

Early Childhood Australia Values

Rights of children ...
Leadership, excellence, respect ...
Courage, honesty & openness ...
Collaboration, diversity ...
Justice ...

Members of the Early Childhood Australia National Executive

Judith Radich	National President
Ros Cornish	Deputy National President Tasmania
Lennie Barblett	Western Australia
Lyn Bower	Queensland
Joy Williams	Victoria
Renata Harris	Northern Territory
Judith Kynaston	New South Wales
Andrea McGuffog	South Australia
Gillian Styles	Australian Capital Territory
Pam Linke	Chair Publications Standing Committee
Margaret Young	Treasurer

If you are not already a member
**Become an
Early Childhood Australia
Member
TODAY!**

If you are an early childhood professional, a parent, a carer, studying in the field, or simply interested in the well being of children, become a member of Early Childhood Australia

Contact our Membership Officer
on 1800 356 900 or Email:
mking@earlychildhood.org.au

The President's Message

A new name

This is our first Annual Report as Early Childhood Australia. The launch of the new name has been an opportunity to refocus our organisation towards its underlying values and a greater reach to the wider early childhood field. These values, set out in this report, provide the reference point for our work and a framework for making judgments about the efficacy of what we do. The name change to Early Childhood Australia has encouraged us to think differently about our advocacy role and to see new opportunities for supporting other people and organisations in their work as advocates for young children.



This Annual Report details the scope and depth of Early Childhood Australia's advocacy work. Advocacy for children comes in many forms. We need to recognise, name and affirm it in all of its many forms.

Being a knowledge broker

This year Early Childhood Australia sharpened its understanding of the potential of its status as a trusted source of high quality information to increase the scope of its advocacy work. Early Childhood Australia is a knowledge broker. As a knowledge broker we act as a link between quality assured early childhood knowledge and those who need it. This is not just to the early childhood profession, but also to parents, grandparents, government officials and politicians, students, members of the media as well as people in other professions who have responsibility for young children, including health professionals.

An important part of Early Childhood Australia's work for children is to support these people in their role with children. This extension of Early Childhood Australia's traditional advocacy role as a publisher and provider of high quality information about children has opened up new opportunities and possibilities for partnerships that will benefit young children.

Social inclusion and a National Agenda for Children

This year the early childhood community across Australia has been involved in the process of developing a National Agenda for Early Childhood. This is an important step forward for children in this country. The vision to develop an early childhood agenda was initiated by the Commonwealth Government and is supported by the Opposition and state and territory governments. However, the development of a national agenda is only the first step in a process. Better outcomes for children will take commitment in terms of both effort and money.

Early Childhood Australia's state and territory branches, and the national organisation, made submissions responding to the Government's consultation paper on the development of this agenda. We affirmed the evidence that has led to this new focus on the earliest years of childhood.

Early Childhood Australia argued that the agenda should include the early years of school saying that there is a great deal of evidence that these years are crucial in the development of a child's confidence in themselves as learners, in their ability to relate to others and in their ongoing successful participation in schooling.

As well as endorsing the rationales for an early childhood agenda set out in the consultation paper, Early Childhood Australia suggested that the agenda should be underwritten by the recognition of children as citizens and a commitment to the goal of social inclusion.

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, to the resources necessary to ensure:

- Their well being in the here and now experience of childhood;
- Their increasing capacity to participate as full and responsible citizens in the social, economic and political life of the society; and
- That they can and will exercise their responsibility as adults for future generations of children and the society and environment in which these children will live.

Realising the goal of recognising children as citizens requires an agenda that gives precedence to social inclusion. Social inclusion, like citizenship, means that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society.

Social inclusion provides a particular way of looking at the well being of children and families and has the potential to frame a national dialogue around the creation of a just, healthy and inclusive society. It means that all children should have the opportunity to develop their talents and capacities to the full and be active and valued members of society. A commitment to social inclusion demands that the barriers to inclusion such as disability, low income and cultural difference be addressed. From the perspective of social inclusion, diversity and difference are not merely seen as challenges to be overcome; they possess their own worth.

