

FREE

connected caregiving

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD MAGAZINE



AUTUMN 2023

hey there!

Welcome to the fourth edition of Connected Caregiving. We wanted to start by saying, thanks for being here!

So, you might be wondering, who's behind Connected Caregiving?

Kerra-Lee Wescombe: Publisher / Editor

Kerra-Lee is a Mama, first and foremost. In her spare time (LOL), she is also the Director at Connect.Ed. Having worked with children for 10+ years, she has had a broad range of experience; initially providing therapeutic residential care for children and young people within the child protection system. She has since worked in a consultative role, supporting various early childhood education and care (ECEC) and Out of Hours School Care (OSHC) services to better understand children's behaviours, with a particular focus on implementing trauma-informed practice. After completing a handful of degrees in child development (including Psychology, Education and Therapeutic Child Play), the idea for Connected Caregiving magazine was born shortly after her son, Harlem. When speaking with other new parents, Kerra-Lee became aware that they were overwhelmed with (often conflicting) information on parenting. The idea was to bridge the gap (ahem, *connect*) parents and the ECEC sector.

Enter Connected Caregiving magazine ... a FREE, reliable source of evidence-based information.

Nicola Vozzo: Content Manager / Designer

Nicola currently works alongside Kerra-Lee at Connect.Ed. She is a jack-of-all-trades, working as a Child Development Practitioner, as well as overseeing graphic design and resource development.

Nicola's background is in Psychology, where she specialised in Infant Mental Health. She has been working with parents, families, ECEC Educators and teachers for almost a decade, sharing her knowledge on child development, child protection as well as the importance of play and inclusion.

Her design background is somewhat new; born out of necessity while living overseas during the pandemic (and a very long lockdown). A second-hand iPad and YouTube tutorials meant a self-taught artist could find a creative outlet in a chaotic world. She began selling digital commissions to pay her rent (where there's a will, there's a way, right?) and the rest is history!

We started this magazine because we wanted a space that connected, supported, validated and educated caregivers of all different types all over South Australia. We hope between these pages you feel inspired, curious and rejuvenated, ready to get back out there and keep doing all the amazing work you've been doing, day in and day out. Every child needs a champion and we're so happy they've got you.

Kerra-Lee & Nicola xxx





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We acknowledge and honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of our land. We acknowledge the Kurna people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage and beliefs. We also acknowledge their stories, traditions and relationship with this land. We are committed to building a brighter future together for children who are the leaders of the future.



who are caregivers?



Parents, Guardians,
Educators, Teachers,
Support Workers.
..or any adult in a
caregiving role!

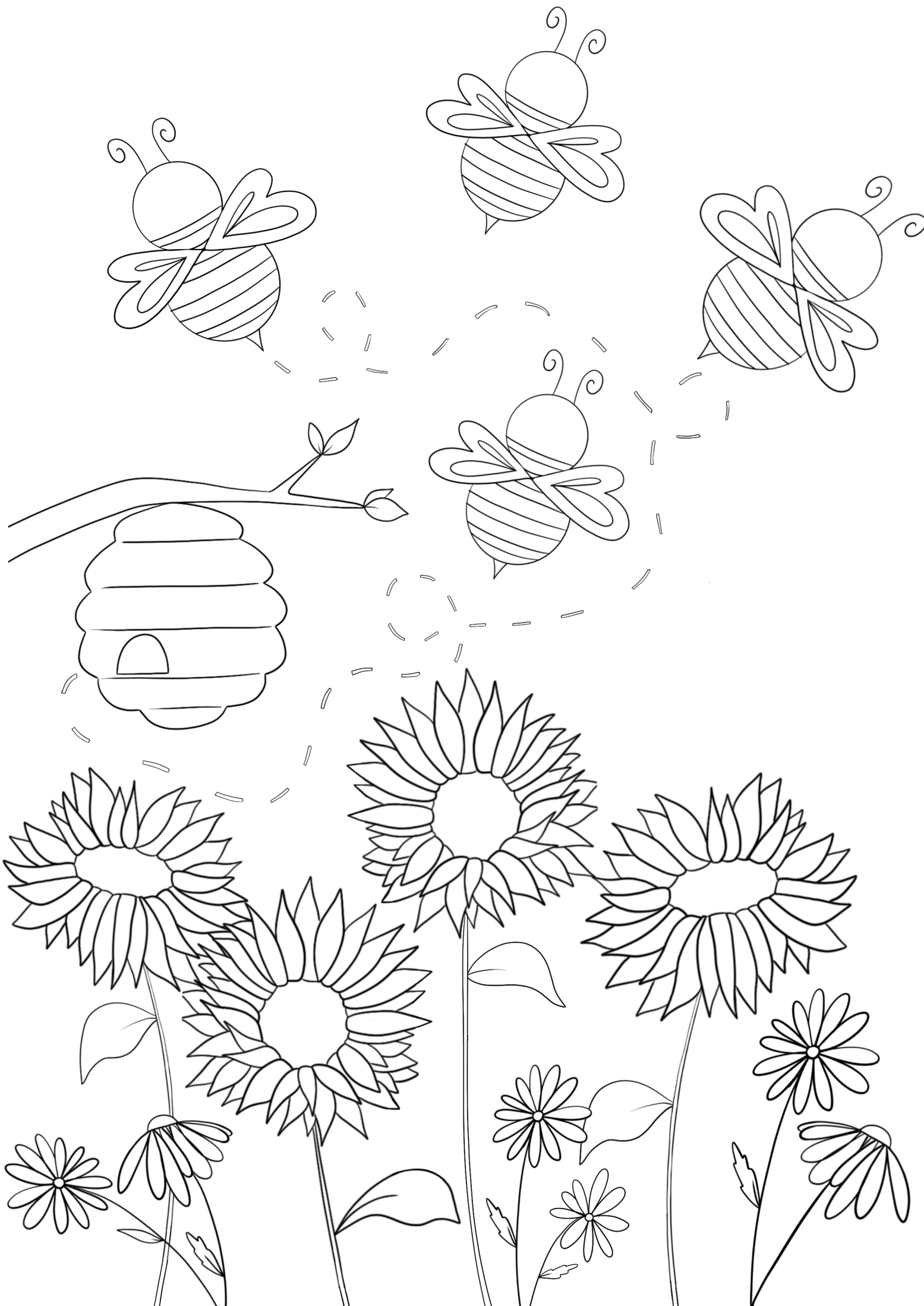


Connected Caregiving
Magazine recognises that
our readers are unique.



We also recognise that all
families are unique.







If you're happy and you know it, **clap your hands!**

“Music has a power of forming the character and should therefore be introduced into the education of the young”

(Aristotle).

Music is often described as “food for the growing brain”, with research consistently demonstrating that exposure to a high-quality music program from a young age can optimise a child’s development – cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically.

Every child is born musical, with musical potential and an innate ability to respond to music. It is up to us as educators and carers to optimise this potential and give our children the necessary musical experiences that allow them to develop. They cannot experience the benefits of music without our help.

Unfortunately, many adults lack confidence when it comes to singing, dancing and being musical with their children. Some feel they’re “not musical” or they “can’t sing in tune”. Others feel stuck for ideas and end up singing the same songs, year in and year out.

But it doesn’t need to be like this. There is music in every one of us. When we were young, we all made music without feeling self-conscious. Just because we’ve grown up doesn’t mean we cannot still sing with our children, make music with our children and help them

reap the benefits of a musical childhood.

How are you currently using music with your children? What musical activities do your children enjoy?

You might sing songs at group-time, play recorded music in the background while the children are working away, play calming music to settle children at rest-times, sing songs to help with routines and transitions, put on recorded music for your children to dance to... BUT are you using music intentionally to optimise your children’s development? Is there a “method in your madness” when it comes to making music with your little people?

Children experience joy through music – when they feel the beat, when they sing, play musical instruments, dance and move their bodies, and when they actively listen to a range of different musical styles.

Here at Branch Into Music, we use a simple framework: the Five Branches Framework for Music in the Early Years. Music is like a strong, healthy tree – its five “branches” are the most important elements of an early childhood music program – Beat, Singing, Instruments, Movement and Listening, and students need to experience them all.





Let's briefly discuss each of these "branches" and how you can incorporate them into your early years program.

Keeping the **BEAT**. One way you can encourage your children to keep a steady beat is by patting your knees in-time while you are singing songs. You can also march around the room, keeping the beat with the children's favourite music.

SINGING is critical to our children's development and it is important to do lots of it with our early learners. Singing together gives us a sense of belonging, promotes self-confidence and can encourage children's language development. Even as adults, when we sing, our brains release "happy hormones", making us feel good and lowering our stress levels. Download a Nursery Rhyme album or playlist from your preferred music streaming service or dust off your old Play School CDs – these short, catchy, melodically simple, old favourites have stood the test of time for a reason! Practise in the shower or whilst driving – your children will love it!

