mental state language – words used to talk about thoughts, feelings, desires and beliefs – is important for children's development.*



# Making the grade

## Supporting transitions to school

**Early childhood teachers and educators play a crucial role in supporting children's transition to school, writes Andrew Taylor.**

Starting school is an important milestone for children and their families.

Charles Sturt University early childhood education emeritus professor Sue Dockett says teachers and educators can support the transition to school by recognising the changes that children and their families experience and "responding to these with care and respect".

To do this effectively, they need a strong understanding of child development and an awareness that the readiness of children, families, teachers, schools and communities contributes to optimal transition experiences.

"It is important for teachers and educators to talk with children and their families about what school will be like and their transitions to school, but not to the extent that it becomes the only focus of interaction," Dockett says.

## Positive relationships

In research undertaken on educational transitions with Charles Sturt University emeritus professor Bob Perry, Dockett has found it is useful to regard it as a period of both continuity and change.

Too often the focus is only on change, without considering what stays the same, which Dockett says can provide a sense of security and confidence.

"The support and continuity provided by family, friends and community members is valuable for all involved in transitions," she says.

Dockett says some children may not realise that starting school means saying goodbye to their early childhood centre.

"Simple, meaningful practices might involve children taking home their learning stories, or taking their name off their locker, as ways of indicating that their time in early childhood education has finished," she says.

"It can be tricky when the year ends and all say goodbye, to then have some children return for a form of vacation care before school starts. Having strong connections with children and families can help explain the situation."

Early childhood teachers and educators in NSW and Queensland are required to complete transition statements for each child in the year before they start school that outlines their learning progress and development.

The IEU has negotiated dedicated non-contact time for writing these statements in enterprise agreements with several employers.

"The relationships educators and teachers build with schools can provide professional support as well as support for the children and families with whom they interact," Dockett says.

"The relationships children build with each other and the adults around them also support them as they navigate change."

## Successful transitions

A successful transition to school fosters a sense of belonging among children, families, teachers and the community who "all feel that they are welcome in the school setting", Dockett says.

This can take time to develop.

"Transitions to school may not be complete by the end of the first week or month," she says.

"For some, much of the first year of school can be a period of transition. Transition to school is one transition among many in education.

"How we help children manage and navigate this early transition can set some patterns for the ways in which they manage future educational transitions."

Dockett says children may start to display a sense of belonging when they talk about "my school, my teacher, my classroom and so on".

"When they start citing the school rules, they may also be indicating a sense of belonging – referring to what they need to do or not do to belong in the new environment."

> "It is important for teachers and educators to talk with children and their families about what school will be like."

## Role of teachers and educators

Dockett says teachers and educators play a vital role in supporting children's knowledge and skills, but it should not include "training" them for school.

"It is not necessary – and can even cause unnecessary stress – to introduce school practices such as lining up to go to experiences, taking away playground equipment, raising hands to speak, or practising letters and numbers," she says.

Dockett says it is important to encourage children to be open to new experiences and respond positively to change.

"Visiting nearby schools and observing what happens, what facilities and resources are available and to whom, talking with those who have started school, and reading about school can be important prompts for discussion," she says.

"Opportunities for children to experience things like packed lunches, drinking fountains and school toilets then discussing these, can be important too."

Families may also benefit from support, given many parents may not have visited a school since their own school days, Dockett says.

## Building confidence

Dockett says the professional practice of early childhood teachers and educators provides a strong basis for supporting transition to school.

"They respect children, engage them in activities that both build confidence and set challenges, and offer support as children approach those challenges," she says.

"The same practices are important in supporting children's transition to school.

"Talking about school, sharing information about school – and how it might be the same and different from early childhood education – is a good start."

Discussing with children about how to seek help when they feel scared, confused or lonely is also a crucial part of supporting the transition to school.

"Most children expect school to be different from their early childhood setting and see that as a sign of them 'getting bigger'," she says.

Dockett says time is essential to a successful transition to school.

"Teachers and educators need time to build connections and relationships with the children, families, community, early childhood settings, and schools involved in transitions," she says.

"Professional learning opportunities can provide the impetus to build connections across early childhood settings and schools.

