

# Early Childhood Australia Annual Report 2007–2008



## National President's message

As this Early Childhood Australia (ECA) Annual Report for 2007–08 shows, in the year of its seventieth birthday ECA is exciting, thriving and very busy.

The report shows the vitality and scope of ECA's activities and the insight, energy and creativity behind the many ways in which we have all spoken up for young children through the year – including through the Code of Ethics, publications, submissions, committees and working parties, e-groups, speeches, meetings, forums, websites, and electronic and paper newsletters. ECA's commitment to the wellbeing of young children in our society, and the delivery of high-quality early education and care services to them and their families, is evident throughout the report – as is the diversity of the places and contexts in which we operate.

As we celebrate our birthday we say thank you to our previous ECA leaders and members around the country – you have given us the base from which we work today and we honour you.

We value the support we receive from all current ECA members around the country, and continue to promote ECA membership as an advocacy tool for busy and committed people. At this time, when there are so many demands on people in our sector, I particularly acknowledge the contribution of active ECA members to our work for children. For almost all of them their ECA contribution is in addition to their work in demanding jobs. ECA reaps the benefits in many ways, including through the National Board, in the ECA Branch Executive Committees, in the various National and Branch working groups, and in our publications and submissions. Without the contribution of members ECA's voice would be neither strong nor authentic.

We also acknowledge with great appreciation the inspired and dedicated leadership of our Chief Executive Officer, Pam Cahir, and the fine work of staff in ECA's National Office and also in Branches. ECA staff, who through their wide range of professional contributions, deliver and develop our services and bring many of our goals to fruition – thank you all.

Reading this report and reflecting on the achievements it documents has led me to think of the progress we have made as an organisation, as well as the work that lies ahead. The Branch launches of the Code of Ethics, the ECA e-group on environmental sustainability, the project with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) on children's mental health, and the national consultation for the review of the *ECA Strategic Directions* are all examples of the power of cooperative national effort. The opportunities for the CEO to visit and work with some Branches during this period were also very fruitful.

While national efforts are not always easy, each time we contribute and participate we are enhancing ECA's ability to be effective. It is important that we continue down this path and strengthen our unified voice. Our distances may be great and diversity of experiences broad but our core concerns and commitments are shared.

Apart from the ongoing delivery and development of our ECA services, and our contribution to various inquiries and forums, the year saw our continued engagement with the key issues highlighted last year – evidence-indicators compared with current practice and standards; qualifications, teams and leadership; and early education outcomes. We have raised these issues in many forums, discussed them many times, and spoken and written about them often. They underpin an ECA first in this period – our partnership with the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) in its Big Steps in Child Care campaign. We can be proud that we are persevering with these issues, and thank Pam Cahir for her significant contribution as we refine, develop and promote our understandings.

In this period our work on these issues has been set in the context of the great opportunities that the Rudd Commonwealth Government opened up for young children and early childhood services in Australia, following its election in November 2007. We are also very aware of the risks that go hand in hand with the opportunities, and of the challenges that face us all in making the most of the opportunities and minimising the risks. The task of resolving the issues and reforming and transforming our sector is enormous in its importance for children now and into the future, in its complexity, and in its resource needs. It will take many years to fully achieve but we have the opportunity to overcome state and territory differences that stem from past policies and programs and start building a truly national, high-quality program of services for our young children.

We look forward to continuing our work in all its dimensions, and certainly to continuing to speak out for children from our ECA base of principle and knowledge at this important time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Young". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Margaret Young  
ECA National President

## **A strong and credible voice for young children**

This annual report of the work of Early Childhood Australia (ECA) shows a vibrant organisation that is broad and energetic in the scope of its work, courageous in its engagement with issues affecting children, and clever in its capacity to develop and use its resources and ongoing work to achieve multiple goals.

ECA is indebted to the early childhood professionals, especially ECA Branches and members, who, as advocates for children, support ECA to do its work. Without them this organisation could not function. This report is testament to their energy, commitment and focus on the wellbeing of children.