Playing musical **INSTRUMENTS** purposefully with children need not be chaotic! Check out our free masterclass for educators and families – "Boom! Crash! Bang! Using musical instruments most effectively with our early learners" – where we discuss how to use musical instruments intentionally with children aged 0-8 years, using a consistent set of musical activities (that can be used with all instruments). Turn to page 25 to read more about this in our Small Business Spotlight.

Through **MOVEMENT** children learn about themselves (their minds and bodies) and the world around

them. Moving and dancing help children develop self-awareness, non-verbal communication skills, self-expression, spatial awareness, coordination, balance, fine and gross motor skills, strength, flexibility, muscle tone, posture and stamina. Indeed, we need to provide children plenty of opportunities to move and dance. I love the old classics you can sing and chant yourself, like "Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear, Turn Around", "Heads and Shoulders, Knees and Toes" and "Open, Shut Them". You will have your favourite recorded music, but I find you can't go wrong with The Wiggles and Play School movement songs. Crank up the speaker and "Shake Your Sillies Out" – you'll have a blast!

Finally, we need to get our children **LISTENING**.

Children (and adults) need to be able to actively listen to, make sense of, and discuss the sounds we hear in our environment. These skills are directly linked to early literacy. Listen to music from a range of genres with your children – world music, jazz, classical music, folk music etc. Discuss the instruments you can hear, how the music makes you feel and whether the music might be telling a story.

We are so lucky to be able to give the gift of music to the children in our care. It is so important that we do.

Words: **Anne Belcher**



Anne is the face behind Branch into Music. For more musical inspiration, including free resources for educators and families, visit www.branchintomusic.online

A message from the *Chief Executive*

Every child has a unique outlook on the world, shaped by their individual experiences, which helps them form their identity as a person, family member, and learner.

While every stage in a child's development is crucial, we know that in the early years, the greater variety of experiences (which form important brain connections), the more opportunities children have to thrive in the world.

When children have limited experiences, their view of the world can be narrow. We see this reflected in a variety of ways, including in children's behaviour, for example, self-regulation, turn taking, and empathy. Widening their experience base is an important part of their development.

Preschool provides an opportunity for children to develop important social interaction skills, learn from other children with different life views, and build a bank of new brain connections. It is a place for children to interact with a community of other 4-year-olds to become the best 4-year-old they can be.

South Australian preschool educators play a vital role in delivering a broad range of intentional experiences that are meaningful for the unique group of kids in front of them. They have a profound effect on a child's ability to squeeze as much as they can out of being a 4-year-old.

This shows that while preschool is a universal service, that every child should have access to, there's no one size fits all approach.

Every child is different, and educators have the flexibility to tailor what they do in their classrooms, but there's a very clear shared purpose to develop children's language, cognitive, and social skills. All these things are outlined in the recently updated Early Years Learning Framework version 2.0, which underpins much of the work in our preschools.

As parents, we often worry that we can't do everything perfectly to support our child's development, but we needn't get caught up in some unattainable idea of 'Instagram parenthood'. You can actually have a huge impact on your child's development through simple engagement. Whether it's asking questions while you're driving, talking about shopping choices – quality interaction occurs when we make the most of those everyday opportunities.



Words: **Professor Martin Westwell**

Professor Westwell is the Chief Executive of the Department for Education. He was previously the Chief Executive of the SACE Board. He has worked extensively with education systems and other organisations in using evidence to inform policy, practice, innovation and impact in education.

Supporting New Dads in the Transition to Parenthood



There's so much to come to grips with when you learn that you are becoming a parent – and there's not a lot out there that speaks directly to dads.

SMS4dads helps fathers understand and connect with their baby and partner through free text messages that provide info, tips, and encouragement. Dads can join up from 12 weeks into a pregnancy and throughout the first year of parenthood.

SMS4dads has already delivered over one million text messages to 12,000 fathers – reaching dads in every state and territory in Australia.

"SMS4dads came about because fathers told us that the health system doesn't provide services that speak directly to dads", explains Associate Professor Richard Fletcher from the University of Newcastle.

“Research from neuroscience now tells us that a father’s interaction with their baby, even before the baby is born, plays a crucial role in the baby’s brain development”

Once enrolled, Dads receive text messages with tips, information, and links to other services to help them understand and connect with their baby and support their partner. The messages are brief, and some have links to more info.

When enrolling, Dads enter the expected date of delivery or bub's birth date, so the texts are linked to the developmental stage of the baby. Some messages provide tips and encouragement, while others are health related, with information on looking after their baby or about being mindful of their own health and ways to support their partner.

Dads who join up receive three messages a week. Checking in with dads is also an important part of the program. A set of MoodTracker interactive texts are interwoven within the messages to find out how dads are coping. If a dad says he's not doing so well and doesn't have anyone to talk to, a health professional from a relevant service makes contact to check in and see if he would like some support.

All the messages sent to fathers have been developed by health professional and researchers.

SMS4dads was first developed as a research project at the University of Newcastle but now includes partnerships with PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia), Red Nose, National Rural Health Alliance, Indigenous HealthInfoNet and Telethon Kids Institute.

For more information and to join up visit sms4dads.com.au



Scan here
to receive
support





The First Thousand Days

The first thousand days, life altering in so many ways.

One would be hard-pressed to find a human experience more profound than parenthood; so deeply enriching to our lives yet so all-consuming in the way it keeps us tied in a constant cycle of joy and worry.

Joy, as our tiny infants give us their first smile and giggle. Laughter, as they discover the taste and feeling of first foods, delight at rolling over, crawling, sitting and finally their first steps. But the joy is so often mixed up with worry: about how much or how little our children are eating, sleeping, moving, resting, and so much more. And it's not without cause; shaping a young life is about as demanding and challenging as it sounds.

While this shaping of a life is a continual responsibility and nurturing a child is a commitment that lasts a lifetime, there is perhaps no period in a child's life more consequential than the first 1,000 days.

Studies from across the globe and countless paediatric institutions have highlighted that it is during the first thousand days of a child's life that they experience the fastest pace of cognitive growth. Their tiny yet glorious-

ly imaginative brains grow by up to 90 per cent the size of an adults' brain during this period alone, indicating just how important it is.

It's difficult to overstate the importance of the experiences children have during the first thousand days of their lives.

Nearly every aspect of their lives during this period, from diet to sleep to the establishment of human connection to daily simple interactions, has a profound impact on their overall well-being and development. It is precisely because of the vitality of this period in children's lives that providing them with the most nurturing and developmentally conducive environment is not just important, it's absolutely vital.

Access to adequate nutrition, physical activity, age-appropriate play and learning opportunities, friendly interactions and safe external environments in the first thousand days can set children up for lifelong success. And sadly enough, a lack of these vital factors can also impede in their developmental prospects.



The Importance and irreplaceable significance of the first thousand days also, therefore, extends beyond the childhood years. In more than one way, the way we as a nation prioritise (or worryingly at times choose not to prioritise) the first thousand days, can chart out the future of our country.

That's why the calls for making high-quality and culturally appropriate early learning and care truly accessible and affordable for all Australian families are so important. They are an urging to invest in the future of our country's children and in our nation's future prosperity.

This starts with recognising the importance of the first thousand days and ensuring that we take the bold steps necessary to make this important period as fruitful and beneficial as possible for every Australian child.

Our political decision-makers must prioritise the futures of our children and deliver the reforms necessary to make universal high-quality early learning and care, staffed by an appropriately valued and paid workforce accessible and affordable for all.

Thrive by Five is a national campaign calling for just this and you can be part of it.

Sign Thrive by Five's petition using the QR code below and join the thousands of parents and carers, educators and supporters across Australia demanding bold and urgent reforms to our nation's early childhood education and care sector.



A recipe for raising respectful & inclusive future global citizens



“There
is no better
place to start
than with the
children.”
Meni Tsambouniaris
– Diversity Kids

As Teachers, Educators and families, if we want to help create future adults that are inclusive, accepting and respectful of diversity in all its forms, we need to work with a unique recipe that introduces and embeds a buffet of inclusive practices and interactions. A recipe that helps nurture and develop a meaningful appreciation of diversity, from a very young age.

We're excited to share our key ingredients for a successful recipe to inclusion!

1. Start Early! Even as young as toddlers.

Research indicates that the earlier conversations around diversity start with children, the better (Katz, 2003). Although there is no 'one time fits all' for every child, we recommend that these conversations start from preschool age. If children are old enough to notice difference (such as skin colour, race or diverse abilities) and ask questions about such things, then they are old enough to start having age-appropriate conversations around these.

Children's curiosity about differences can provide useful opportunities to discuss concepts such as culture, race or (dis)ability and enable us to work towards removing bias, prejudice and racist behaviours in children from an early age.

2. Don't avoid difficult conversations & topics.

As uncomfortable as some conversations may be, it is more important to have them than not to have them at all. For example, if you catch your child staring at a person in a wheelchair or making inappropriate comments about skin colour in public, we recommend that you act immediately, because immediate action gives the child a better understanding of your response. It is also a good opportunity to have this important conversation before other people become involved and express their views when you are not present.

Once you start this important conversation, keep the conversation going! This way, you have the perfect opportunity to gently lay the foundation of the child's worldview.