"But they need to be guided by input from both sectors. Transition programs are built on respect for the different early childhood and school sectors and their varied contributions to the education and wellbeing of children."

# A welcome sign

## Creating a space where every child belongs

**IEU member Alice Drake is a devoted early childhood education assistant whose philosophy is to provide a safe and fun space where all children can learn and thrive, writes Emily Campbell.**

Alice Drake is passionate about disability inclusion and aims to give children the best start in life by nurturing their development and being present in the moment.

Since graduating from high school in 2017, Alice has kept busy balancing work and study to pursue a career working with young children.

She has gained qualifications including a Certificate III and Diploma in early childhood education and a Certificate IV in school-based education support.

In 2024, Alice began working as a part-time assistant at C&K Indooroopilly Community Kindergarten, a job she loves and describes as 'amazing'.

"I was inspired to work in the sector because I had a bit of an unstable home life as a child, and so I hope to provide a sense of stability and enjoyment for other children," she says.

Prior to working at C&K Indooroopilly, Alice was employed at a private daycare and at an Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) program.

"OSHC was great, but it was casual employment, so the income and routine were never consistent, but the private daycare role was full-time and inherently exhausting, which I struggled with," she says.

### Celebrating neurodiversity

Having recently been diagnosed with autism, Alice says the part-time working arrangement offers her a better work/life balance than previous roles.

"I have learned to be more understanding of myself and my capabilities, so it's been awesome for me," she says. "I'm less mentally exhausted and really loving my job.

"It's been great working alongside colleagues who are supportive and understanding too – I feel very fortunate at my centre."

Learning that she is autistic provided Alice with a unique perspective and valuable insight into the experiences of the neurodivergent children she supports.



*A unique program at C&K Indooroopilly allows deaf, hard of hearing and hearing children to share an inclusive kindergarten experience.*

Alice is happy with the wage rises achieved by IEU members as part of the new union-negotiated C&K collective agreement.




*Alice Drake loves her job as a part-time assistant at C&K Indooroopilly kindergarten.*

Her Certificate IV in school-based education training, which focused on working with children who have complex needs, coupled with her lived experience of autism, gives Alice empathy and understanding.

"Sometimes, neurotypical children can see autistic children and think they're being naughty or misbehaving, so it's important for me to explain what autism is and how autistic brains work differently," she says.

"For example, autistic children can struggle with certain things neurotypical children might not – getting them to sit down for lunch at a specific time might not work for them or can be too overwhelming."

## Inclusive learning

Alice also enjoys learning Auslan (Australian sign language) alongside the children who attend C&K Indooroopilly.

Since 2025 the centre has run a bicultural bilingual Auslan program, the only one of its kind in Queensland. It allows deaf, hard of hearing and hearing children to share a truly inclusive kindergarten experience.

Through a partnership with the Queensland Department of Education, the program means children of all abilities learn, play and grow side-by-side, forming friendships and learning both English and Auslan.

Alice says being part of the program is exciting and fascinating.

"We have a mix of deaf, hard of hearing and hearing children who attend the centre," she says.

"For the past two years, I've been learning Auslan along with the kids, which has been great.

"I am not fluent but am getting better and previously had no exposure to deaf people or culture, it was all brand new to me."

Three department staff – a Teacher of the Deaf, an Auslan Language Model (a fluent Auslan signer) and an Educational Interpreter – work alongside the teacher and assistant at C&K Indooroopilly, providing full Auslan access for every child who needs it.

"Our Teacher of the Deaf and Auslan Language Model are both deaf, so I feel comfortable approaching them and asking questions about deaf culture or Auslan and they will assist or act as cultural representatives," Alice says.

"If I want to chat to a child or adult who is deaf, the Educational Interpreter will help interpret the conversation."

Alice says students learn not only communication skills, but also deaf culture and etiquette.

"The hearing children have learned if you want something or need to talk with a deaf person, it's appropriate to tap them on their shoulder first, not their head," she says.

"It's fantastic to see hearing children interacting with the deaf children, for example tapping them and signing 'play'.

"The other day I saw a hearing child and deaf child going through the Auslan dictionary, and the deaf child was teaching the hearing child all the signs as they read together through the book."

## Union negotiates better pay

Despite her fondness for the job, Alice is aware of the issues staff face in early childhood education.