A commitment to social inclusion leads to:

- Public policy recognition of the value of all individuals through universal programs such as health care including child health checks, immunisation;
- Policies and programs, such as support for new parents including prenatal programs, high quality early childhood programs etc, that nurture the social and emotional health of young children as well as their talents, skills, capacities;
- Work and family policies that acknowledge the needs of children and provide real choices for families;
- Policies that provide the reduction of social distance between children through involvement and engagement, for example, integrated settings and community/other services which encourage family participation and build capacity;
- An approach to policy, program development and implementation which is insistent on its commitment to hear the voices of children and in regard to infants, the voices of those with the expertise to speak for them; and
- A commitment to the rigorous evaluation and public reporting on the effectiveness of programs and policies.

A commitment to social inclusion affirms the need for targeted programs for vulnerable groups, programs that aim to reduce the distance between the everyday lives and life outcomes for vulnerable children and other children. Targeted programs, whether they are mainstream or discrete, acknowledge that children and families who are vulnerable, for whatever

reason, will need additional support and resources if their childhoods are to be healthy and to be rich in relationships and interactions that support their social and emotional health, general well being and development.

Early Childhood Australia's work on social inclusion drew on the work of the Laidlaw Foundation on Social Inclusion. www.laidlawfdn.org The full text of our submission is on the Early Childhood Australia website at www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Staff in early childhood services

The other issue Early Childhood Australia has grave concerns about, is the staffing crisis that is endemic in the children's services sector in this country. Across the country it is almost impossible to get staff, qualified and unqualified, to work in children's services. Given the clear link between quality programs and outcomes for children and the qualities and qualifications of those who work with them, it is imperative that this issue be addressed.

This issue has its roots in the lack of status traditionally afforded to the early childhood profession and is evidenced by the low wages and poor conditions of work. This is not an issue that will go away until those working with children earn more in terms of income and recognition. Until such time the provision of high quality programs for children is jeopardised.

The Tasmanian conference

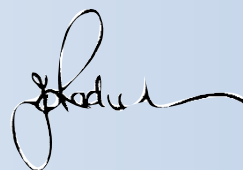
This year saw the work of the Tasmanian Branch Conference Committee realised in what has been acknowledged as the best Early Childhood Australia conference ever. Every aspect of the conference 'Children the core of society' was impressive. The thought that went into the details around the conference made people feel valued and proud to be early childhood professionals. Highlights included a lovely venue, gifts that evidenced real thought, a fun celebratory dinner, wonderful green backpacks that people wanted to buy for their children, the Tasmanian Food Stall, and a program that reflected real understanding of those who work for and with young children. The Tasmanian Early Childhood Australia members, for whom nothing was a problem, were outstanding.

Early Childhood Australia knows that conferences like this one are the result of hard, sustained work and planning by a committed team. The planning committee is to be congratulated for their dedication.

Thank you to members and branches

Early Childhood Australia is also indebted to the early childhood professionals, especially Early Childhood Australia branches and members, who as advocates for children support Early Childhood Australia 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 Early Childhood Australia state and territory branches. This report is testament to their energy, commitment and focus on the well-being of children.

I look forward to our future work together to be a 'voice for children'.



Judy Radich National President

Advocacy: A campaign for children

In 2002-03 Early Childhood Australia's advocacy 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/territory levels. That work is evidence of an ongoing campaign for children.

Speaking out for children

Early Childhood Australia is making its voice heard for children as an organisation and through its members. The national president regularly makes speeches and comments in the media about issues related to children. Both the national organisation and the branches have regular meetings with government and opposition members as well as departmental officials who have responsibility for issues related to young children. This year Early Childhood Australia met with the Commonwealth Minister for Children and Youth Affairs a number of times and with the Minister for Education.

Submissions, consultations and committees

Early Childhood Australia nationally and in all state and territory branches spoke out for children on various issues by making

submissions, taking part in consultations, delegations and participating in reviews and on committees and task forces.

Issues on which branches spoke out in 2002–03 included:

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY—the rights, interests and well being of children and young people, supporting children in immigration detention centres.

NEW SOUTH WALES—the draft children's services regulations 2002, the impact of under-funding on community based preschools and staffing shortages in NSW.

NORTHERN TERRITORY—child protection, the review of child care regulations and school age entry.

QUEENSLAND—the child care industry plan, proposed changes to the regulations and child care on education sites.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA—the importance of Australian content in television dramas for children, children in immigration detention centres and asylum seekers and the first years of school.