3. Encourage dialogue

This gives parents and teachers the opportunity to educate children, before they are influenced externally.

4. Expose children to diversity in all its forms from a young age

This includes culture, religion, race, (dis) ability and gender. Use every opportunity to introduce and have conversations around diversity. Openly discuss, answer questions, clarify, and immerse children in experiences, programs and resources that promote and embrace culture, diversity, anti-bias, kindness, belonging, and inclusion.

5. Educate children about the value of all, not just theirs.

Help create an awareness of and a respect for ways of being that are different to their own.

Find ways to instil in children the notion that "it's ok to be different" and "we all have something valuable to share."

Encourage children to experience and appreciate the many different "mirrors and windows" out there.

By teaching young children about diversity, we are exposing them to different ways of being from an early age. This encourages them to see difference as positive and enriching, nurturing a respect and acceptance for people, practices, beliefs, attitudes, cultures, abilities and experiences that are different to their own.

6. Season with parental guidance and good role modelling around embracing and valuing diversity.

Always model respectful, inclusive behaviour. Children learn through observing adult behaviours. Be conscious of your words and actions when you interact with diverse others. Educate through example. This is a powerful way we can help children learn empathy and diversity inclusive behaviours.

7. Stir gently until all ingredients combine well.

8. Use every opportunity to serve with good practice.

Repeat steps 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 over and over and embrace every diversity given opportunity to do so!

9. Enjoy! Inclusive children create future inclusive societies.

If we want to create future adults that accept, respect and embrace the diversity in our world, "there is no better place to start than with the children."

We all hold the key in paving the way to creating societies that see diversity as a positive and a strength. It's all in the recipe!

Words: **Meni Tsambouniaris**

Meni is one of the faces behind Diversity Kids. Diversity Kids is committed to preserving and maintaining culturally inclusive practice in early childhood.



Early Childhood Education & Care

Service Spotlight

GOODSTART, BLACKWOOD

Our team at Goodstart Blackwood recently received intensive support from Connect.Ed to understand children's behaviours and respond using a trauma-informed approach.

As the Centre Director, I decided to reach out to Connect.Ed after starting at the centre and realising that the team were in need of support. I saw a high turnover of staff due to burnout and was committed to supporting the teams wellbeing, as well as their practice. With this goal in mind, we accessed the Innovative Solutions Support funding. We were recommended Connect.Ed through our management at Goodstart and, after doing our own research and speaking to people about their services, we decided they were very aligned with what we needed.

When I first arrived at the centre, it was clear that the team were struggling to support children's behaviour. There was a gap in their skill set and a lack of understanding of the impact that trauma can have on children's developing brains. This was leading to an increase in incidents which often resulted in children being evacuated from the room for safety. Educators were reportedly feeling 'on edge' and struggling to communicate with families about how they could support their children. Acknowledging that we required training on trauma-informed practice was the first step for us and, the more we became aware of this, the clearer the gaps in our knowledge became.

When we started the project with Connect.Ed, the team was initially apprehensive. They were feeling depleted and were lacking the energy to do 'another thing'. However, once we engaged in the professional development and mentoring sessions, there was a real shift in attitude. The team started to deeply reflect on their beliefs about children and developed an understanding of the impact that trauma can have on their brains, bodies and behaviour. Overall, they started to view children differently. The team's ability to see things from the child's perspective, with such empathy, was a real turning point.



The project helped the team to feel more connected, not just to the children, but to each other. They were supported to develop skills in recognising their own triggers and were encouraged to call on each other for support. They started to view children's behaviour as communication and became very attuned to validating children's feelings and experiences.

One of the most impactful elements of our project was the role modelling and mentoring we received. We really valued having Nicola in the room with us, giving us language to use and showing us what connection, co-regulation and support for children can look like.

With that said, one of the most surprising parts of our journey was that we initially thought we would receive training that gave us an 'answer' to our problems. We wanted something easy and straightforward to implement, however, we soon realised that we would need to look within ourselves first, understanding our own brains and bodies, before we could support the children in our rooms. Our practice became about giving the best of us rather than what's left of us.

Since completing the project, our team has been keeping trauma-informed practice at the front of our minds. We attend a free monthly Trauma-Informed Community of Practice Meeting (facilitated by Connect.Ed) which helps us to connect with other Educators who are on the same journey and helps us to continue our learning.

We now understand that children come from all different backgrounds and will need different things from us in order to thrive, and sometimes even heal.

Because of this project, we feel more confident that we can provide an inclusive and supportive environment for all children. We feel armed with the tools to deal with different situations and, because of that, we feel the project has reminded us why we love our jobs.

We have recently had new families enrol in our centre after being told [by other early learning services] that their child's support needs couldn't be met. We are so happy to be able to support families such as these and we pride ourselves on being an inclusive centre for all children.

Words: **Vanessa Rameh**

Vanessa is the Centre Director at Goodstart, Blackwood

'It has been such a wonderful learning journey for the team. We will use these skills each and every day, because we've got them for life.'

– Vanessa, Centre Director

'Connect.Ed has helped us with connecting and communicating with both the children and families in a better way.'

- Neha, 2IC

The Innovative Solutions Support (ISS) funding is available through the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) to assist eligible early childhood education and care services to fund innovative, flexible and responsive solutions to barriers to inclusion and embed inclusive practices.

Innovative Solutions Support provides flexible funding to empower services to carefully consider their inclusion challenges and take on an active role in finding solutions and build their capacity and capability to include children with additional needs.

For more information about the funding, please contact the South Australia Inclusion Agency inclusion@gowriesa.org.au

Connect.Ed can support early childhood education and care services to implement trauma-informed practice, using a regulatory and relationship-based approach. This approach is different to a 'traditional' behaviour-management approach and, instead, focuses on supporting children to regulate their emotional experiences using their emotional connection with Educators.

For more information about accessing support from Connect.Ed, please contact admin@connectededucation.info

Including Diverse Families on Mother's Day & Father's Day

Mother's Day and Father's Day are important days to celebrate, but they can be tricky for children from diverse families as they present some challenges for families that don't have a mum and a dad. Schools and early childhood services can be supportive of all families by honoring how individual families choose to celebrate the day.

Instead, schools and early childhood services can place an emphasis on all of the loving relationships a child has in their life, including grandparents, older siblings, or friends of the family.

What can educators do to include all families?

1. A great place to start is by asking families how they would like their child to celebrate the day. Use their words when talking about their families. Ask parents and children for direction and follow their lead.
2. On Mother's Day and Father's Day give the option to make a gift for a special adult - not necessarily for a mum or dad.
3. Avoid gender stereotypes in children's crafts. Steer away from cards with flowers for mum or ties for dad.
4. Don't let a child be alone. If your school has a Mother's Day event, make sure someone (maybe a teacher) can be with that child.
5. Use the day to talk about different kinds of families. Not every family has one mum and one dad. Make it safe to celebrate any supportive relationship a child has. Provide books in the classroom that show different kinds of families.

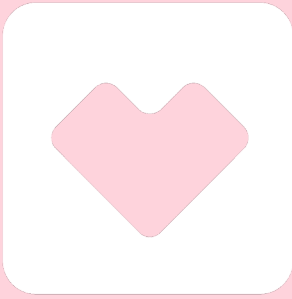
"The teachers would ask how many Mother's Day or Father's Day presents we wanted and that was it."

"I have 2 dads, so on Mother's Day I make a card for my aunt"

"My dads don't wear ties so I felt funny giving them a card with a tie on it"

See our webinar for more information about how to include diverse families on Mother's Day and Father's Day.





treasure boxes

GIVING GOODS TO KIDS IN NEED

“Children are the innocent victims of every form of disadvantage. Treasure Boxes is here to ensure that every vulnerable baby and child living in South Australia has access to the essential items they need to stay safe and thrive during tough times.”

- Rikki Cooke, CEO & Founder of Treasure Boxes.

ABOUT US

Treasure Boxes Inc is a South Australian based not-for-profit children's charity, providing essential goods to our most disadvantaged and at-risk babies and kids within our community. Our work directly impacts the lives of children experiencing debilitating poverty, endless homelessness, and family and domestic violence by giving hope to those most vulnerable in our community who have lost theirs. We provide the basic essentials such as clean clothing, shoes, toys and books, warm bedding, safe cots and car seats, and baby items such as nappies and feeding equipment to increase their physical, emotional, and social well-being.

OUR IMPACT

Every year, we provide quality pre-loved and new children's goods to more than 2,500+ babies and children and 1,300+ families across South Australia and divert over 70 tonnes from landfill with our environmentally friendly, sustainable recycle model.

WHO WE SUPPORT

We are a child focused organisation, supporting at-risk and vulnerable children aged from newborn to 18-years of age who are experiencing immediate crisis situations, debilitating hardship or families who simply can't afford to buy the basics for their children. Families who are referred to us via 170 community and health support agencies such as Anglicare SA, Uniting Care SA, Women's Safety Services, Novita, The Smith Family, Department of Child Protection, and many more to ensure we can reach every vulnerable family in SA that needs our help.

