

Annual Report 2005–2006

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President's message

In 2005–06, Early Childhood Australia has extended the reach of its advocacy for young children through work that has been innovative, broadly based and public. This report provides an overview of the work done by members of Early Childhood Australia at national and state levels. That work is evidence of an ongoing and growing commitment to speak out for young children. It reflects the diverse backgrounds and interests of ECA members and the range of issues faced by young children and those who care about and work with them.

A major theme of Early Childhood Australia's advocacy in 2006 with government, key officials and in the media has been to argue for policy-makers to accept the implications of evidence which shows that improving the structural quality of children's services is fundamental to good outcomes for children. The development of a young child's brain, particularly in the first three years of life, will have an immediate and long-term impact on life choices.

Structural quality in children's services leads to warm, sensitive, stimulating and consistent provider–child interactions (process quality). Structural dimensions which allow this are high staff–child ratios, smaller group sizes, specialist early childhood teachers and staff with other early childhood qualifications, and the income/wages and conditions of those working directly with young children. What is worth noting is that the evidence is clear that the more those working with children know about how children develop and learn, the better the quality of their interactions with children and the better the outcomes for children.

One effect of the structural limitations of the current children's services is the high turnover of staff. What is compelling about this reality is that it has not caused an uproar amongst parents whose children are in our services. Imagine if each year there was a similar turnover of teachers in the first year of schooling—there would be uproar. Why is this not the case for children birth to five in children's services?

This year too ECA has further strengthened its relationship with the early years of school through the development of a strong alliance with the Australian Primary Principals Association. Some of the issues that are currently facing the early years of schools are similar to those facing the birth-to-five age group. Specialist early childhood qualifications underwrite effective early childhood leadership and appropriate pedagogy in the first year of schools in the same way as they do for birth to five-year-olds.

The challenge ahead is to persuade parents that what is happening now in services is not okay and have them join with us as allies to persuade governments to tackle the hard issues. There should be a cross-party and cross-jurisdiction approach which focuses on what is right for children and, in doing so, creates a stronger future for the community as a whole.

In this, my last message as president, I want to acknowledge the indebtedness of Early Childhood Australia to the early childhood professionals, especially the National Executive, ECA Branches and members who, as advocates for children, support ECA to do its work. Without them this organisation could not function. It is particularly important to acknowledge and appreciate the depth and extent of the work done by ECA state and territory branches. The extent of this work is apparent throughout this annual report. Every day this year, members of ECA spoke out for children. This report is testament to that energy, commitment and focus on the wellbeing of young children.

I also acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the staff in the national office and the sustained leadership and drive of the Chief Executive Officer, Pam Cahir.

Judy Radich, National President

Advocacy—speaking out for young children

Each year we note that speaking out for young children takes many forms. What is reported here is how Early Childhood Australia, both nationally and through its state and territory branches, has advocated for children in the past 12 months. What is not reported, but which is equally important, is the myriad of ways individual members of Early Childhood Australia who have responsibility for young children advocate for them every day in the programs they deliver; in the professional support they provide, in the partnerships they build with families, in the discussions they have with others and most importantly in the unhurried, sensitive encounters they have with the children for whom they have responsibility. This report is an affirmation of that work and testament to all who advocate for young children.

Early Childhood Australia—Code of Ethics review

Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics was groundbreaking work when it was first developed over 10 years ago. It remains a testament to the professionalism and commitment to children of early childhood professionals. Two years ago work began on the ECA Code of Ethics Agenda. That work, with its focus on review and renewal, is essential to the maintenance of a contemporary early childhood Code of Ethics. This year the Agenda process has included the publication of a literature review, a survey of people interested in the work of the Agenda and meetings in all state/territory branches. The commitment and enthusiasm of early childhood professionals across the country for this work has been exceptional. The work on the Agenda will culminate at the 2006 ECA National Council, where a new code will be endorsed. Thank you to members of the national working group and to Lennie Barblett from the ECA Branch in Western Australia, who provided the leadership for this task.