## **ECA Strategic Directions**

A key priority in 2007–08 has been the review of ECA's strategic directions. The review task has been led by the Board and there has been ongoing consultation with ECA Branches. It is intended that a new set of strategic directions be adopted at the Annual Council meeting in October 2008. This is important work: it refocuses the organisation's attention to its priorities, which is a key feature of a dynamic organisation and makes for good governance. When finished and approved by the ECA Council these priorities will shape the strategic work of the organisation.

## **The Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics**

The ECA Code of Ethics is a landmark document for the Australian early childhood profession. This year the task of promoting the revised ECA Code of Ethics has begun in earnest. At least 50,000 copies of the Code have been distributed throughout Australia. TAFE OTEN online Diploma students and Cengage Certificate III students are now given copies of the Code. Other TAFEs, RTOs and university early childhood courses also distribute the Code to their students and include comment on the Code in their courses.

ECA publications have been used to promote the Code, with articles appearing in *Every Child* and the publication of *The Code of Ethics: A guide for everyday practice* by Lennie Barblett and Catharine Hydon as part of the Research in Practice Series. Similarly, the Code has been promoted by *ECA WebWatch*. It is also pleasing to see the ECA Code of Ethics ranking first in the Google search engine worldwide under the search term 'Code of Ethics'.

## **Submissions, consultations, committees**

Writing submissions; taking part in consultations and delegations; and contributing to and participating in reviews, forums, committees, reference groups and taskforces is an indispensable part of ECA's advocacy work. In the discussions and negotiations that take place around these activities, real gains can be made for young children. This year ECA again commented regularly in the media on a range of matters regarding children. ECA also made submissions to the Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave, and responded to the Teaching Australia consultation document on advanced standards for principals and accomplished teachers.

ECA, nationally and through ECA Branches, has 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. Prior to the federal election, ECA nationally met with the minister, his advisors and members of the then Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and with officers in the then Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). Since the 2007 federal election ECA has, on many occasions, met with ministers,

their advisors and senior officers within the Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations. ECA also worked with the Department of Health and Ageing, the Defence Community Organisation and DEST.

ECA has participated in a range of forums and conferences, including the SNAICC 2007 National Conference, '*Ngadluko Ngartunnaitya – For our Children*'; Teaching Australia seminars on teaching standards; the National Curriculum Board Forum; a National Goals for Schooling Forum; the National Early Years Learning Framework Symposium; the National Child Protection Forum; and the 'Giving ALL Children a Chance to Achieve' seminar, featuring Professor Iram Siraj-Blatchford. ECA has also spoken at a range of forums and a deliberative forum on childcare quality convened by the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) of the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

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. Nationally ECA has spoken out for children on the Australian Families and Children Council, the Child Care Management System Reference Group, the National Advisory Group for Child Care Accreditation System, and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. ECA was a member of the CCCH Policy Brief Reference Group, the Board of Childcare and Children's Health, the COAG Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative Early Childhood Early Intervention Roundtables, the Review of the Community Services Training Package Industry Group, and the Children of Parents with Mental Illness initiative.

## Environment and sustainability

The issues of the environment and sustainability are a priority for ECA both nationally and in Branches. The national ECA Global Warming e-group produced two statements on environment and sustainability. These have been published in *ECA Voice* and so circulated to every childcare centre and preschool in Australia. In its federal election campaign, ECA identified the environment and sustainability as a priority on the ECA election e-card that was sent to all political parties, and via *ECA WebWatch* to the early childhood community. The response to the e-card was outstanding.

This year, editions of the Research in Practice Series and the Everyday Learning Series have focused on environment and sustainability for early childhood services. ECA's flagship magazine *Every Child* and *ECA WebWatch* have kept this issue in front of people working with young children. *ECA WebWatch* now features an 'ECA Greenwatch' section. One of the themes for ECA's 2008 Biennial Conference is 'Environment and Sustainability'.

The ECA website's focus on this issue has deepened with the development of a 'resource theme' on sustainability, global warming and climate change, as well as a new Supporting Best Practice segment on the outdoor environment. In addition, in-house search engine optimisation activity has contributed to ECA ranking first in the Google search engine for a range of environmentally related search terms such as 'Early Childhood Sustainability'. To further emphasise the importance of this issue, ECA highlighted sustainability and the environment in its response to the National Quality Framework discussion paper.