"Challenges include mental and physical exhaustion. However, pay levels are an issue with the increased cost of living," she says.

"With the cost of everything being so expensive, it has been difficult to manage."

This is why Alice is happy with the wage rises achieved by IEU members as part of the new union-negotiated C&K collective agreement.

"Receiving frequent updates from our union during the negotiations was beneficial, because it's important to be informed," she says.

"I grew up in a working-class union family where my grandad and mum were unionists and my brother was a delegate in his union.

"IEU membership is great because if I have any questions or I'm stressed I can call for advice and have someone help me out."



*IEU members relished the opportunity for professional learning in the unique environment of Taronga Zoo.*





# HANDS-ON LEARNING

## Close encounters of the wild kind

**A cast of furry, feathered and spiky critters provided unique professional learning opportunities for members at the IEU environment conference, writes Andrew Taylor.**

Nestled in a blue woollen beanie, Marlow is initially shy as Taronga Zoo education officer Alexandra Heagney introduces him to members at the IEU environment conference.

However, the ring-tailed possum eventually pops his head up and allows Alexandra to unfurl his tail and reveal his opposable thumbs.

Marlow's curly prehensile tail helps him grip and hold onto tree branches.

"The thumbs are not just for playing Minecraft, but for gripping and holding," Alexandra says.

### Hands-on experiences

Marlow was one of several zoo residents that members encountered at the conference in August.

He was joined by pythons, pygmy marmosets, a sleepy koala and luminescent scorpion to name a few.

Billed as a day of "Wild Learning", the conference featured sessions on nature journalling, science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) enrichment design and conducting fieldwork.

Through immersive, hands-on experiences, the professional learning sessions offered members practical teaching tools that they could take back to their schools and early learning centres.

The sessions also align with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

Importantly, NSW/ACT Branch members such as Paula Harris experienced activities as learners first, before exploring how these approaches can be adapted to different age groups, curriculum requirements and school settings.



A teacher at Pymble Turramurra Preschool, Paula says the conference was an opportunity to collaborate, network and exchange ideas with colleagues.

The cost of the one-day conference ($100 for IEU members) was much lower than that of other professional development opportunities, an important factor for early childhood teachers and educators who do not earn high wages.

## Observe and design

Alexandra began the session on STEM enrichment design by leading members outside to record observations of the zoo's pygmy marmosets that would inform the design and creation of an enrichment object to stimulate and encourage natural behaviour.

The tiny, furry primates darted along branches high off the ground, ate and gazed intently at their surrounds. Native to the rainforests of South America, they huddled together to ward off the chill of a Sydney winter morning.

Members also observed echidnas Pippa and Gabby before heading back to the classroom to create enrichment objects using everyday materials – egg cartons, toilet rolls, string.

Karen Murphy, an early childhood educator at Terrigal Early Learning Centre, says she believed students would enjoy the opportunity to research and create enrichment objects for local wildlife.

"We have a lot of water dragons in our area, and the kids are just fascinated by them," she says.

## Practical workshops

In the afternoon, members ventured into the zoo for practical workshops on fieldwork and nature journalling.

Alexandra's colleague Ash Mulcahy introduced members to a spider, desert scorpion and spiny leaf insect, which he called the "big juicy chicken nugget of the bush" because it is an important food source for other animals. Members were asked to note observations and questions about the bugs as an introduction to fieldwork and collecting data.

While the zoo is a rich source of data, Ash said fieldwork can just as easily be done in the grounds of a school or preschool.

Simply shaking a tree or sifting through leaf litter produces data for students to collect and study.

## Nature journalling

Nature journalling involves observing the natural world and recording observations through drawing, mark-making, writing, discussion and reflection.

"It encourages learners to slow down, look closely and document what they notice, wonder and discover," Alexandra says.

For preschool students, nature journalling is less about creating accurate scientific records and more about fostering curiosity, observation and personal connection.

"Children might draw a leaf, record the colours of an insect, make bark rubbings, dictate observations to an educator, collect descriptive words, or share questions about something they have discovered outdoors," Alexandra says.

> "It's crucial that teachers and educators feel confident to teach about the natural world."

One of the advantages of nature journalling is that it requires few resources. Teachers and educators only need simple journals or paper, pencils and access to the outdoors.