Submissions, consultations, committees and speeches

Making submissions, taking part in consultations and delegations, contributing to and participating in reviews, forums, committees, reference groups and task forces is an indispensable part of our advocacy work; because, in the discussions and negotiations that take place around these activities, gains can be made for young children.

This year the National President made speeches and commented regularly in the media about issues relating to young children. Both the national organisation and the state/territory branches of Early Childhood Australia have had many meetings with ministers and other Government and Opposition members of parliament, as well as with Departmental officials who have responsibility for issues relating to young children. This year the ECA national organisation met with the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Minister for Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and their advisors. There were also many meetings with Departmental officials in the Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA), the Department of Education, Science and Training, the Department of Employment of Workplace Relations and with the Defence Community Organisation in the Department of Defence.

The breadth and depth of ECA's work is nowhere more apparent than in the range of committees and forums on which ECA members work to make a difference for young children. ECA's capacity to contribute to the plethora of committees focused on the interests of children that exist nationally, as well as in the states and territories, is dependent on the commitment and generosity of our members. ECA has spoken out for children on the Australian Council of Children and Parenting; the Child Care Reference Group; the National Education Forum; Standards Australia CS-5; the National Indigenous Strategy Forum; reference groups on the implementation of the Commonwealth Inclusion Support Program; Young Media Australia; Child Care Communications and the implementation of the Childcare Hotline; the Read Aloud Workshop steering committee; National Prescribing Service; ACROD's National Committee on Children, Young People and their Families; World Forum Planning Committee; Raising Children Network Steering Committee; Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) Policy Brief Reference Group. ECA is a member of CCCH Board of Child Health and Childcare, the Board of the Australian College of Educators, the steering committee for the

Father-Inclusive Practice Framework, and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. In addition, the issues addressed at state and territory forums were the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics, teaching standards, school leadership, reading aloud, overseas early childhood qualifications and the use of medicine in children's services.

In South Australia, ECA is represented on the Wellbeing Steering Committee, the Minister for Education and Children's Services Consultative Committee, the Minister's Consultative Committee for Children with Disabilities, the Early Years Literacy Committee, the Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework committee, and the branch also works with Justice for Refugees SA.

Committees in which ECA NSW participated included the Department of Education and Training Early Childhood Reference Group, the Intervention Support Advisory Committee, Early Childhood Environmental Education Network, Early Childhood Professional Experience Network, Forum for Non-government Agencies, NSW Children's Services Qualifications Committee, Department of Community Services advisory committees on Early Childhood Teacher Interim Policy, Preschool Funding Review, SCAN Advisory Committee, and the Taskforce for the 1:4 ratio.

ECA Victoria participated in 'Putting Children First ... Planning for the Future', the Department of Human Services Early Years Advisory Group, the Children's Services Regulations Forum, the Early Intervention Australia Forum, and continues to convene the Qualification Committee.

In Tasmania ECA involvement included the Minister's Child Care Advisory Committee, support for the campaign of the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union for improved wages/conditions for childcare workers, and the State Planning Committee.

ECA in Western Australia was a member of the Children, Family and Community Courses Study Panel, literacy and numeracy reference groups, the National Excellence in Teaching Awards, and Young Media Australia.

In Queensland the ECA Branch takes responsibility for Under Eight's Week and Child Watch. It is also involved in a range of committees including the Community Services and Health Industry Training Council, Executive Board, Childcare Skills Formation Strategy reference group, the Professional Support Coordinator Project reference group, Queensland Studies Authority reference group, Queensland Curriculum Council, Department of Families Child Care Forum, Education Queensland Early Years Curriculum Advisory forum, and the QUT Education Faculty Advisory Committee.

In the Northern Territory ECA participation included university course development and course monitoring committees, Research Reference Group for Talking Pictures, the Human Service Training Advisory Council, input into the Workforce Development Strategy, the NT Early Childhood Think Tank and the *Strong Beginnings*—pre-compulsory curriculum document.

Supporting the early childhood profession

This is a key part of ECA's advocacy work. The research is increasingly clear that knowledge and expertise in how young children grow and learn is a fundamental structural input to the quality of what happens on the ground for young children.