## Indigenous young children, their families and communities

At Council 2007, ECA approved a change to its 2005–2008 strategic direction to include as a desired outcome a commitment that 'ECA be an organisation that addresses its responsibility to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young children, their families and communities through ongoing advocacy work and by undertaking specific initiatives.' This commitment has focused ECA more strongly on this obligation; as did the Prime Minister's apology to the Stolen Generations upon taking office after the 2007 federal election, which ECA strongly applauded.

ECA acknowledges the traditional owners at all meetings and events where it has a leadership role. This is an important way of reminding the organisation of this strategic commitment. ECA's election strategy had a particular focus on Indigenous young children and families; ECA called on the political parties to commit to delivering culturally safe children's services that build capacity into the future for Indigenous Australians. Dr Karen Martin, an early childhood professional who is a Noonuccal woman, was a keynote speaker at the ECA 2008 Biennial Conference. There have been many articles in ECA publications specifically focused on issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. Images of and references to Aboriginal children and families are embedded in all ECA publications and indeed wherever possible in ECA's work generally. *ECA WebWatch* has often highlighted the NT intervention and in particular the potential it had to undermine the human rights of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ECA has continued its strong relationship with SNAICC; and the two organisations undertook a joint initiative related to the COAG early childhood mental health initiative.

## The early childhood profession

Supporting the early childhood profession is a strategic priority for ECA. This occupies a significant part of ECA's advocacy work, and links strongly with the work it has been doing in regard to the development of workforce strategy for the early childhood sector. Evidence of this is the focus that has been given to the promotion of the ECA Code of Ethics, and the work being done with Teaching Australia that will see the development of advanced teaching standards for teachers working with children aged from three to eight.

The existence of a Code of Ethics and the definition of standards of accomplishment are the defining features of a profession. ECA was a member of the Teaching Australia drafting group for the defining capabilities for advanced teaching and for principals, and responded to the National Professional Standards for Principals and Advanced Teachers.

## ECA 2008 Biennial Conference

The ECA 2008 Biennial Conference, *Children: A nation's capital – Investing in children*, was held in Canberra, 3–6 October. The conference themes were 'Advocacy and leadership', 'Environment and sustainability', 'Emotional wellbeing' and 'Theory to practice'. The international keynote speakers were Ferre Laevers and Julia Moons (Belgium), Joan Brink (United States), and Angela O'Connor and Cathy Diggins (New Zealand). Australian keynote speakers were Chris Sidoti, a human rights lawyer; Rob Gell, an environmental activist; and Karen Martin, an early childhood academic who is a Noonuccal woman.

## Speaking out for the early childhood sector

This year ECA spoke at the Southern Cross University in northern NSW, at the LHMU conference in Launceston and at the Mobile Children's Services conference in Wagga Wagga, to the exit students at the Bathurst and Dubbo Campuses of Charles Sturt University, at the 2008 Early Childhood Education Conference *Together we grow* in Melbourne, at the ACT Children's Plan Community Consultation Forum about consulting with children, at the Country Children's Services Association of NSW professional development day in Dubbo and at a Teaching Australia Forum.

ECA was also asked to comment at a forum about the proposed Early Years Learning Framework. The message in most cases was that we can no longer stand by and say that early childhood services that do not reflect evidence-based standards are delivering quality care. These evidence-based features include high staff-child ratios and a workforce strategy that will deliver a stable and capable workforce. Part of that strategy is a commitment to four-year-degree-qualified early childhood leadership positions. This has been hard to come to terms with for some of the early childhood sector, as they do their very best each day for the children with whom they work. But ECA's view is that every time we say we are providing a quality program for children in absence of the evidence-based conditions, we are undermining our claim for the resources necessary to truly provide a quality experience for young children in early childhood services.