TASMANIA—the shortage of child care places and qualified staff.

VICTORIA—the inclusion of Outside School Hours Care and Family Day Care in the regulatory framework, the administrative tasks involved in managing a service, developing a curriculum framework for children's services in Victoria and child representatives in family courts, the development of a proposal for a Registration Board.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA—advocated for a children's commissioner, contributed to the community building through an early years strategy and the child care workforce issues.

The national organisation and most branches also made submissions and/or participated in the consultations for the National Agenda for Early Childhood, the Broadband Redevelopment process and child care workforce issues.

The breadth and depth of Early Childhood Australia's work is nowhere more apparent than the range of committees and forums on which Early Childhood Australia members work to make a difference for children. In 2002–03 Early Childhood Australia was represented on over fifty national and state committees, working parties and forums. The committees and other capacities on which Early Childhood Australia has a voice include the National Childcare Accreditation Council, the Child Care Reference Group, the National Education Forum, Standards Australia, and various state organisations.

Some of the committees and forums that the state and territories participate in are:

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY: the Children's Strategy Reference Group.

NEW SOUTH WALES: the Forum of Non-government agencies, the Children's Services Health and Safety Committee and the Early Childhood Reference Group.

NORTHERN TERRITORY: branch is a member of the State Liaison Forum.

QUEENSLAND: the Child Care Forum, the Community Services and Health Industries Training Council, the Preparatory Trials Reference Group and the Curriculum Advisory Group for Education Queensland.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA: Coalition for Refugee Children, the Curriculum Standards and Assessment Framework implementation committee

TASMANIA: the Early Childhood Reference Group, the Learning Together Council, the Childcare Advisory Council and the Curriculum consultation working group.

VICTORIA: Review of preschool funding, the Registration Advisory Board and a forum dealing with early childhood staff conditions and retention.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: Child Care Industry Forum, NIFTeY and the Community Services, Health and Education Industry Training Council and the College of Teaching.

Supporting the Early Childhood Profession

A significant part of our advocacy is the support Early Childhood Australia gives to those who have some responsibility for the care, growth and development of young children. Early Childhood Australia has always done this through its publications, the organisation of seminars, the biennial conference and the development of formal policy positions. In the last year we have increased our presence as an online advocate for young children. This new tool enhances our ability to make a real contribution to the professional status and understanding of early childhood staff as well as the well-being of young children.

COLQUHOUN MURPHY SOLICITORS CONTINUE TO ACT AS EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA'S HONORARY SOLICITORS—THANK YOU

Seminars, Conferences, Panels and Public Meetings

Seminars and forums have been held or jointly sponsored by all state and territory branches of Early Childhood Australia. These seminars provide an opportunity to focus on current issues, reflect on what is happening in early childhood programs and, importantly, talk and network with colleagues. Issues addressed in these seminars and forums were diverse. As was the case in the previous year there has been an Early Childhood Australia seminar or forum approximately every 10 days. Some of the committees and forums that the state and territories participate in are:

TOPICS COVERED INCLUDE:

a curriculum framework for children's services,

- Competency based training packages and children's rights,
- Understanding the nature of early childhood,
- Autism spectrum disorder and young children,
- Children in immigration and detention centres,
- Reggio Emilia,
- Family intervention programs,
- Staff shortages,
- Government and opposition children's services policy,
- Developments in early childhood education,
- The introduction of the preparatory year,
- Silence, voice and socially relevant curriculum,
- Sustaining pedagogical innovation and critical reflection,
- Context, culture and movement for young children,
- NSW draft children's services regulations,
- Staffing shortages.

Publications and Online advocacy

Advocating through publications

A crucial way in which Early Childhood Australia advocates for children is through the publication of books and other resources. All publications represent a commitment to the provision of high quality information to those who are responsible for the growth and development of young children. 2002-03 has been a remarkable year for Early Childhood Australia's publications program.

This year 5263 book orders were filled, 32,000 copies of *Voice* were distributed, 30,000 people read *Every Child* and many thousands of subscription items were sent out.

The Learning at Home series was initiated and the first titles published. Initial work has begun on the internationalisation of AJEC.