WAYS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN IN NEED

Being a part of the change that impacts a child's life is a collaborative effort – and every effort counts.

- **Donate goods:** Organise a donation drive at your place of work, home or school.
- **Donate funds:** Organise a fundraiser that raises vital funds for kids in need.
- **Partner with us:** Choose Treasure Boxes as your Charity Partner for your next event or function.
- **Volunteer:** Individual, school and workplace volunteering available.
- **Shop pre-loved baby clothes at our Baby Boutique.**
- **Share the love and raise awareness. Follow us on social media.**



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SUPPORTING PRE-SCHOOLERS TO HAVE A VOICE TOO!

A message from The Commissioner for Children and Young People

Not long after I commenced as South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, I went on a tour of the state to talk with as many children and young people as I could. I wanted to hear firsthand what was going on in their lives and what they wanted me as their new Commissioner to do for them.

One of the key learnings I had from this '2017 Listening Tour' was just how few opportunities children and young people have to have their voices heard, particularly those in the 8-12 years age group.

To address this, I initiated an annual Student Postcard initiative. It was my way of providing these children with an opportunity to tell me, their Commissioner, what matters to them most and what they would like to change about their lives if they could. The responses have been fantastic and have guided me in my efforts to ensure I am doing my best to advocate in those areas SA children want change most.

“Children in the 8-12 year old age group have shared their thoughts and ideas about what's great about being a kid in South Australia, as well as what's not. They've drawn fantastic pictures to illustrate their thoughts and ideas and sent me heart-warming and heart-wrenching messages that have been a mixture of insight, humour, and some sadness, many expressing their appreciation for the opportunity they've been given to have a voice. I now want to extend this opportunity to Early Learners.”

The initiative has been well received with 324 of the states 354 primary schools participating last year with 15,669 postcards returned. This brings the total number of cards received since the initiative commenced in 2019 to over 40,000 providing a rich source of primary content for researchers, academics, decision makers and professionals.

Due to the success of my Student Postcards initiative for primary school children and at the request of many Early Year's teachers and educators, from this year I have decided to extend this state-wide engagement initiative to include pre-schoolers.

I'm keen to ensure that SA children in this Early Years age group are also provided with an opportunity to have a voice by asking them one simple question. What is your favourite place and why? They answer by drawing a picture and telling me why this is their favourite place.

If you are an Early Year's teacher in SA, you can expect to receive an email at the start of school Term 2, inviting you to support the initiative and providing you with a link to a downloadable copy of the postcard artwork. It will be sent with a request to support pre-school children to complete the task, scanning their finished responses and emailing them back to me before the start of Term 3. I look forward to working with you on this Early Years Postcards initiative.

Visit commissionerspostcards.com.au to view a gallery of postcard responses and to download The Things That Matter summary reports.

For more information on the work of the Commissioner visit: ccyp.com.au

Words: **Helen Connolly**

Helen became South Australia's first Commissioner for Children and Young People in April 2017. The Commissioner promotes and advocates for the rights, development and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia, with a special focus to engage with and listen to children who aren't usually heard.





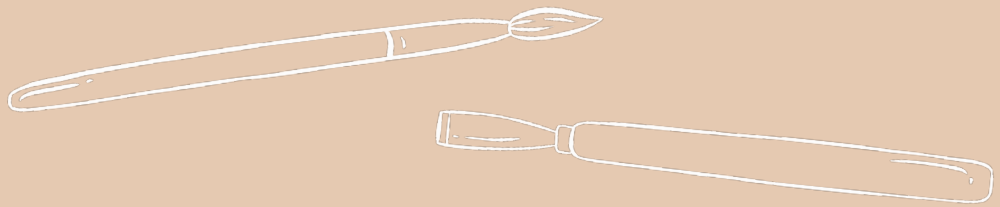
Summary of our

Rapid Review of the evidence behind pre-school for 3-year-old children.

Commissioned by the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, South Australia.

The Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in South Australia presents an opportunity to propose new solutions to the government on delivering a high-quality early year's system that is fit for the children of South Australia. Broadly, the Royal Commission is inquiring into:

1. The extent to which South Australian families are supported in the first 1000 days of a child's life, focused on opportunities to further leverage early childhood education and care to enable equitable and improved outcomes for South Australian children;
2. How universal quality preschool programs for 3 and 4-year-old children can be delivered in South Australia, including addressing considerations of accessibility, affordability, quality and how to achieve universality for both age cohorts. Consideration of universal 3-year-old preschool should be undertaken with a view to achieving this, commencing in 2026;
3. How all families can have access to out of school hours care (OSHC) at both preschool and primary school ages, including considerations of accessibility in all parts of the state, affordability, and quality in public and private settings.



In conducting its inquiry, the Royal Commission has been tasked to hear the voice of parents and caregivers from diverse backgrounds, experts in early childhood development, service providers in the first 1000 days, leaders of early childhood education and care services, relevant unions, and providers of OSHC. Within this broader remit, the University of South Australia was commissioned to (A) undertake a rapid literature review to help inform the Commission's knowledge of the existing scientific literature with a tight focus on the impact of 3-year-old preschool on developmental and learning outcomes, and (B) to conduct a survey of academic experts in the field to gather insights into what is established (known and not known) regarding ECEC implementation considerations to support child developmental outcomes.

Results from the rapid review confirmed the scientific literature into the importance of early child development for later academic success, health and wellbeing.

As such, it isn't surprising that South Australia is considering increasing their investment in ECEC. The intent behind such investment is twofold; it not only serves to support early child development, but also to facilitate increased workforce participation of young parents. Interestingly, although the evidence for the latter is strong (i.e., increased workforce participation) (European Commission 2022), the strength of the evidence for the former (enhancing child development) is not so clear cut, especially when it comes to preschool provision for 3-year-old children.

Ultimately the challenge for policy makers is to understand the right "ingredients" (both inputs and quantity of those inputs) for a universal ECEC system that will support families across the socio-economic spectrum. One key ingredient to consider is the number of hours per week that a child attends ECEC. Evidence from high quality studies is contradictory, with some indicating that simply more hours is better and others suggesting that this is the case for children from challenging home environments but greater hours either has no effect or a negative effect on children from supportive home environments. Of course, pragmatically, parents will have preferences depending on employment flexibility and other care arrangements and these considerations will also influence children's attendance patterns.

In terms of quality, the literature clearly supports high quality ECEC provision. Aspects of quality include the need for staff-to-child interactions to be positive, kind and caring, with staff pro-actively seeking to enhance children's development and learning through a range of pedagogies. Further there is strong evidence for higher staff-to-child ratios having better outcomes, with those

ratios being more important for the younger children. Additionally, the research supports the benefits of teachers informed through formal qualifications and ongoing professional development, including a thorough understanding of child development, to inform pedagogy and practice, ongoing program evaluation and development, and meaningful interactions and support of families. Programs with many or all of these elements present demonstrate the strongest and most persistent development outcomes for children.

Engagement and inclusion of parents/caregivers by the ECEC service is another important factor in achieving a holistic approach. A common element of programs evaluated to be impactful on children's development is the inclusion of parenting support through either playgroup type models where parents are learning and having activities role modelled, or with the embedding of parenting practice support programs. Further, the optimal number of hours per week, assuming a minimum quality standard, will differ depending on the home circumstances of the child, meaning a flexible high quality service system will be required. Aspects of quality should primarily consider delivering services in a way that facilitates a close and positive relationships between the staff, children and parents, where a child sees their ECEC as a safe, fun and affirming learning environment. Any ECEC should engage parents, ideally with role modelling and assistance to facilitate parent's ability to support their child's growth, development and learning. Both parents and children are more likely to be engaged when they trust that their ECEC service will provide encouragement and emotional support, thus leadership in the centre/pre-school should foster an inclusive culture supporting all families no matter what their background.

South Australia has a unique opportunity to provide a mix of ECEC services to support children and families. The existing research evidence provides important insights to consider in any expansion and ideally this will be undertaken hand in hand with ongoing monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate the benefits to the community, improve effectiveness, and create an opportunity to share information about what works and what doesn't as the services expand to scale.

Words: **Professor Sally Brinkman**

Sally's research through UniSA aims to improve the healthy development and early learning of young children, with a focus on those living in highly disadvantaged communities.

For more information and to read the full report visit:
royalcommissionecec.sa.gov.au



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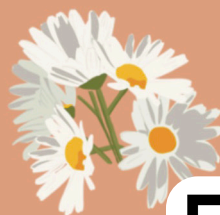
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Childhood Dementia



Childhood dementia are two words we would not expect to sit sidebyside. Sadly though, childhood dementia is a real, devastating and currently incurable disease. South Australian mum, Renee, like many of us, had never heard of the disorder until she recently discovered that all three of her children are living with it. For parents, the diagnosis usually comes as a total shock. They may have noticed some minor developmental delays, but do not expect to hear that their child is terminally ill, or that there is no cure for the illness. To make matters worse for these families, childhood dementia is currently drastically underfunded and overlooked, meaning that there has been little government funding for research to find treatments and cures. It also means that there is little care and support offered to those affected.