This year ECA has entered into a new alliance – indeed partnership – with the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) and has worked closely with this organisation on the Big Steps in Child Care campaign. In this campaign ECA and the LHMU have jointly argued that good outcomes for children are dependent on higher staff-child ratios and a workforce strategy that will ensure that the childcare workforce is qualified, has a career structure and has proper remuneration. Only if this occurs will there be the stable, capable workforce necessary to underwrite a high-quality experience and outcomes for children in early childhood services. To this end the ECA National President spoke at the campaign launch, the CEO spoke at the launches in the ACT and in Melbourne, and there have been joint delegations to meet with the ministers, their advisors and officers from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

## ECA publications and online advocacy

ECA is a trusted source of information. The information that ECA provides carries the assurance of quality. This role as a knowledge broker leverages the authority of the early childhood expertise provided by ECA members. As such, it is one of the organisation's most powerful advocacy tools and has been so for many years. ECA's own 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. The publications from other publishers that are sold by ECA are also quality assured and the same criteria are applied to the information in the Supporting Best Practice segment of the website. The work of quality assuring ECA publications is done by the Publications Committee.

This year ECA distributed 86,000 copies of *Everyday learning about behaviour*, 26,000 copies of *Your child's first year at school: A book for parents*, 90,000 copies of *ECA Voice* and 150,000 copies of ECA's own publications. Many of these publications were distributed free of charge to parents.

Online, ECA distributed 450,000 issues of *ECA WebWatch*, resulting in more than 1.3 million pageviews on the ECA website. ECA's commitment to search-engine optimisation has contributed to ECA ranking first in Google on many search terms. Search-engine optimisation is to the online environment what traditional advertising is like to supermarkets: it drives the customers. Great progress has been made in 2007–08 towards providing online access to the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* (AJEC), which will be available to AJEC subscribers early in 2009.

As a result of the joint ECA–SNAICC project, funded under the COAG early childhood mental health initiative, more than 5000 copies of *The Circle of Security: Roadmap to building supportive relationships* were distributed for free to early childhood services. The Defence Community Organisation (DCO) distributed a further 5000 copies of *Home is where the family is: Moving house with children*, taking the total number of copies that have been distributed to Defence families who have been relocated to 45,000. The partnership with DCO is now more than 10 years old. This partnership is a powerful joint advocacy initiative which supports Defence Force families to deal with the unique challenges they face. Similarly, ECA's solid relationship with Cengage and TAFE NSW OTEN sees their students in particular courses being introduced to *Every Child*, *ECA Voice* and *ECA WebWatch* and the *Everyday Learning Series*.

## 2007–08 publications

### Everyday Learning Series:

- *Everyday learning about confidence and coping skills* by Pam Linke
- *Everyday learning in families* by Judy Radich
- *Everyday learning about loss and grief* by Pam Linke
- *Everyday learning about being green* by Rachael Kinsella

### Research in Practice Series:

- *Greening services: Practical sustainability* by Rachael Kinsella
- *The Circle of Security: Roadmap to building supportive relationships* by Robyn Dolby
- *The Code of Ethics: A guide for everyday practice* by Lennie Barblett, Catharine Hydon and Anne Kennedy
- *Learnings from High/Scope: Enriching everyday practice* by Jenni Connor

ECA's flagship magazine, *Every Child*, and the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* (AJEC) also published four issues each, some of which were themed editions:

- Thinking and problem solving (*Every Child*)
- Building collaborative communities (*Every Child*)
- Play and learning (*Every Child*)
- The arts issue (AJEC)

ECA's publications program is indebted to the team of enthusiastic and committed early childhood professionals who write, review and promote ECA publications. ECA would like to acknowledge the hard work of publications chair Pam Linke whose leadership, time and writing skills have continued to develop and strengthen the ECA publications program. Supporting Pam and the National Office staff in their work is a dedicated Publications Committee.

ECA thanks:

- Jenni Connor
- Alison Elliott (editor, *Every Child* magazine)
- Marilyn Fler (editor, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*)
- Judy Radich
- Carmel Richardson

## [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)

ECA's website and its online capacity provide an important strategic platform for ECA's advocacy work. *ECA WebWatch* receives many unsolicited testimonials from people working in children's services. The ECA website is a rich source of support for early childhood professionals and others with a role in children's growth and learning. A new segment about the outdoor environment was added to the Supporting Best Practice link directory, and three new 'resource themes' were added: 'Sustainability and the environment', 'School readiness and children's transitions' and 'Baby and toddler sleeping' – each of which rank first in the Google search engine.