New Research in Practice and Special Titles topics included:

- Attachment: Building secure relationships in early childhood
- Meaningful planning: Rethinking teaching and learning relationships
- Boys and literacy: Changing perspectives
- Ethics in Action: Introducing the ethical response cycle

Issues explored in our other publications such as the *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* and *Every Child* have included:

- Social Justice
- Spirituality
- Children in Detention Centres
- The United Nations Special Session for Children
- The Global Movement for Children
- War and Children

Early Childhood Australia's publication's program is dependent on the generosity and commitment of the early childhood professionals who write, review and promote our publications and are members of our publications committee. Thank you.

Online Advocacy

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au was redeveloped in 2002—03. It has featured issues of immediate concern for children, families and early childhood professionals. These have included children and bush-fires, helping children cope with war and terrorism, concern about controlled crying, outcomes of research on privately owned and community based children's services, punishment and its consequences/alternatives as well as speeches, submissions and press releases. Early Childhood Australia's website has continued to feature concerns about children and families in immigration detention centres.

Over 90,000 advocacy emails were sent this year to support those helping children cope with many of the issues listed above. There has been much positive feedback for this kind of support.

There have been over 5000 requests for copies of Early Childhood Australia's policies in 2002- 03. Some 2700 of these have been email requests directly from our website.

An early childhood knowledge management system

With the support of the Australian Government through the Minister for Children and Youth, Early Childhood Australia has been working on the development of a prototype Early Childhood Australia website with an early childhood search and navigation tool that will take users quickly and easily to Early Childhood Australia-quality assured information on other websites. We have made a proposal to the Government for funds to complete the site. When finalised the site will be unique worldwide and a rich resource for those involved in the growth, development and care of young children.

Working together in early childhood

The National Children's Services Forum

The National Children's Services Forum (NCSF) includes the majority of children's services national peak organisations and continues to work effectively for children. Early Childhood Australia auspices, chairs and is a member of this group. NCSF provides an important forum for the sector to discuss issues of common concern and interest, and to meet with Departmental officials. This year Forum members again talked to members of Parliament about children and issues related to their well-being. The issues canvassed with politicians included children in detention centres, children services for Indigenous young children, child care workforce issues, and the corporatisation of child care.

A number of Branches are part of or convene similar groups. In Victoria there is the Children's Services Forum, in South Australia the Joint Early Childhood Affiliates, in New South Wales the Children's Services Forum, in Tasmania the Early Childhood Reference Group and in Queensland the Child Care Coalition.

Finance Management and Information Systems

Major progress has been made in linking the MYOB accounting system with Early Childhood Australia's sales/subscription/marketing databases, and the rationalisation of these. The initial outcomes have been improved data quality and integrity, significant operator efficiencies, improved member and customer service, and the development of the foundation for a corporate information system including website production/management, email and other marketing and e-commerce.

The budget process has been streamlined. Simple yet sophisticated systems have been developed this year that will form a template for budget development in future years. This will speed-up the process, reduce the margin for error and facilitate reporting.

Early Childhood Australia Membership

Early Childhood Australia's membership is broadly based and increased significantly in the last twelve months. This is not surprising given the enormous amount of work being done by branches across the country and nationally. The regional groups are functioning well and a fourth NSW regional group was formed this year covering central and far west of NSW. Our aim is to have an Early Childhood Australia member in every early childhood service and classroom, every tertiary institution, government department and professional organisation that has an interest in the well being of young children.

All members play a significant role in the organisation's advocacy for children. Some take on leadership roles in the state and territory branches and in regional groups. Early Childhood Australia acknowledges the dedication and commitment of these people. We have a tremendous appreciation of those members who take on leadership positions in the national organisation as office bearers and as members of the National Executive. This work requires a level of dedication and commitment that would not be possible without the support of their employers.

Thank you to:

- The New South Wales and Tasmanian Lady Gowrie Child Centres
- Child and Youth Health in South Australia
- Country Children's Services Association of New South Wales
- The State Government Departments covering education, training, children's and family services in South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.
- The University of Southern Queensland, and Edith Cowan University
- Uniting Church in Australia - Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.
- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory

In particular

- The Cooloon Children's Centre Management Committee and staff for their support of Early Childhood Australia's National President Judith Radich.

Thank you to all staff in the National Office for their hard work and dedication this year. Thank you to those who work in state and territory branches.