ECA Biennial Conference 2005

The 2005 Conference, *Kaleidoscope: Changing images of childhood*, held in Brisbane, was an outstanding success. With over 1000 registrations, the conference lived up to its promise to challenge the early childhood profession to reflect on the way popular culture and technologies, cultural diversity and the changing relationships in early childhood education and young children's health impact on their professional practice and the lives of young children. Thank you to the Queensland Branch and their tireless conference committee for putting on an

event which stimulated the profession and provided the opportunity for those professional conversations that underwrite professional growth, at the same time as ensuring that people had fun and enjoyed themselves. Well done!

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Early Childhood Australia's redeveloped website was launched in September 2005. The site is a rich source of support for early childhood professionals and the families with whom many of them work. It has greatly increased the reach of ECA's advocacy work.

ECA has been uncompromising in its commitment to quality-assure the information about good practice that is provided. The Supporting Best Practice (SBP) part of the site provides over 2000 links to ECA quality-assured information held on other sites via an easy-to-access taxonomy. The information included in SBP covers how young children grow and learn, teachers and teaching, and children's rights. *ECA Webwatch*, a fortnightly e-newsletter, provides news and information about early childhood practice and policy. The rate at which the *ECA Webwatch* e-list is growing, the fact that page downloads peak on the day *ECA Webwatch* is sent out and the unsolicited testimonials about SBP and *ECA Webwatch* indicate that the new site is meeting a real need in the early childhood sector. It is also heartening to note the number of organisations that forward *ECA Webwatch* to their e-list.

The site has an e-commerce facility which is increasingly being used by early childhood professionals in other countries to source quality-assured early childhood resources. Plans for the future development of the site include a greater emphasis on the 'resource theme' section of the site and ongoing work on search engine optimisation which is necessary to ensure that the site rates highly in search engines such as Google. *ECA Webwatch* will provide ECA with a platform for growth into the future.

Seminars, conferences, panels, forums, elections and newsletters—an opportunity to speak out for children

Many seminars and forums have been held or jointly sponsored by all state/territory branches of Early Childhood Australia. These seminars provide the opportunity to focus on current issues, reflect on what is happening in early childhood programs, and to talk and network with colleagues. The issues addressed were diverse.

In New South Wales the focus included the role of children's services in building community, the preschool funding battle, the 1:4 task force (staff-child ratio for children under two), taking time for childhood, connecting curriculum to children's popular culture, the ECA Code of Ethics, regulations for childminding services in shopping centres, interagency child protection guidelines, excellence and innovation and national standards, and the National Teaching of Literacy Inquiry.

In Queensland they included an author/practitioner's response to the importance of mothers, children and child care; the ECA Code of Ethics; assessment in early childhood settings; the introduction of the preparatory year in Queensland; and social language and literacy development in childcare settings.

In Tasmania the state election provided the branch with the opportunity to publicly question political parties about their plans for young children. Other issues included the ECA Code of Ethics, the role of the Children's Commissioner, gifted and talented children, charitable status of children's services, and health issues and young children. ECA also played a leadership role in establishing the Bachelor of Education and Care (Early Years) at the University of Tasmania.

In the ACT, while the focus has been on planning for the next ECA Biennial Conference, forums have been held on protective behaviour and supporting Indigenous students and their families.

In Victoria issues included the impact of the wage decision for childcare workers, national standards and quality child care, environmental sustainability, children's services regulations, the Health Act Review, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, funding for kindergarten infrastructure, and sustainability in early childhood settings.

The South Australian issues included the need for qualified staff in early childhood settings, the effect of planning principles on childcare centre location, the Parenting Imperative Conference, professional standards and a Code of Ethics for teacher registration purposes, and multiple literacies. ECA South Australia also asked voters in their state election to put their *Hands up for children!* through a postcard and poster campaign.

In Western Australia ECA met with Teaching Australia and the Opposition spokesperson on Family and Community Services; participated in the launch of the Anti-Bullying Campaign; and has held public forums on scoping solutions to issues identified by practitioners in the field, with follow up lobbying action.

