

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



As I write, families and communities are still dealing with the enormous losses from the bushfires in Victoria and the effects of floods in Queensland. The governor-general, Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, AC, spoke to all Australians about these disasters, and asked us to support those who now have such great needs. Early Childhood Australia adds its voice to the countless expressions of deep shock and sympathy. We encourage everyone to contribute and assist the work of care, recovery and rebuilding.

2009 also see us in very difficult economic times that are bringing worry and hardship to many, testing governments and leaving us all with uncertainties about the future.

It is in this climate that we go about our work for children and their families, doing our best to secure a sustainable environment and material future; but, more importantly, **we are helping young children to enjoy early years that are secure, healthy and rich in good relationships and learning.** In doing so, we support them to become resilient, resourceful and compassionate people—who in turn will nurture and teach the next generation.

Reshaping early childhood

Governments are still involved in the early stages of reshaping and improving the quality of early childhood education and care programs. We know that this is major work, and we encourage everyone to reflect deeply and respond carefully to consultation and implementation opportunities. Again we remind governments and leaders in our sector—ECA included—that **this important undertaking requires strong, well-informed and nationally consistent policy and action.** We must look across a complex range of areas, including funding and business models, staffing, practice standards and diversity of service models. We need to learn from the past, and we need to be brave and creative in building the future—and take the time to do this properly.

After the Apology

A fundamental issue is our obligation to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We must act to improve current experiences and outcomes for their young children around Australia. Like many others, ECA had apologised and committed to action well before the celebrated National Apology by Prime Minister Rudd in February 2008. However given the significance of the Apology we have now come to realise that all this is only meaningful if we seriously set about making a difference—and that means each one of us doing something every day. ECA will be thinking, talking and acting a lot more about this, as we challenge ourselves and everyone to bring about change; to make our apology more than words.

ECA: working together with you

This issue of *ECA Voice* includes information about ECA's *Strategic Directions*, which along with our values and principles will underpin and guide our work nationally and in ECA state/territory Branches over the next three years. You will recognise some of the issues I have mentioned here.

See what we are saying and join us in our work. We very much look forward to being with you on the journey!

Margaret Young

National President

Early Childhood Australia

ECA values

- The rights of children
- Leadership, excellence and respect
- Courage, honesty and openness
- Collaboration and diversity
- Justice
- Social inclusion of children

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ECA Principles

ECA Principles are beliefs that inform and guide our positions. They are derived from our *Values*.

The question then is: do ECA values provide a robust framework for articulating guiding principles? There is no doubt that in many cases they do. One helpful strategy for making this connection is to think about guiding principles that have emerged from our work because of certain values that ECA holds.

Value: The rights of children

Because ECA values the rights of children, what guiding principles have emerged from our work? What practice/work has given voice to this principle? I would suggest that one such principle is **the recognition of children as citizens**.

The recognition of children as citizens is seen in ECA's response to the Government's consultation paper on a National Agenda for Children:

'...a further reason for the development of a national agenda for children arises from the recognition of children as citizens. As citizens children have a value as human beings in the here and now, not simply for what they might become. As citizens, they have an entitlement, independent of their parent's capacity to pay and shared by all other citizens, to the resources, that is policies, programs and funds...'

Value: Justice

The question is: because ECA values justice, what guiding principles have emerged from our work? This value is evidenced in **ECA's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, which acknowledges obligations that result from past wrongdoings from which we all benefit**.