The Childhood Dementia Initiative (CDI) states that recent analysis of federal government research funding in Australia has revealed significant inequity between child illnesses. **According to the analysis, we lose nearly as many children to childhood dementia as we do to cancer.** And yet, the disease is reported to receive 20 times less funding than childhood cancer.

Without a cure, and still little acknowledgement of the disease, parents like Renee are forced to grapple with the reality that their children will gradually deteriorate as a result of progressive brain damage. Children with the disease gradually lose skills such as the ability to write, read, talk, walk and play. Their brains also lose the ability

to keep the body functioning properly and, eventually, to keep the body alive. Unfairly, with the state of current research funding and support, these children may not live beyond 18.

With the support from people like you, we are hoping to make a difference in the life of Renee and her three beautiful children, as well as other families affected by the disease. To do so, we are currently hosting a GoFundraise campaign, where you can make a donation with just a few simple clicks. We encourage you to please donate to this campaign and we urge you to do so today. This is an incredibly worthy cause, surrounding a health issue that has been overlooked for far too long now.



Supporting children's physical and mental health

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Little Heroes Foundation is a South Australian-based not for profit organisation that supports the physical and mental health of children. They have been supporting seriously ill children for 26 years.



NATURE PLAY

When nature and learning collide, wondrous things can happen.





When you drive past your local public school, keep an eye out for what's fast becoming a must-have for every schoolyard... it might be a pile of branches fashioned into a cubby, or it could be a fairy circle of log rounds. Whatever you spy, you've likely stumbled across a purpose-built nature play space.

As primary schools continue to invest in nature-play spaces, we're hearing more and more about the benefits of children playing and being in nature – and not just being outside and running about on the school oval, but really engaging in play and learning activities where natural features such as logs, rocks, and water integrate with children's activities.

A growing body of research indicates that when children connect with nature, take risks, and manipulate their environment in both play and learning scenarios, it reflects positively on their health and wellbeing.

For teachers in the know, nature-based play and learning can provide novel ways to connect students with learning. By incorporating nature into play and learning experiences at school, teachers can create opportunities for children to develop important skills such as problem-solving, creativity, and resilience, while also gaining a deeper appreciation and understanding of the natural world.

Take for example, cooking damper on an outdoor fire. This simple activity can encompass a range of curriculum skills – maths and measurement of ingredients, essential fire and safety skills, literacy, and sequencing skills from the recipe, as well as resourcefulness in finding the best sticks to use as skewers. In this way, teaching in nature can have real impact when it comes to student learning.

But how many schools are using purpose-built nature play areas to their full capacity?

In my recent research, I found that purpose-built nature play spaces are present, planned, or in construction in 88 per cent of South Australian schools. This is great news for students, but on the flip side, many of these spaces are being underutilised, especially when it comes to the curriculum. Given the benefits of nature-based play and learning, and the investment that schools have made in these areas, boosting learning opportunities seems intuitive. So, what's going on?

From what school staff are saying, a key barrier to using purpose-built nature play spaces for teaching is a general lack of knowledge and confidence. In my study, 68 per cent of school staff felt that a lack of knowledge and confidence limited their use of nature-based play and learning. Similarly, over a third of teachers said that a lack of understanding and support from others in the school put a stop on any progressive teaching developments. Add to this a crowded curriculum, and teachers' availability to include nature-based play and learning in the school day is rather limited.

Given the clear benefits of getting children out into nature, it's important for schools to consider how they can take full advantage of their purpose-built nature play spaces. So, what can we do?

First, it's important that we find ways for teachers to upskill and feel confident in delivering learning opportunities in nature. This could include professional development opportunities and resources to support teachers in developing their knowledge and skills, as well as integrating nature-based learning into existing curriculum frameworks.

Additionally, my research has identified that a 'nature-based play and learning champion' helped to enable the use of nature-based play and learning. This is someone at the school who is an advocate for nature-based play and learning. Nature-based play and learning champions can play a role in creating a supportive environment for nature-based play and learning to take place and for teachers to build their knowledge and confidence. Schools should consider cultivating and nurturing champions within their community.

When we come to the heart of it, nature-based learning doesn't have to be complex. But given the enormous benefits it can provide for children's health, development and well-being, it is worth the investment. Schools have already invested in the physical spaces; now, it's time to invest in our teachers to make this amazing outdoor learning happen.

Words: **Dr Nicole Miller**

Nicole is an expert in nature-based play and learning. She works with educators, principals, and school staff to understand the current practices and perspectives of nature-based play and learning and the barriers to and enablers of these practices.

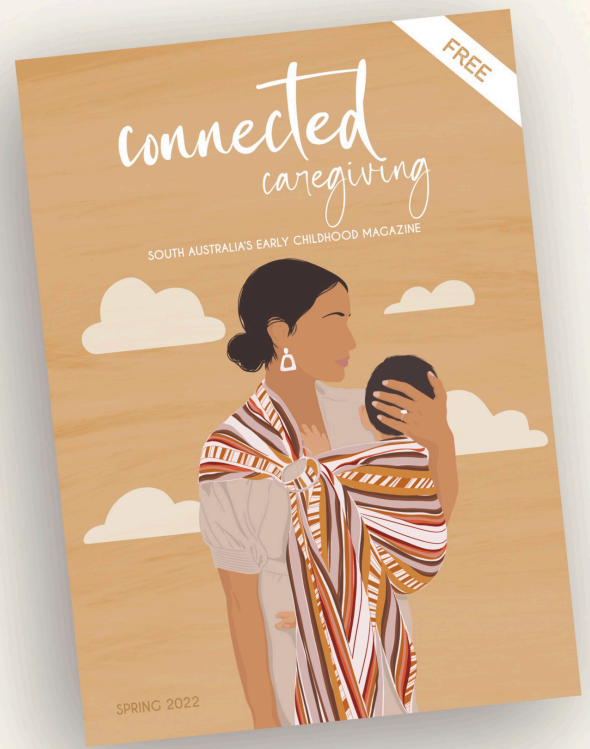


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'BE WITH ME'

A program supporting Aboriginal Families and Communities to navigate the NDIS

Aboriginal family Support Services (AFSS) has been working in South Australia helping to build safe and culturally strong Aboriginal Families and Communities since 1978. The NDIS can be tricky to navigate for the most experienced of users, but the 'Be with Me' program adds a layer of support to Aboriginal Families to stay safe, supported and together. This program was the first of its kind in SA, and was born from what we saw as a huge unmet need in community. Our 'Be with Me' practitioners are all Aboriginal people, with a lived experience of the NDIS in their families – we call them Navigators.

How we can help people who don't have an NDIS plan?

Our Navigators will meet with a person or family and work with them to find the right supports they need, most often this is an application for the NDIS, sometimes its my aged care, or a different community based option. Our Navigators will support clients to their appointments, support them with reports and assessments and walk alongside people through the application and support planning processes.

How we can help people who have a plan, but aren't getting the supports they want or need?

Our Navigators will sit with a person and explain their plan or supports in a practical way – and help them plan how they can be implemented. Navigators will do warm referrals into services, do research to find the right match and be an ongoing partner in making sure the supports keep meeting clients needs.

How we can help ensure better practise?

Our Navigators provide free training to community members, organisations, individual workers and AFSS employees on Aboriginality and Disability – this training has been popular, and the feedback we have received has been really positive. We have a lot of people approach us about training, we also offer it whenever we refer a client into a service as a way of ensuring the service our clients receive is culturally informed.



From left to right; Ricache Van Groesen (Navigator), Olivia King (manager NDIS and SILS), Shana-May Karpany (Navigator) & Eileen Collins-Cole (Navigator) with the Hesta Award for Excellence in Team Work, Disability.

If you would like more information, to put in a referral to receive support from a Navigator, or to attend training, please contact: NDIS@afss.com.au



Aboriginal Family Support Services
Together with the community

Our Navigator was able to support and guide me through all the hoops that came along with Kudos and to try obtaining NDIS approval for our son, they have been an amazing support throughout this journey so far.

-Toni, 'Be with Me' client

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Nutrition in the postpartum period



In traditional cultures, the village cares for the mother while the mother cares for the baby. In Western culture, the 'village' of support looks very different. Women are not being nutritionally nourished after birth, and this is contributing to postpartum physical and mental imbalances.

In traditional Chinese culture, the grandmother will stay with the new mother's family for at least 30 days and will prepare the food post-birth, ensuring optimal nutrition to support her healing and breastfeeding journey. In Australia, too often, new mums are understandably reaching for quick and easy foods (i.e. takeaway) that are low in nutrients. This then impacts long-term health for the mother and baby.

After giving birth, the body has an inbuilt healing process, however if we aren't receiving optimal nutrients, postpartum depletion commonly arises. This can include fatigue, anxiety, depressive feelings, iron deficiency, skin concerns, hormonal issues and conditions such as thyroid illnesses.