In the Northern Territory the focus was the ECA Code of Ethics and the childcare rebate. The branch also sponsors Children's Week, the NT early childhood conference, and the NT Relief Staff Scheme, and is the Inclusion Support Agency for the Top End.

ECA publications and online advocacy

Advocating through publications

ECA is a trusted source of information—the information that we provide carries the assurance of quality. This role as a knowledge broker leverages the authority of ECA early childhood expertise. As such, it is one of the organisation's most powerful advocacy tools. In this role Early Childhood Australia advocates for children and has done so for many years. ECA publications are peer reviewed and represent a commitment to the provision of high-quality information to those who are responsible for the growth and development of young children.

This year ECA set out to increase the reach of its publications and provide a stronger growth platform within the publications program. That work has resulted in a tenfold increase in subscriptions to the *Everyday Learning Series* which will take effect at the beginning of the 2006–07 financial year. Many of these subscriptions will be provided by children's services to the families of children who are enrolled in the service. ECA has also entered into a partnership with the Australian Primary Principals Association to publish a book to support parents with a child enrolling in the first year of school. That book will be available at the commencement of the 2007 school year.

Subscriptions to all ECA subscription series rose.

The internationalisation of *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* (AJEC) continues with Committee members from Singapore and New Zealand and regular international contributions. In 2005–06 one themed edition of AJEC dealt with transitions.

Titles in the *Everyday Learning Series* (ELS) were:

- ◆ *Everyday learning about maths* by Jenni Connor
- ◆ *Everyday learning about imagination* by Lyn Bower
- ◆ *Everyday learning about healthy bodies* by Nadine McCrea
- ◆ *Everyday learning about fears and anxieties* by Diana Roe

The new *Research in Practice Series (RIPS)* titles were:

- ◆ *Young gifted children: Meeting their needs* by Louise Porter
- ◆ *Active children: Healthy now and later* by Linley Campbell and Josephine Musumeci
- ◆ *Young children as active learners* by Andrea Nolan, Anna Kilderry & Roslyn O'Grady
- ◆ *Managing change with infants and young children* by Pam Linke

Special Titles included:

- ◆ *Stress in early childhood: Helping children and their carers* by Patrice Thomas

and a reprint of

- ◆ *Travelling teens: A parents' guide to family relocation* by Pam Linke

ECA has been publishing its flagship magazine *Every Child* for over 12 years and subscriptions have grown steadily in that period. This year there were three themed editions: Healthy children, Parent-partnerships and Literacy.

Early Childhood Australia's catalogue—an advocacy tool

ECA underwrites its income by onselling the publications of other publishers. All publications sold in this way must meet the ECA quality criteria. Over time the ECA catalogue has grown and, in the past two years, the catalogues have linked all publications to the quality areas identified by the National Childcare Accreditation Council for the Quality Improvement and Accreditation Systems for long day care centres, family day care and outside school hours care services.

ECA's publications program is dependent on the generosity and commitment of the early childhood professionals who write, review and promote the program. It is also indebted to the work of Pam Linke as chair of the Publications Committee. Pam's leadership, energy, commitment and personal efforts as a writer have continued to shape the ECA publications program and our sales and subscriptions continue to grow. She has been supported by a dedicated Publications Committee. Thank you to:

Alison Elliot (Editor, *Every Child* magazine)

Marilyn Fleer (Editor, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*)

Carmel Richardson

Jenni Connor

Judy Radich (ex-officio as National President of ECA)

Geraldine Mackey (to October 2005)

Online advocacy

In addition to the work reported earlier, it is important to note the way the internet gives ECA the capacity to respond more quickly to issues, to be more public and to increase the reach of its advocacy for children. In the last seven months of 2005–06 66,000 copies of *ECA Webwatch* were sent to people who have subscribed to this service. These e-newsletters carried comment and information about many issues, including teaching children tolerance following the Cronulla riots, the ECA position on children in immigration detention centres during the debate about changes to the Commonwealth approach to the processing of refugees, developing a childcare quality rating system in response to the suggestions of a new gold standard level for

accreditation in child care, emotionally intelligent organisations, the importance of conversations in preschool, family and work balance, the myths and realities of Aboriginal life, children's rights generally and teaching for these rights, quality in children's services, wondering with children, the ECA policy on inclusion, the role of early childhood systems in promoting cultural competence and inclusion more generally, and reconstructing teacher education to prepare qualified preschool teachers.