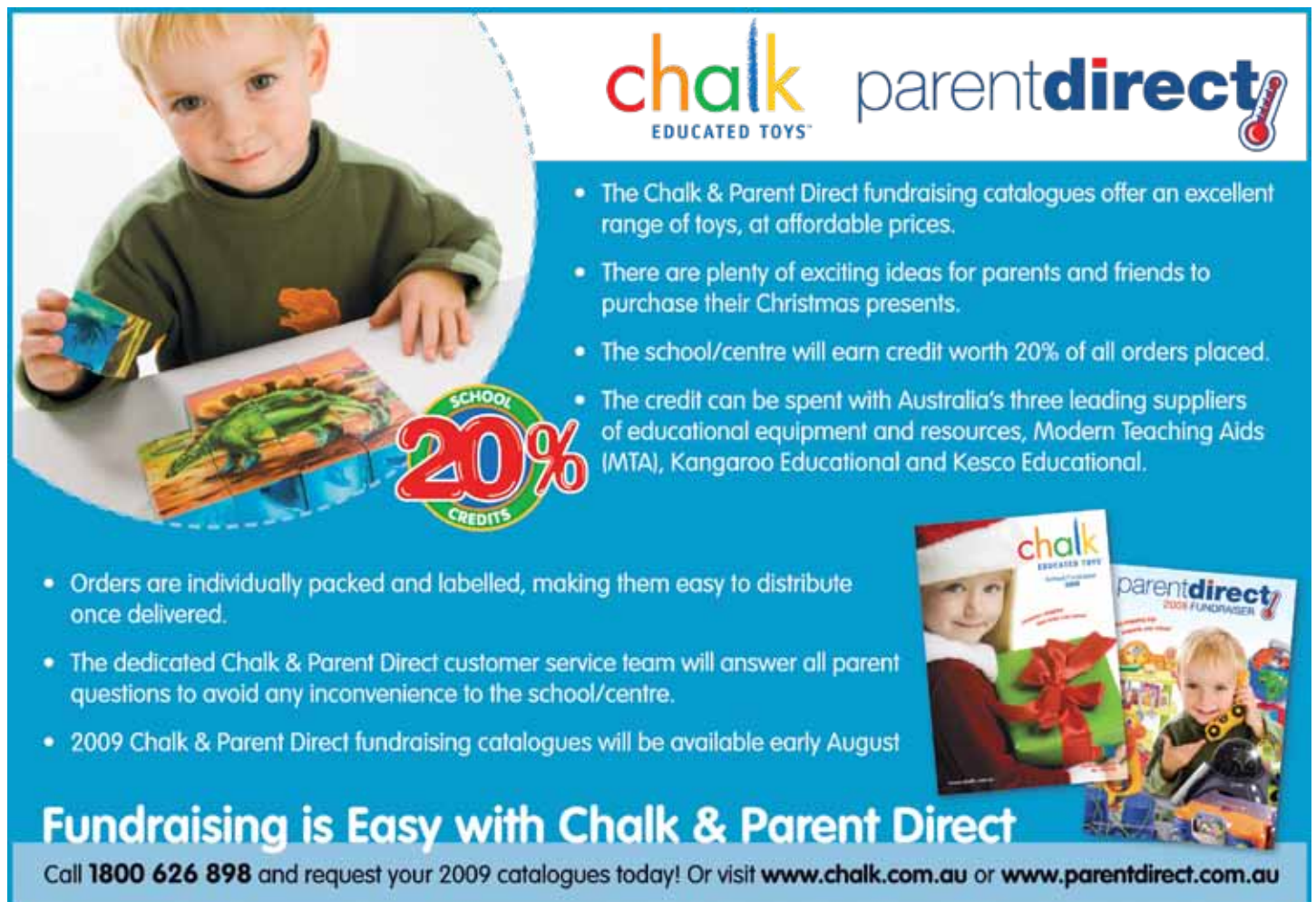
Given this principle, what practice or work has evidenced this commitment? One example is the acknowledgement of the traditional owners, which ECA as a national organisation now makes at all meetings in which it has a leadership role.

Some policies have emerged in response to the evidence via submissions, speeches etc. To what value and principles are they linked?

The recognition of **the importance of the quality of early relationships**, which has expressed itself in advocacy for paid parental leave, higher staff-child ratios, specialist early childhood qualification, and a real career structure and proper remuneration for people working with young children in early childhood services. (See, for example, ECA's 2007 federal election agenda.)

As we begin to make the link between these *ECA Positions* and *ECA Values*, what becomes clear is that the lack of definition about the values makes this task extremely difficult. What is also clear is that there is a coherence about ECA's positions that suggests that the values are agreed at a quite fundamental level.

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ECA Positions

At Council 2005 it was decided to archive ECA Policies (as listed on the website), with a view to updating them. The outcome of this process was considered at Council 2008 (see *ECA Scope of Activities*, right).