After birth, our bodies require large amounts of quality meats and legumes for vitamins such as iron and B12, to replenish blood lost. Quality carbohydrates are required to fuel our energy demands, and these can include warm vegetables and stewed fruits (which also contain vitamin C and zinc for healing). Warmed foods are best for the new mother to aid digestion. Broths from marrow bones contain many nutrients and minerals, as do eggs, which contain choline - an important nutrient for our muscles and nerves, in addition to baby's brain development. Omega 3 is required for similar reasons, but also to reduce inflammation, and can be found in selected meats (e.g. kangaroo), and nuts

and seeds (e.g. walnuts, flaxseeds and chia seeds). Breastfeeding will consume even more nutrients, and it is recommended that lactating women receive 3.5L of fluid a day!

Postpartum food is about going back to basics - it is what we ate once upon a time, the food will give the mother energy back from the land. Food is the most important gift we can give ourselves.

But of course, this should not be the mother's job. Invest in postpartum nutrition, just like you would your birth. If you're in a position to, ask for meals from family, friends, food delivery services and the like.

Let's care for ourselves so we can care for our little ones - to create a stronger and more resilient next generation.

Words: **Rebecca Harwood**



Rebecca is a Naturopath, Nutritionist, Herbalist & Director of Mother Nature Heals. Rebecca has a special interest in postpartum care and children's health. After the birth of her daughter, Rebecca realised the importance of this, but even more so noticed the lack of care for women after birth. It is for these reasons that Rebecca is passionate to help others reconnect with themselves and their bodies, encompassing emotional, physical and spiritual balance.



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right@ home

Bringing home a new baby is exciting – and scary. Especially for families experiencing disadvantage, early parenthood can be stressful.

Sustained nurse home visiting (SNHV) is where a trained nurse visits families in their own home over a long period of time. This lets families build a strong and trusting relationship. Visits are usually front loaded – more at the beginning, and fewer as the baby grows and parents gain confidence. Many programs also focus on building community connections, helping parents form a network of support.

Who is SNHV for?

Sustained nurse home visiting is used internationally including in the UK, Germany, US, the Netherlands, and here in Australia. It is one of the best evidenced ways to support mothers who are living with disadvantage. Research shows that the first 1000 days is a critical time for babies' developing brains. During this time, babies' brains are extremely sensitive to their environment. Empowering mothers experiencing adversity to give their babies the best support during this critical time is a powerful way we can address inequity and intergenerational disadvantage.

Can I get home visiting in Australia?

In SA, every family receives one home visit as part of the universal service, but there is not widespread access to sustained home visiting. There are several SNHV programs running in other parts of Australia, including the Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program, for first time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers; NSW's Sustaining NSW Families program; and the right@home program in Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Both Sustaining NSW Families and right@home are based on an Australian-designed program called MECSH, or Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-visiting, developed by Distinguished Professor of Nursing Lynn Kemp at Western Sydney University. Also part of right@home is Diana Harris of ARACY - the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, who says:

“Sustained nurse home visiting takes the pressure off mums who might be doing it tough. They have a trusted professional who is there to help – and they keep turning up to help. The mum doesn't have to keep asking for support, and they don't have to worry about transport, or care for older kids. It's easy, it works, and it feels safe, and that's why our research mothers give their relationship with the right@home nurse an average score of 39.4 out of 40.”

Researching SNHV in Australia

The research she refers to is the right@home Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT). This is Australia's largest trial of SNHV and is one of only three RCTs internationally that has followed children up to school age. In Phase 1 of the RCT, trained nurses delivered up to 25 visits to mothers with indicators such as living alone,

low education, never working, having anxious mood, or no support network. A control group of similar mothers received “usual care” through the universal health system.

The researchers found statistically significant differences at the end of the two year program. Mothers in the right@home group showed warmer and more responsive parenting (linked to healthy attachment and brain development). They had more regular routines, safer homes, and felt more confident in caring for themselves and their children.

As the research continues, those benefits have endured. Up to three years after visits ended, the researchers are still seeing better maternal mental health and parenting confidence. While the results are not yet published, early signs are that the right@home babies are now doing better in social and emotional development and reading readiness. These gains are small, but consistent across a number of different measures. The researchers next plan to compare the right@home children and the control group with school NAPLAN data as the children turn eight.

SNHV is a proven way to enhance vulnerable mothers' ability to care for their children during a critical time of development. In supporting mothers to parent well, we are breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage and giving children the early opportunities they need to thrive.

For more information on Right@home, please contact:
Diana Harris, Lead for Knowledge Translation, ARACY
Tel: 0449 059 729
Email: diana.harris@aracy.org.au





DELIVERING DENTAL, DIFFERENTLY

Teaching Teeth

is a digital dental education platform designed to aid in the oral health care of your children, in a freely accessible and easy to understand way.

The platform was created by two Adelaide Oral Health Therapists, Donna McMahon and Brittany Kidd, as a means to bring the dental setting to you. The duo met whilst studying their Bachelor of Oral Health at the University of Adelaide (2016) and have remained close friends ever since. In 2021 they each welcomed their first child and entered a new bond of friendship during motherhood. It was through the new parenting journey that Teaching Teeth was born. With 22 years of dental experience between them and an understanding of the challenges faced in motherhood and for children's oral care, they aim to make preventative information more accessible than ever before.

The Teaching Teeth digital platform aims to provide dental education and preventative strategies in a relatable way to new parents.

“In today’s busy world, and with rising cost of living, we wanted preventive dental education to be accessible to new parents without them having to leave their home.”

The Teaching Teeth platform is designed for the ever-growing technology-savvy generation of new parents and this digital transformation is changing the way dentistry is traditionally delivered.

“We aim to bridge the gap between expecting and new parents and the dental industry. We hope Teaching Teeth can encourage preventative behaviours by providing education, that is easy to access and understand, and support to this population, whereas traditionally they may not access a dental professional at this time for various reasons.”

Teaching Teeth covers all aspects of oral health, spanning from prenatal care through infancy and early childhood. With topics ranging from parental oral health affecting newborns general health, early oral motor development and function, how, when and what to brush, oral hygiene for both mum and bubs, and what products we recommend using, when and why.

Good oral health starts well before the first tooth erupts and we want to educate new parents on this to help shape and change the oral health habits of the next generation.

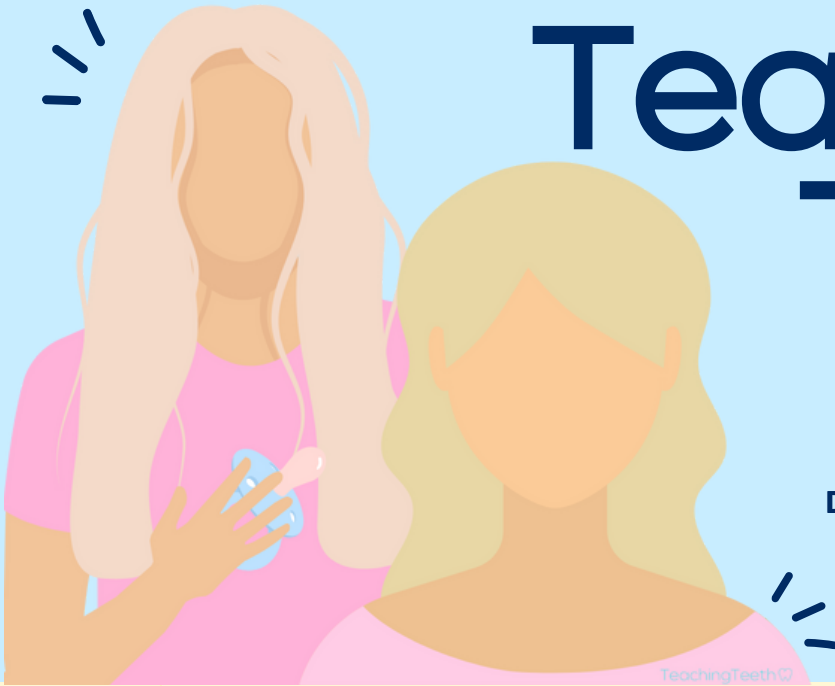
Words: **Brittany Kidd and Donna McMahon**

Brittany & Donna are dentists who, after both welcoming their first children in 2021, had a new found awareness for the lack of dental information available for new and expecting parents. With 22 years of dental experience between them, their mission through Teaching Teeth is to make preventative knowledge more accessible than ever before through continuous education and support

Teaching Teeth



Delivering Dental, Differently



Teaching Teeth was created by mothers who just... get it!

A digital platform created by Oral Health Therapists focusing on preventative dental care, specifically for pregnancy and early childhood. Its like having a virtual dental professional in your back pocket!



