



**Early Childhood
Australia**
A voice for young children

Newsletter

WA BRANCH ISSUE 3 (October 2011)

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PRESIDENTS REPORT

Welcome to our third Newsletter for 2011 which provides a snapshot of our work as a Branch within the last 3 months and our connections across National and State levels. A strong focus of our work has evolved through our sub-committee working groups and I would like to thank the committee and our members for their dedication and involvement in the work of the branch and the leadership they have demonstrated. I would also like to personally invite you to Perth WA to be a part of our ECA National Conference: *Consulting the Compass: Defining Directions* which will be held in Perth on the 3rd – 6th October 2012.

Since our last newsletter, there have been new processes and initiatives put in place that have deepened connections between the national organisation and our state branch. For example, our CEO Pam Cahir now holds a teleconference with each State President and Director one week prior to National Board meetings to discuss any state matters and better understand the needs of our State branch. This has been in addition to a teleconference which occurs one week after National Board meetings to discuss Board outcomes with Branch Presidents. Another initiative has been the *Early Childhood Australia Leadership Forum* held for the first time in Canberra in July 2011. This was instigated to deepen dialogue between the National Board and Branch Presidents on future leadership direction and matters relating to the work of ECA nationally and its state branches. I believe this opportunity has been invaluable and provided a forum through which we could develop a shared vision, discuss matters of importance and give voice to our members. Currently, our involvement has been in providing feedback to ECA National on the review of the ECA National Strategic Directions 2012-2014. These will be discussed during the ECA National Council meetings in Hobart on the 7th and 8th of October 2011.



Elizabeth Stamopoulos
State President of ECA
WA Branch.

Within WA, the National Reform agenda and consultative processes continue to provide us with ongoing opportunities through which we can voice our opinions and concerns and advocate strongly on embedding early childhood in ways in which we know will positively impact on children and their families. One of these opportunities emerged when the WA branch was recently provided with an allotted timeslot to speak to Karen Curtis who is the new CEO of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Karen was very interested in listening to our perspectives about national and state matters in relation to early childhood and asked numerous questions about WA and our work as part of ECA. This provided us with an important forum through which we could communicate our thoughts.

The WA Branch continues to advocate for its members and has written a letter to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) about the importance of including the EYLF in curriculum documentation within its Professional Learning Flagship Program: Leading Curriculum Change. This was in response to our attendance at the AITSL Leading Curriculum Change Stakeholder Forum held in Perth where the presenters explained AITSL had responsibility for establishing Professional Learning Flagship Programs that link to national reforms and priorities. They explained the program had been established to give teachers the knowledge, skills and confidence required to lead curriculum change, specifically the Australian Curriculum. There was no mention of the EYLF and its existence in the school sector. At the meeting we spoke to both presenters and followed up with a letter to AITSL highlighting this issue. Recently, the ECAWA branch has responded to member concerns and written to Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA in relation to the installation of play equipment in early childhood facilities. A response was received outlining constraints in terms of budget and timelines as well as the need to conform to the Building Code of Australia and Department of Education duty of care requirements. Dr Constable mentioned she will forward ECAWA's offer to consult to the Department's Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning (OECDL). Our recent guest speaker at our Branch meeting was Kerry Logan who spoke about her presentation at the International Play Association Conference in Cardiff, UK. I would like to thank her for sharing her knowledge and expertise with us.

The sub-committee working parties which follow provide further depth and insight into the leadership and advocacy role of our branch and its members. We look forward to including your contribution in future Newsletters and meeting with you at our bi-monthly branch meetings. Our next meeting will be our AGM which will be held on Tuesday the 18th October 2011. We would love to see you there... details are on the next page!

Also – a reminder to save the date for the ECA WA Christmas event ... Please remember to put Tuesday 13th December in your diary, we will provide more details about the event soon!

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Stephanie Jackiewicz - National Director (WA)

I wanted to share with everyone my experience as National Board Director. I took on this role with limited knowledge of what was involved and it has been a huge learning curve and a valuable experience.

Belonging to the ECA Board seemed daunting at first but this soon passes. There is a sense of camaraderie that develops amongst the Board Directors. It is vital when making important decisions that all Board Directors are able to work in a respectful manner valuing the diverse opinions of the group.