Current ECA positions include:

- The renewal of the ECA apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as an ECA Statement of Regret
- The ECA position on children in detention centres
- The ECA statement on environment and sustainability, and associated 'resource theme' on the ECA website
- Submissions to inquiries on parental leave, quality assurance, literacy, and the Agenda for Children, and the AEU preschool inquiry
- ECA's election agendas
- ECA's position on the implementation of Government commitments to 15 hours of preschool
- ECA's commitment to four-year-degree-qualified early childhood teachers providing pedagogical leadership in childcare and preschool services
- ECA's commitment to a workforce strategy in early childhood services—because such a strategy underwrites stability and quality of staff, and therefore relationships with children and pay parity with primary school teachers.
- Reflections in speeches about the nature of teaching, the characteristics of teachers, the nature of early childhood specialist teaching degrees, the place of content, what the EPPE, Galinsky and the NZ evidence synthesis means.

Information about these can be found on the ECA website.

ECA Code of Ethics

The *ECA Code of Ethics* is available at www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/code

ECA Scope of Activities

1. **Advocacy**—ECA promotes the interests and wellbeing of young children, their families and the people who work with them as broadly and effectively as possible.

ECA's advocacy for young children is its main activity.

As an advocate, ECA critiques policy and programs of government and major organisations and committees; promotes a wide range of health, family and early education and care programs; and supports initiatives that enhance social justice and strengthen communities.

In advocating to the community, ECA promotes its views through varied means, including publications and newsletters, the press, radio and television and the internet.

Advocacy is also carried out by individual ECA members in their professional and personal activities when they make and take opportunities to promote the wellbeing of children and ECA principles in general.

2. **Principles and positions**—ECA maintains and publicises a body of knowledge and informed views on issues to do with young children and their care and education in our community.

Over many years ECA's Council has held that ECA's views are important and useful and that ECA has the authority to develop and promote them. The knowledge and expertise of senior ECA staff, Branches and members around the country, gives ECA access to current information about a wide range of matters to do with early childhood.

Discussion and negotiation between informed members, experts in particular fields, academics and practitioners from a range of settings—using ECA values and principles, their own practical knowledge and evidence from the research—can generate agreed and wise organisation positions.

3. **Education and information**—ECA promotes high standards of practice and understanding in those who care for and educate young children, and raises awareness of and stimulates informed debate about relevant issues in the community.

ECA is committed to continuing development and education for all people who work with or are interested in the wellbeing of young children, and to educating the general population about the significance of early childhood and related issues.

4. **Liaison and consultation**—ECA consults widely on relevant issues in the community and facilitates communication among associated interest groups at National and Branch level.

ECA believes that liaison and cooperation among all interested parties promote good results on behalf of children. ECA itself has a unique place and role as a promoter and facilitator of interaction among associated interest groups nationally and within states and territories.

This has been formally recognised by the federal government in ECA's 'umbrella' function. It is also in keeping with ECA's own focus on the wellbeing of all young children and therefore extends beyond this government-assigned role.

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5. Organisation development—ECA protects and develops its ability to work to achieve its mission for young children and its vision for its own future.

For ECA to be successful into the future, it is important that we design and implement strategies that are consistent with our principles and policies, which will enable us to be:

- *strong and enthusiastic in all parts of our organisation, including Branches and the National Organisation, and Executive Committee/Board members and staff*
- *forward-looking and efficient in the way we attract and respond to members and clients in general*
- *strategic, effective and realistic in our work plans*
- *open and constructive in the relationships between all parts of the organisation*
- *as financially secure and as independent as possible.*

6. Accountability—ECA acts in a way that is consistent with the *ECA Mission* and *ECA Values*; that achieves efficiency, effectiveness and openness in all operations; and that demonstrates excellence and leadership to the field.

ECA is accountable to its constituency for all its activities, and this accountability is made explicit in the management of the organisation and its activities.

ECA should demonstrate excellence in all aspects of management practice, both to ensure its own organisational wellbeing and as a model for the field.



Strategic Directions and Desired Outcomes, Jan 2009 – Dec 2011

Goal 1: ECA will be a clear and credible advocate for the rights of young children

ECA will be:

- an activist organisation that leads strongly through its advocacy work. ECA will be informed, articulate and forward-thinking in raising and responding to issues and campaigning for the wellbeing of children, giving particular priority to our obligation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- an organisation that recognises and supports the key role of parents in their children's wellbeing and early learning
- an organisation that strongly promotes agreed ECA values, principles, positions and Code of Ethics in advocating for young children
- an organisation that builds strategic and collaborative alliances that strengthen the early childhood sector and support the achievement of ECA's advocacy goals.