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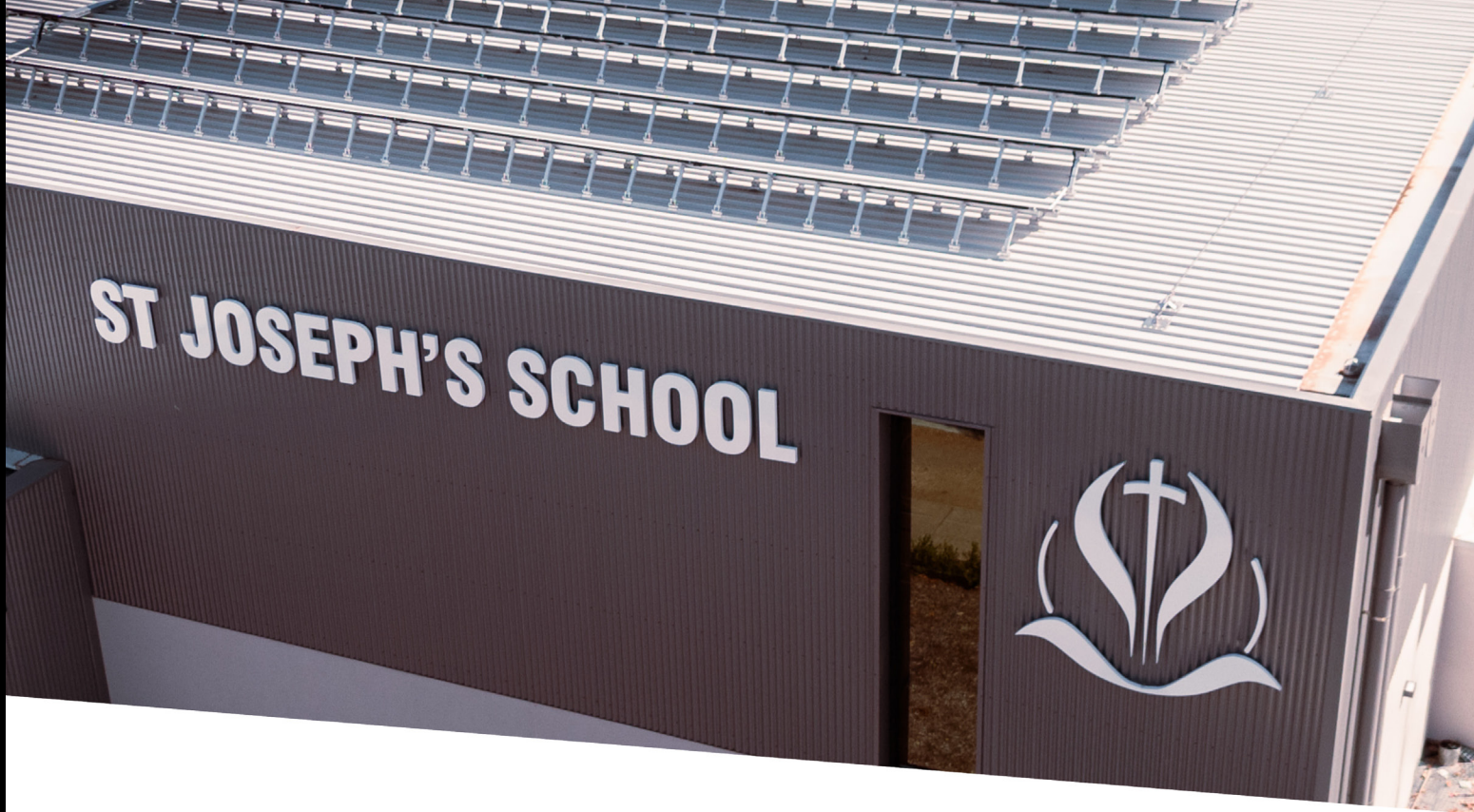


✓ Preventing dental disease

✓ Oral motor development

✓ Pregnancy and parents oral health





ST JOSEPH'S SCHOOL



SCHOOLS GO SOLAR

With the help of Wescombe Electrical, St Joseph's School, Clare, has gone solar. The school has installed 202 panels to provide locally generated, green energy to power the school's state of the art facilities.

Joseph's School is a Reception to Year 9 co-educational school proudly located on Ngadjuri land.

The 150 year old historic school was recently approved a \$5.95 million expansion by the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS) to demonstrate their commitment to improving Catholic education pathways for children and young people in regional South Australia. This expansion was designed to provide students in Clare and surrounding districts an extended pathway to high quality Catholic education in preparation for their transition to senior secondary years.

The purpose-built facilities includes multi-use specialist areas for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and Arts and incorporates breakout spaces designed to cater for the specific wellbeing and learning needs of young adolescents.

With plans to commence offering secondary education in 2022 (Year 8) and 2023 (Year 9), the school community anticipated a significant increase in energy consumption and sought support from Wescombe Electrical to consider alternative options and

design a solution that matched the school's values and needs.

Wescombe Electrical completed the installation of the 75kW systems in 2022. In addition, a smart energy management program was introduced to monitor and control the integration of renewable energy.

By choosing to install solar, the school is likely to save approximately \$22,750 annually in electricity bills and significantly reduce their carbon footprint.



Scan to hear what St Joseph's had to say about their experience with Wescombe Electrical

SOLAR SNAPSHOT

LOCATION: Clare, South Australia

SIZE OF SYSTEM: 75.44kW

ESTIMATED BILL SAVINGS: \$22,750/year

PAYBACK PERIOD: 3 years

SOLAR INSTALLER: Wescombe Electrical



Save **46%** on school's energy bill



Equivalent to planting **2,034** trees per year



'Not only are we saving almost \$23,000 per year, but we're providing educational outcomes for the students as they're able to learn about the sustainability of our school and our community.'

- Peter Shearer, Principal, St. Joseph's School, Clare



Wescombe Electrical services metro & regional areas of South Australia

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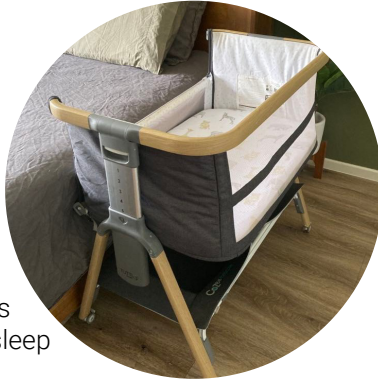
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The Reality Gap

Do you see this co-sleeper bassinet? It's brand new, it's pretty, has wheels, and wasn't cheap. We bought it for our third baby because we wanted to have him close but still in his own sleep space. This beautiful bassinet represents my "reality slap" because as it turns out my baby doesn't like to sleep apart from me.



The "reality slap" moment is when life deals us a blow. It might be the big shock, like a freak accident, a loved one's loss, or a natural disaster. Or, it might be something smaller and less "shocking" – the feeling of loneliness when I realise my pre-baby friends aren't there for me; or the pang of envy when the other mums at mothers' group talk about how well their babies sleep; even anger or resentment at my partner sleeping while I settle the baby for the fourth time that night.

Some slaps are passing insults, like that jab of frustration when the lady in the grocery store asks if he's a 'good baby'. Others might have us reeling for weeks (or longer), like the aftermath of a traumatic birth.

When the reality slap passes, there's the "reality gap"... that gap between my expectations and the reality I live within – the bigger that gap, the more painful the feelings. A reality slap may pass in moments, but the reality gap may persist for days, weeks, months - even years.

My reality gap is 50cm - the space between the bassinet and where my son actually sleeps - in my bed.

When I was pregnant with my first child, I knew my baby would wake at night, but I wasn't prepared for how often, or for how long. A part of me thought I'd have my nights back within six months, and while sleep was very manageable by that stage, the rollercoaster of what is actually normal infant sleep presented me with a few more surprises.

When the reality slap of infant (or toddler) sleep hits, it can hit hard! The reality gap between baby waking four times every night and the expectation that our baby will sleep from 7pm-7am is huge. Where did "couple time" go, where did relaxed mealtimes go? Why won't my baby nap in the pram while I enjoy a coffee date with a friend? The witching hour feels like an eternity – how on earth do I maintain my own sanity and self?

I was lucky to discover the Possums Programs early in my parenting journey. For my first baby, they helped with breastfeeding challenges and for my second baby, their shared medical appointments connected me with other parents experiencing the same reality slap challenges. As we all sought to adapt to our new reality, we benefited greatly from the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) practices embedded throughout the programs.

Prior to Possums, this reality gap would have caused me a lot of painful feelings. I would have felt like I wasn't doing 'it' right; guilt, because my baby didn't

The Possums Programs provide parents with evidence-based resources about caring for baby AND you. They can be accessed via a Milk & Moon membership, which includes access to the Possums Parent Hub - a closed, peer-mentored group to safely share the challenges and wins of caring for a baby.

It helps us understand that we are all facing our own reality gaps - and everything is interconnected; incorporating mindfulness, understanding of our own individual values and acceptance skills to help with responses to stressful experiences.



sleep in the bassinet; spent hours trying to 'teach' him to sleep apart from me. Instead, I am empowered with the knowledge of normal infant sleep from Possums and with my experiences of parenting two older children, I am armed with a toolkit of strategies to help me unhook from uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. With these tools, I am confidently navigating this intense phase of parenting my new baby.