"A tree, a garden bed, a patch of grass or even observing wildlife visiting the playground can become a starting point for inquiry and exploration," Alexandra says.

An educator at Terrigal Early Learning Centre, Amy Mossman says the conference was an "amazing opportunity" for professional learning across STEM subjects.

"I love the session when we just sat there and listened to the surroundings," she says. "That would be a great thing just to do with the kids."

## Supporting members

IEU Organiser Richard Ryan says the conference provided practical ideas and activities for members to take back to their classrooms.

"We believe professional development opportunities such as the day of Wild Learning at Taronga Zoo are an important way to support members," he says.

"It's crucial that teachers and educators feel confident to teach about the natural world.

"These sessions at the zoo today demonstrate how engaging and fun these learning experiences can be for teachers and students."



*Kate Damo is an Organiser for the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch. Melanie Stellmacher is an Industrial Officer for IEU-QNT. They answer your industrial and legal questions as they relate to state laws and regulations.*

## NSW/ACT Leaving your job? What you need to know

**Dear Kate**

I have been employed at a long day care service for 13 years, which is covered by the modern award. The service also receives the worker retention payment.

I am considering resigning in the next few months and want some information about this. I currently hold the positions of director and educational leader.

I have accrued more than 700 hours of leave entitlements including annual leave, long service leave and rostered days off.

I would like to know:

- How many weeks' notice do I have to give?
- Are allowances payable on my remaining leave balances?
- Is the worker retention payment applied to my remaining leave balance?

**Jody**

**Dear Jody**

**Under the Educational Services (Teachers) Award 2020, you are required to give four weeks' notice of resignation.**



*Kate Damo*

The director's allowance and educational leader's allowance are considered base rates of pay as they are annual allowances – and should be paid on your remaining leave balance.

The federal government's worker retention payment should be applied to your accrued entitlements as employers receive additional funding for accrued leave entitlements.

Please note that superannuation does not need to be paid on accrued entitlements upon termination.

You may wish to consider applying to use your long service leave and annual leave so superannuation and allowances are paid while you are on leave. You can resign while you are on leave provided you give four weeks' notice.

**Kate**

## QNT Collective agreements

**Dear Mel**

Some of my colleagues are unsure whether collective agreements really make a difference to our working conditions and job security.

Can you explain why collective agreements are important for early childhood education staff and how they help protect and improve wages, conditions and professional standards in our sector?

**Kayla**

**Dear Kayla**

**Collective agreements play a vital role in the early childhood education sector. They provide a fair, transparent and legally enforceable framework for wages, conditions and workplace rights.**



*Melanie Stellmacher*

Without a collective agreement, employees are often reliant on the minimum standards contained in awards and legislation.

For early childhood education staff, collective agreements are important because the sector has historically faced challenges such as low pay, workforce shortages, high turnover and increasing administrative demands.

By negotiating collectively, employees have a stronger voice and greater bargaining power than they would individually.

Collective agreements help improve job security and workplace stability. Clear provisions regarding employment arrangements, classifications and dispute resolution processes provide certainty for both employees and employers.

This can contribute to a more positive workplace culture and assist in attracting and retaining skilled staff, which ultimately benefits children, families, and services.

Multi-employer agreements are a single collective agreement that cover more than one employer (and the staff at each centre) in the same industry or sector.

These agreements can support workforce retention and reduce competitive pressure that can undermine wages and conditions.

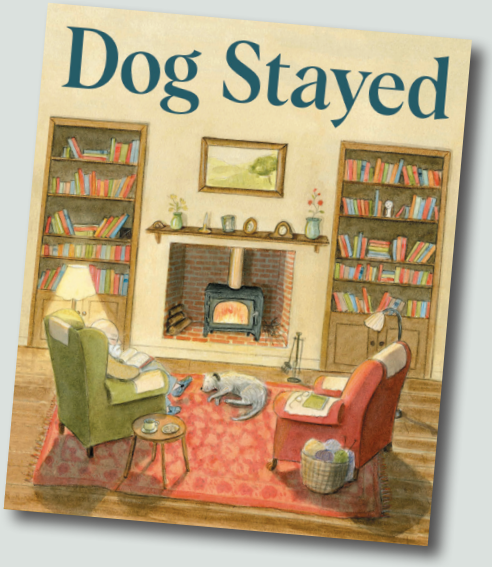
To explore the possibility of a collective agreement in your workplace, contact your IEU branch.