Goal 2: ECA will advocate for and support programs and services that deliver high-quality outcomes for young children

ECA will be:

- an organisation that campaigns for the development of an educated, specialised and skilled workforce that delivers high-quality early learning programs and good outcomes for children
- an organisation that speaks out for and supports high-quality, evidence-based, reflective practice in early education and care, and the development of professional standards for programs and services for young children
- an organisation that supports strategies by employees, employers, unions, peak groups and governments to achieve appropriate recognition, status and career paths for people who work with young children.

Goal 3: ECA will be a strong, progressive and sustainable organisation that is future-focused

ECA will be:

- an organisation that models high standards of governance, management and planning for the future
- an organisation that is financially independent and secure
- an organisation that has a broad, growing and committed membership base
- an organisation that is respected by other similar organisations.

UPDATE: NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The first wave of consultations on the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care have now been completed. This includes work done towards the development of the Early Years Learning Framework.

The National Quality Framework *Expert Advisory Panel* report is now available for download from the DEEWR website.

ECA's submission

In its submission, Early Childhood Australia outlined the key areas for the Early Years Learning Framework:

'Early Childhood Australia therefore believes that the purpose of the EYLF should be to articulate our intentions for Australia's children from birth to age five in crisp, unequivocal terms clearly stating what exactly children are entitled to experience and what their families can hope will be gained from children participating in early learning settings. The EYLF should base the description of early years content on a vision for the people children will become and they world they will create.'

'ECA therefore suggests the following four outcomes and associated key elements:

- Identity and relationships—including emotional and physical wellbeing and social skills and empathy
- Active participation—including learning to act democratically, to value diversity and to contribute to interdependent communities
- Thinking and investigating—including processes of inquiry, understanding the natural and constructed world and creating sustainable futures
- Ways of communicating—including literacy, numeracy, IT and creative representation and communication through arts forms.'

The full submission is available on the ECA website:

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/pdf/submissions/early_learning_framework.pdf

For more information

For further updates, contact:

ECECQualityReformEnquiries@deewr.gov.au

or visit the DEEWR Office of Early Childhood website:

www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/OfficeOfEarlyChildhood



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Early Learning State Conferences 2009 – with Prof Iram Siraj-Blatchford

Frameworks and foundations: When the best will do

How do we take practical steps, based on research evidence, to ensure that we have:

- the best early learning programs?
- the best teaching strategies?
- the best outcomes for children?

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Melbourne Thursday 2 April, 9.30–3.30pm
University of Melbourne, Hawthorn

Bookings and information

www.acer.edu.au/proflearn/early-learning.html

CARING TODAY FOR A BRIGHT TOMORROW

With childcare policy changes, ongoing developments in early childhood care and an increased focus on service availability, Australia's childcare industry has its sights focused firmly on the future. Yet childcare workers may not be able to enjoy that time, HESTA super fund has warned.

Many in the childcare sector believe they're on track to retire comfortably in 20 or 30 years, when in fact few are likely to be in a position to meet the equivalent of the current \$37,829* yearly living cost of an average retiree.

HESTA encourages childcare workers to take time to nurture their super, so that it can grow to give them the future they deserve.

How to boost your super

1. Access the government's co-contribution scheme

Super bonuses up to 150% of an individual's super contributions are available through the government's co-contribution scheme. If you earn less than \$60,342 per year, you may be eligible. If you are, and you make after-tax contributions to your super, the government will automatically make a co-contribution to your account after the end of the financial year. For details, visit www.hesta.com.au

2. Make a salary sacrifice

Salary sacrifice can be a pain-free way to contribute to your super. These contributions are deducted from your pay before tax, so they make less of an impact on your pay packet—handy for those whose budgets are already tight. As salary sacrifice contributions are made before tax, they can also provide significant tax benefits. Speak to your employer about setting up a salary sacrifice.

3. Roll your super accounts into one

If you have multiple super accounts, you're probably paying multiple account fees. Roll all your accounts into one with your preferred super fund, and you could benefit in the long term.

4. Find your lost super

\$7 million in lost super was reunited with its owners in 2008. You may not think you've lost any super, but it's worth visiting the SuperSeeker site at www.ato.gov.au/superseeker to check.

Care for your super so you can enjoy a brighter future.
For more information, visit www.hesta.com.au

*Source: WESTPAC—ASFA Retirement Living Standard September 2008

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- Advocate for the wellbeing of young children.
- Promote high-quality teaching and learning environments.
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'We very much look forward to being with you on the journey!'
—Margaret Young, National President

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