I've learned how valuable these programs can be in facing the "reality slaps" of early parenthood and became a Possums Parent Mentor to support other parents.

Words: **Ashleigh Lyness**

Ashleigh is a loving mother of 3 beautiful children. She is a radiographer and Parent Mentor with Possums for Mothers and Babies – An Australian registered Charity to deliver support services, education and resources to parents of babies during the postnatal period and up to 2 years.

Milk & Moon Membership

Caring for baby & caring for you with evidence-based resources on breastfeeding, sleep and unsettled babies.

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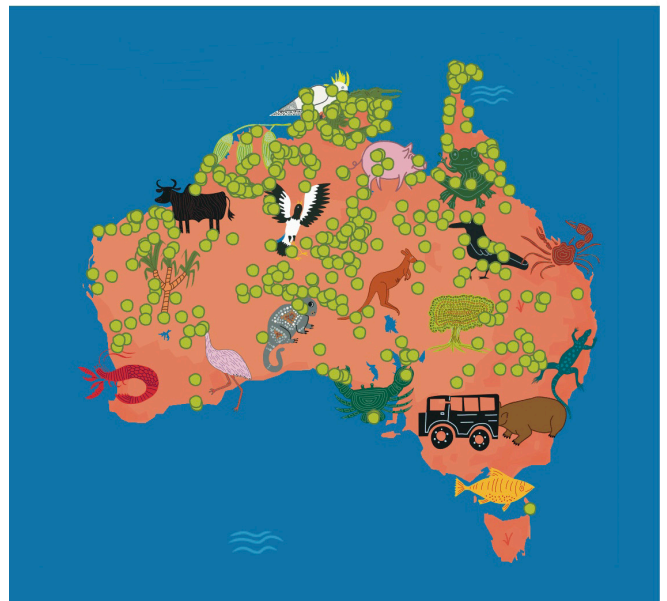
What is the Indigenous Literacy Foundation?

The Indigenous Literacy Foundation (ILF) is dedicated to improving literacy outcomes for Indigenous children in remote Communities across Australia. The organisation recognises the value of supporting Communities to preserve and revitalise their First Languages for cultural integrity, learning, identity, improved wellbeing and autonomy. ILF's community-led approach responds to requests from remote Communities for culturally relevant books, resources and programs to support Communities to create and publish stories in languages of their choice.

Access to reading material is limited in remote Communities due to the lack of infrastructure such as libraries or bookstores, which affects the literacy outcomes of Indigenous children. ILF programs focus on ensuring access to quality resources, including books in First Languages, publishing Community stories and empowering Communities and families to lead the entire process.

ILF defines literacy as a navigation skill that provides a fundamental step of building context, comprehension and understanding, whether it is written, visual or auditory. Literacy is a foundational skill that helps children to navigate the world around them, making it a fundamental human right.

ILF has achieved significant milestones since its inception in 2011, working with over 400 remote communities, gifting 752,866 books, implementing its early literacy program Book Buzz with 90 remote playgroups and publishing 109 books reflecting 31 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.



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ILF PROGRAMS

Book Supply

Gifting books to Communities that need them the most

Access to books in remote Communities is challenging, as there are often no libraries or bookstores. ILF's Book Supply program meets this need by providing new, culturally relevant books to remote Communities across Australia. Schools, Community, health, and women's centres working in remote Communities, can order books to distribute to children and families.

Book Supply packs are carefully selected for different age groups and 45-50% of books in the Book Supply packs feature Indigenous authors and illustrators.

Book Buzz

Promoting early literacy, with a focus on First Language

Our Book Buzz program aims to develop familiarity and engagement with books for children under five through a daily dedicated Story Time session, so children can develop critical pre-literacy skills. Our team also provides the funding for many remote Communities to translate popular books into First Languages, allowing children to start their literacy journey with books in languages spoken in their homes.

Book Buzz supports remote playgroups and provides board books, picture books, and touch and feel books, some in English, some in English with Aboriginal Language translations, and others printed in a First Language.

Through the Book Buzz program, children learn to navigate books; how to hold them, how to move from the start to the end following the story, and to think about what might happen next. It is a vital learning stage in preparing children for school.



Photos by Wayne Quilliam

Community Publishing Projects

Publishing books written by Community

The Los Pintos Declaration, the roadmap for UNESCO's Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032, emphasises Indigenous peoples' rights to freedom of expression, to an education in their mother tongue, and to participate in public life using their languages, as prerequisites for survival of Indigenous languages.

ILF works to meet the wishes of remote Communities across Australia, to assist with the publishing of books created by Community - many in First Languages - as well as to fund the development of digital, audio, or other learning resources and workshops.

It is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can see themselves, their culture and languages reflected in the books they read. Having books that share local stories in First Languages, preserves and maintains Indigenous languages and culture, as well as builds pride, identity and strengthens a sense of belonging, confidence and wellbeing. These books are highly desired because they often share a local story that a Community is familiar with and in a language they speak at home.

How can you support ILF?

ILF receive no government funding and relies solely on the generosity of supporters and sponsors. Every \$10 donation puts a book into the hands of a child living in remote Australia, making a significant impact on their literacy journey. You can also support us by purchasing a book! ILF sell a range of beautiful children's books via their shop: shop.ilf.org.au

Learn more at ilf.org.au

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Out of School Hours Care

Service Spotlight

Happy Haven,
Christies Beach



Happy Haven Christies Beach accessed support from Connect.Ed to better understand children's behaviour through a trauma-informed lens. Here's what Tracy, Service Director, had to say about the project:

“It was such an amazing experience... From the first day that Kerra-Lee stepped into our service, [she] could instantly understand and identify some of the complexities within the service. From that day forward we learnt so much and were able to start understanding the impact trauma can have on children.”

The service had numerous strengths - the main one being educator's relationships with children and their ability to co-regulate with them. Tracy says, “It was just such an eye-opener to understand just how important it is to build connections with the children and how this can have such a positive impact.” Through the professional development sessions with their Child Development Practitioner, they had the “science to back it up”.

During staff meetings, they explored topics such as brain development, developmental trauma, understanding children's behaviours using the 'Iceberg Model' and the Window of Tolerance. This allowed them to

“observe and reflect as a team and try to understand what those needs were and how [they] can help children get those needs met”. They were also able to notice children's cues to escalation before they ‘flipped their lid’, meaning they were able to respond quicker, connect and redirect prior to them becoming dysregulated.

“We learnt that by having these connections with children we could read their signs easier and could then redirect children if we could see they were becoming dysregulated”

One of the key take-aways for Tracy and the team was understanding that offering relational and regulatory-based strategies to regulate children (and help them to remain regulated!) was not “rewarding ‘bad’ behaviour”, but rather fulfilling their underlying needs.

During their fortnightly mentoring sessions, the team and their Child Development Practitioner reflected on the service's physical care environment.

“The Connect.Ed team discussed with us the impact a ‘busy-looking’ environment can have on some children and how overwhelming it can be. [They shared] why changing the OSHC environment could benefit the children at the service.” Tracy reflected, “this was



The Innovative Solutions Support (ISS) funding is available through the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) to assist eligible early childhood education and care services to fund innovative, flexible and responsive solutions to barriers to inclusion and embed inclusive practices.

Innovative Solutions Support provides flexible funding to empower services to carefully consider their inclusion challenges and take on an active role in finding solutions and build their capacity and capability to include children with additional needs.

For more information about the funding, please contact the South Australia Inclusion Agency inclusion@gowriesa.org.au

Connect.Ed can support early childhood education and care services to implement trauma-informed practice, using a regulatory and relationship-based approach. This approach is different to a 'traditional' behaviour-management approach and, instead, focuses on supporting children to regulate their emotional experiences using their emotional connection with Educators.

For more information about accessing support from Connect.Ed, please contact admin@connectededucation.info

something I had not thought of before and when it was discussed it all made sense as to why this can have an impact on children's behaviours."

"Calming children's physical environments can make it easier for them to manage."

Without delay, Tracy and her team painted the walls in a neutral white, covered the 'loud' pin-board with more neutral tones and incorporated only purposeful posters on the walls. The team also took this one step further, creating a calm corner to meet the sensory and emotional needs of the children.

"We also set up a calm corner that children could access anytime they were feeling overwhelmed, anxious, angry, tired, or just needed to chill out by themselves for a bit. Once children learnt what the area was for, we saw children who before may have tried to abscond or become dysregulated now go and use this space."

This inviting space included a tent, comfy neutral pillows, blankets, books, sensory/calming items, and a couple of egg chairs. Children were observed using the space to play quietly with soft toys and read books and also regulate their emotions during 'tricky times'. The service even explored a secondary calm corner due

to the need of the children and the positive impact this simple strategy had on meeting their overall needs.

"These are just a few of the things we have learned and putting them into practice had such a positive impact on our service. I cannot recommend the Connect.Ed team enough, if you have the opportunity to have them run a program at your service, it will be well worth it."

- Tracy Powell

Words: **Tracy Powell**

Tracy is the Service Director Christies Beach OSHC and Mitcham Primary School OSHC

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