A survey tool has now been included on the site and will be used in future to get information from the early childhood field on a range of issues. All of this work will be ongoing.

Celebrating those who work with children

This year Pam Linke, a long-term and very active member of Early Childhood Australia and a passionate advocate for young children, Barbara Piscitelli and Sue Harper, also passionate advocates for young children, were awarded the Order of Australia. These awards acknowledge personal contributions but equally they are a testament to and an acknowledgement of the significance of young children and the value of the work done by early childhood professionals wherever they are.

This year the Barbara Creaser Memorial Address was given by Karen Martin from Queensland and Michelle Ortlipp from Victoria was the recipient of the ECA Doctoral Thesis Award. Congratulations to these five outstanding early childhood professionals.

Early Childhood Australia in South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania, Northern Territory and Victoria present awards of excellence to university and TAFE graduates in early childhood. Similar awards are sponsored by a number of ECA regional groups. South Australia continues to be involved in the selection of the Jean Denton, Lillian de Lissa and Margaret Trembath scholarships and Victoria is involved with the Agnes Farrance Award. In this reporting period, New South Wales instituted an advocacy award and the majority of ECA Branches are on the selection panels for the National Excellence in Teaching Awards, sponsored by the Australian Scholarships Foundation. ECA is a member of the judge's panel for the National Quality Schooling Awards, which include a pre-primary category, and the local government quality childcare awards.

The establishment of the biennial McArthur Management Services/ECA Travel Scholarship was announced at the ECA Biennial Conference in Brisbane.

Working together in early childhood

National Children's Services Forum

The National Children's Services Forum (NCSF), which includes the majority of children's services national peak organisations, continues to work effectively for children. Early Childhood Australia auspices and chairs this group. NCSF continues to provide an important forum for the sector to discuss issues of common concern and interest and to meet with Departmental officials. This year the forum met three times and each meeting involved FaCSIA officials. As a result of these meetings FaCSIA convened a number of NCSF reference groups on issues including the implementation of the new Inclusion Support Program and Childcare Hotline. NCSF also undertook a national day of advocacy in which delegations of NCSF members met with over 30 Members of Parliament. The issues raised included the importance of investing in young children and what this means for early childhood services, the challenge to quality assurance given the structural problems in children's services, the need for evidence-based standards, affordability, and government funding.

A number of Branches are part of or convene similar groups. In Victoria and in NSW there is the Children's

Services Forum, in South Australia the Unified Professional Association, in Tasmania the Early Childhood Reference Group, and in Queensland the Child Care Coalition.

Advocacy through alliances and collaboration—extending the reach of ECA’s advocacy work

ECA’s commitment to extending its advocacy endeavours is evident through the strengthened focus on the building of mutually beneficial alliances with other organisations. These alliances provide a framework for ongoing collaboration and take many forms.

ECA continues to have strong relationships with organisations and agencies with an interest in young children. Some of these are formalised through memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and others are built through working together. ECA has ongoing MOUs with education.au and Child Care Information Exchange and in 2006 ECA established a formal MOU with Thomson Education Direct, an international training organisation. As a result of this MOU, Thomson students will now receive subscriptions to the ECA *Everyday Learning Series*, be joined as student members of ECA half-way through their studies and receive *ECA Webwatch*. This is an important initiative and it links future members of our profession into the advocacy work of ECA and begins the process of inducting them into the early childhood profession.

This year ECA also entered into partnerships with the Secretariat for National Aboriginal Islander Child Care to produce a *Research in Practice* title about bringing Dreamtime stories into mainstream services, the National Association of Community Based Children’s Services to promote the *Everyday Learning Series*, HESTA superannuation fund to distribute ECA Voice regularly to all children’s services, and the Australian Primary Principals Association to write, promote and distribute *Your child’s first year at school: A book for parents*.