My role on the ECA Board has allowed me to develop a sense of belonging to the much broader early childhood community that exists in its many shapes and forms across this country. The sense that I belong to this community of people who value children and are prepared to speak out on their behalf to ensure the best possible outcomes for all children is inspirational.

Being on the Board of ECA is a valuable and rewarding experience. At each Board meeting, and across the intervening months, I am exposed to a diverse range of issues and opinions. One of the strengths of the Federation model under which ECA is governed, is that the whilst each Board Director puts forward the issues for their state, the Board as a whole must make the correct decision for the entire country. It is one of the few times in my hectic work schedule where I have the opportunity to put forward my professional opinion unencumbered by other constraints. I am able to listen to the opinions of other Board Directors and work alongside them to make the best decision as a whole. This opportunity to "BE" is a privilege.

Becoming a productive Board member is a steep learning curve. Every day is a learning experience as Board Director. Under the expert tutelage of my fellow Board Directors, President and Vice President, I have learnt a great deal about fiduciary responsibilities and the importance of leadership. I am also learning that Boards are ever changing and as ours enters another period of change it will be my turn to step up and assist others to become part of the Board and to lead the organisation. This is an exciting opportunity and a challenge I look forward to in the coming year.

ECAWA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

DATE: Tuesday 18 October 2011

TIME: 6.00- 7.00 pm (including light refreshments)

PLACE: NGALA , 275 Abernethy Road, Cloverdale

Guest speaker - Geoff Metcalf

You are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Early Childhood Australia (WA State Branch) where you will have the opportunity to meet other early childhood professionals and listen to Geoff Metcalf talk about his experience of innovation, leadership and establishing a multi-service hub in a school.

Geoff currently holds the position of Acting Executive Director in the Office of Early Childhood Development and Learning for the Department of Education in Western Australia His substantive position is that of Principal of Roseworth Primary School, where he has had an association with this community for 15 years. Geoff's leadership has spanned a career of 23 years and he has been at the forefront of the development of the growing number of Western Australian schools offering extended services to the school community.





THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTDOOR PLAY

Kerry Logan - Kidsafe (Now at NaturePlay WA)

Elizabeth asked me to write a small item for the newsletter about my exciting trip to Cardiff in July to attend the International Play Association Conference. At this conference I presented a paper about a recent research project investigating outdoor play provision in communities in the Pilbara and Kimberley.

The conference was opened by the Welsh First Minister, who talked of the Welsh Government's commitment to supporting children's opportunities for play and active learning through their 3-7's curriculum. He

accepted an award from the IPA made to Wales recognising the efforts of the Welsh government towards meeting the objectives of Article 31 of the UNCRC.

Keith Towler, the Welsh Children's Commissioner talked of his goal to protect children's childhoods – not just for the societal benefits in the long term – but for children to enjoy in the present – for them to enjoy their childhoods. He sees the opportunities for play – particularly free play in natural settings as an important and unalienable right for all children.

He provided his thoughts about the 'cotton wool generation' and talked about the societal barriers to children's free play and particular the difficulties for children with disabilities. As our WA Commissioner advocates, he also urged planners to consult with and involve children in decisions about their environments.

Although, I feel that children are typically not well-informed consumers. ...They can only talk about their own experiences; and if they have only experienced a McDonalds-style playground, that might be what they think they should have!

COMING IN 2012

**'Consulting the Compass
—defining directions'**

Early Childhood Australia
National Conference
PERTH CONVENTION EXHIBITION CENTRE
3-6 October 2012

CONFERENCE THEMES:
**Networks
Sustainability
Engagement
Wellbeing**

For further information visit: www.eacaconference.com.au

**Early Childhood Australia Disclaimer
(WA newsletter)**

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of ECA. By publishing a diversity of opinion we hope to provide a forum which promotes professional growth, creativity and debate in the early childhood field.

Rural and Remote Report

Kaye van Nieuwkuyk (Director)
YMCA Early Learning Centre, Newman

The Early Years Learning Framework unites early childhood educators across the Nation with its aim to extend young children's learning in early childhood settings.