## Working together in early childhood

### *National Children's Services Forum*

ECA auspices and chairs the National Children's Services Forum (NCSF), which includes the majority of national peak organisations for children's services and continues to work effectively for children. The NCSF continues to provide an important forum for the sector to discuss issues of common concern and interest, and to meet with the Government and officers from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The Forum met with the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Education and Child Care immediately after the 2007 federal election.

The value of the NCSF in building consensus on fundamental issues was exemplified in the lead-up to the 2007 federal election, where it was agreed that a commitment would be made to evidence-based standards for early childhood services. A number of ECA Branches participate or convene similar groups. In Victoria and New South Wales 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.

### *Strategic and collaborative alliances support the achievement of ECA's vision*

ECA has extended its advocacy endeavours by a strengthened focus on building mutually beneficial alliances with other organisations. The importance of these relationships to ECA's advocacy work is apparent in other parts of this report, which detail how ECA's participation in conferences and forums and on committees and boards supports the work of other organisations. These are important relationships, as they open up new audiences for ECA's messages about children and their needs.

Many ECA alliances are ongoing and have been very significant in ECA's capacity to extend the reach of its advocacy work. The breadth and diversity of ECA's relationships is essential if it is to pursue its advocacy mission. Organisations with whom ECA has worked this year include the SNAICC, the LHMU, Hesta Super Fund, the Centre for Community Child Health, Australian Scholarships Group, Australian Primary Principals Association, Defence Community Organisation,

Teaching Australia, McArthur Management Services, Monash University, University of Melbourne, Country Children's Services Association of NSW, the Australian College of Educational Leaders, the Council of the Deans of Education, the Hunter Institute, and the Lady Gowrie Child Centres across Australia.

ECA has entered into a relationship with the US High/Scope Foundation as a result of a grant to look at the relevance of the High/Scope program for Australia. A number of early childhood professionals were funded to participate in a two-week training program at High/Scope in the US. ECA has published an edition of the Research in Practice Series that outlines the experience of these people as they implement aspects of the High/Scope program in their own services. ECA invited Joan Brink from the High/Scope Foundation to speak at the ECA 2008 Biennial Conference.

## **Organisational management and growth**

### ***Investment in ECA membership pays a unique dividend – advocacy for young children***

ECA membership continues to grow and is diverse, with members from every part of the early childhood profession. 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. Student membership has grown substantially, which is a cause for celebration! Cengage Certificate III students and TAFE OTEN Diploma students are all student members of ECA. These early contacts with fledgling members of the early childhood profession are important in ensuring that ECA continues to flourish into the future.

## **Conclusion**

In all its activities ECA depends upon the people who make things work in its offices. Among them we have a great diversity of skill, energy, creativity and commitment. We acknowledge with great appreciation the contribution of the staff of Branches and all in the National Office who day by day work to enact the ECA vision. The Chief Executive Officer, Pam Cahir, continues to inspire and challenge us with her energy, creative intelligence and insight; the Board thanks her for her leadership and work for the governance of the organisation, for young children and for the future of ECA.

All ECA members play a significant role in the organisation's work for children. Some take on particular leadership roles in ECA State/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 Board of Directors.

## ECA Board of Directors

- Margaret Young – National President
- Ros Cornish – Deputy National President, Tasmania
- Judy Kynaston – National Treasurer
- Pam Linke – Chair of the Publications Committee (non-voting)
- Margaret Brannock – Queensland
- Renata Harris – Northern Territory
- Catharine Hydon – Victoria
- Chris Legg – New South Wales
- Kaye van Nieuwkuyk – Tasmania
- Elizabeth Stamopoulos – Western Australia
- Christy Ward – South Australia
- Vanessa Whelan – ACT



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

## Thank you to:

- Lady Gowrie Child Centre of Tasmania
- Country Children's Services Association of New South Wales
- Children, Youth and Women's Health Service, South Australia
- Department of Family and Community Services, Northern Territory
- Brotherhood of St Laurence, Victoria
- KU Children's Services, New South Wales
- School of Education, Edith Cowan University
- Canberra Institute of Technology
- University of South Australia

and, in particular:

- the Board and staff of the Lady Gowrie Child Centre Sydney for their support of ECA's National President, Margaret Young.

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