Organisations with whom ECA has continuing alliances include the Australian College of Educators, the Defence Community Organisation within the Department of Defence, NIFTeY, the National Childcare Accreditation Council, Community Child Health in Victoria, Good Beginnings, Pademelon Press, Child and Youth Health in SA, Modern Teaching Aids, McArthur Management Services, the Australian Scholarships Group, the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Monash and Melbourne universities, the Curriculum Corporation, and the children’s services national peak organisations.

Governance and membership

Governance

During 2005–06 work continued on the formalisation and documentation of ECA’s approach to governance through a set of governance policies. These policies provide the framework within which the National Executive exercises its stewardship of the organisation’s mission. They define the organisational culture, values, operating principles and parameters within which the National Executive expects ECA’s operations to be managed. This work has culminated this year with the drafting of a new constitution which was passed at a Special General Meeting of the Association in August 2006. This year too the ECA Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, negotiated with staff and which embodies a strong commitment to work and family balance, was certified by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. These documents will be available on the ECA website.

Membership

ECA membership continues to grow and is diverse, with members from every part of the early childhood profession. The evidence of ECA’s visibility and public advocacy for young children provided in this report is

the motivation and impetus for people to join ECA. All parts of the ECA organisation are active in promoting membership and an important focus of that work is promoting ECA to students and younger members of the profession. These early contacts with the fledgling members of the early childhood profession are important in ensuring that ECA continues to flourish into the future.

Branches engage with students in a variety of ways and this year saw the first ECA student group established on a university campus at Griffith University. The payment of ECA student membership for students who are active participants in a branch, the sponsoring of student awards at TAFEs and universities, the payment of conference registration fees for students at ECA and other early childhood conferences, and putting ECA information in student packs and talking to them about ECA are other ways in which ECA branches support early childhood students.

Regional groups in New England, in central and far west NSW, the Riverina, the north coast of NSW and the Peninsula group in Queensland continue to flourish. Interest has been expressed in the formation of two more regional groups in Queensland and Western Australia. These groups are an important way to enable people beyond the capital cities to be active members of ECA.

Some branches have formed special interest groups to allow people with a particular interest to focus their advocacy. All branches publish newsletters which are distributed to members. These are an important source of information about local and state issues. Investment in ECA membership pays a unique dividend—advocacy for young children.

Acknowledgements

Staff in the national office work in partnership with the national organisation to achieve the goals of the organisation. They work with dedication, energy and flair. The National Executive in particular appreciates their commitment and effort. The Chief Executive Officer, Pam Cahir, continues to provide thoughtful, creative and dedicated leadership and to work in a strong partnership with the National Executive to promote the best interests of young children.

ECA members

All ECA members play a significant role in the organisation's work for children. Some take on particular leadership roles in the ECA state and territory branches and in regional groups. ECA acknowledges the dedication and commitment of these people. ECA also acknowledges here its appreciation of those members who take on leadership roles in the national organisation as office bearers and as members of the National Executive.

The members of the National Executive are:

Judy Radich – National President

Ros Cornish – Deputy National President, Tasmania

Andrea McGuffog – South Australia

Judy Kynaston – New South Wales

Elizabeth Stamopoulos – Western Australia

Renata Harris – Northern Territory

Catharine Hydon – Victoria

Margaret Brannock– Queensland

Vanessa Whelan – ACT

Margaret Young – National Treasurer

Pam Linke – Chair of the Publications Committee (non-voting)

The work of the National Executive requires a level dedication and commitment that would not be possible without the support of their employers.

Thank you to:

The NSW and Tasmanian Lady Gowrie Child Centres

Children's, Youth and Women's Health Service in South Australia

Country Children's Services Association of New South Wales

The Department of Education and Children's Services in South Australia

The Canberra Institute of Technology

Edith Cowan University

The Brotherhood of St Laurence in Victoria

The Department of Family and Community Services in the Northern Territory

and, in particular,

The Cooloon Children's Centre Management Committee and staff for their support of ECA's National President, Judy Radich.

Colquhoun Murphy Solicitors continue to act as ECA's honorary solicitors – thank you.