**Mel**

# BEDROCK GIVEAWAYS

**To go in the draw, email entries to giveaways@ieu.asn.au with the title of the book you would like to receive in the subject line. Write your name, membership number and postal address in the body of your email. All entries must be received by Monday 14 December.**

## Dog stayed




Author: Tammy Forster, illustrated by Margeaux Davis

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

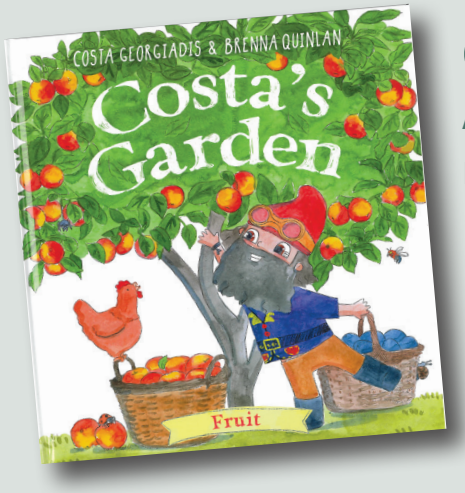
A tale of love, loyalty and the changing seasons of life.

Mr Hindbottom does not want Dog, but Dog isn't going anywhere.

*Dog stayed* is a heartwarming story about two grumpy but loveable characters and their journey of hope and renewal.

When Dog turns up one day and stays – despite Mr Hindbottom's protests – they gradually find a comfortable way to get along. Life is good, but of course life doesn't stand still.

When Mr Hindbottom is gone, can Dog ever love again?




## Costa's garden: Fruit

Author: Costa Georgiadis, illustrated by Brenna Quinlan

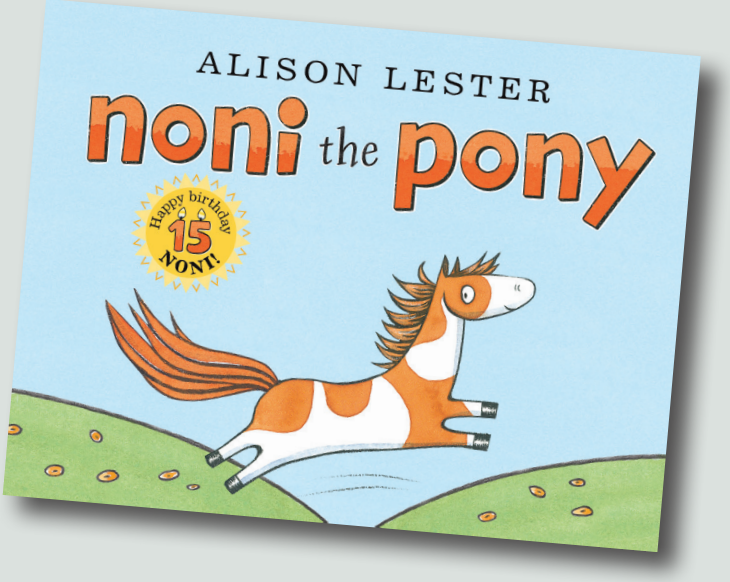
Publisher: Harper Collins

Hello! I'm Costa, and welcome to my garden. I love nature, and my garden is a place filled with much to explore and discover.

Fruits are like little treasures that grow on trees and plants. Some of them you already know and eat, but there are others we are going to encounter on our fabulous fruit journey.

Join Australia's favourite garden gnome as he shares the awe and wonder of the natural world with young readers.

## Noni the pony




Author and illustrator: Alison Lester

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

The winner of book of the year for younger children at the 2011 Australian Book Industry Awards, *Noni the pony* returns in a new hardback 15th anniversary edition.

Would you like to meet Noni? She's the friendliest pony. She lives on a farm overlooking the sea and loves to play with her best friends, Dave Dog and Coco the Cat.

A satisfying and delightful rhyming pony story for young children. Noni is the nicest pony any little child could ever hope to meet.

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