The challenge for rural and remote services is to deliver quality in the varying environments and contexts of this wide brown land. Our service is situated in Newman, 450kms from the nearest towns – Port Hedland to the northwest and Meekatharra to the south - and 1200kms from Perth. Newman was developed to support the BHP mine at Whaleback and continues as the commercial hub for the East Pilbara.

Our team of educators is challenged by an ever-changing context where families are very transient and much of the work in the mining industry is determined by shift work and rosters. The transient nature of the community means that we also have many staff changes and the associated difficulties of retention and recruitment.

As educators, much of our reflection and discussion about how best to meet the EYLF outcomes, focuses on how we can develop a sense of belonging for families, and consistency for our children. Our approach is to develop strong connections with our families and to build on what children know as the realities of life in Newman: BIG trucks, lots of machinery, the ubiquitous high visibility shirts, red dirt, huge blue skies, lots of trips to waterholes, plane travel to Perth and further afield, Aboriginal culture, the heat, long car trips and special events that unite the community.



Our children love to get outside and dig in the red dirt and make the most of the perfect weather that we experience from May to October. Once it gets really hot we all resort to the air-conditioned comfort indoors.

The educators consider themselves to be a community of learners and take advantage of professional learning opportunities that are offered. Regular meetings have developed a sense of collaboration and team work with educators working together to tackle the challenges.

YMCA Early Learning Centre has now been operating for over two years and has become the focus for early childhood activity in the East Pilbara. As well as the long day care service Newman ELC is the base for the FaHCSIA funded Intensive Support Playgroup – a mobile service that supports Aboriginal playgroups in Newman, Nullagine and Jigalong.

In addition to these programs YMCA partners with World Vision Australia to deliver Certificate II in Children's Services to Aboriginal women who attend the playgroups. It is anticipated that these women will be employed as Playgroup Leaders in their communities as they become more skilled at facilitating playgroup sessions. Centre staff are offered the opportunity to work in the Centre and in the Aboriginal programs. The development of relationships with the Aboriginal families through playgroup has supported the enrolment of their children in the Centre.

Meerilinga – 100 Years Young

During our landmark centenary year, Meerilinga is celebrating a long and proud history that dates back to 1911, to the pioneers of the kindergarten movement and the early advocates for children's interests in this state.

Similarly in our history, volunteering has been integral to our work and today volunteers continue to make a significant contribution to Meerilinga and to the children and families they work with. Meerilinga remains committed to recognising and valuing the contribution by our volunteers.

This year we commemorate the achievements of the many people – staff, volunteers, students, families, colleagues and friends who have been involved with Meerilinga throughout its history whilst also fixing our sights firmly on the future - where might Meerilinga be in another 100 years?

Meerilinga is a vibrant and dynamic organisation and whilst its original focus on education and working with children will always remain core to Meerilinga's vision and values, this focus has broadened to encompass a range of diverse children, parenting and community programs and services such as parenting, children and family centres and playgroups.

Children's Week is the premier Week in the Meerilinga calendar. Recognising the talents, skills, achievements and rights of children and young people, the celebration is based on the articles expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, emphasising play, well-being and protection.

Meerilinga has convened Children's Week in Western Australia since 1985 and coordinates two major elements: the Western Australian Children's Week Awards of Recognition and the Children's Week official opening, attended by thousands of families.

The next five years will be an exciting phase for Meerilinga; it will be a period of consolidating our core business of services, building partnership capacity and developing our commercial arm.

Expansion plans in Early Learning and community are underway and our focus on research will be renewed and expanded and continue to underpin the work we do.

Meerilinga has undergone many changes since those early kindergarten movement days, one thing hasn't changed. Our passion and commitment for the rights and interests of young children.

CHILDREN'S WEEK WA

Children's Week™ is a yearly event held around the fourth week of October to coincide with Australia's celebration of the United Nations' Universal Children's Day.

Children's Week aims to recognise the talents, skills, achievements and rights of children and young people. The celebration is based on the articles expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, emphasising play, wellbeing and protection.

Meerilinga is the convener for Children's Week in Western Australia and coordinates two major elements: the Western Australian Children's Week Awards of Recognition and the Children's Week official opening.

Community and government organisations, schools, child care centres hold their own local events across Western Australia.

These range in size from a private celebration in schools and child care centres to large public events attended by 1,000s of people.

The Children's Week website has a calendar of events so you can easily find out what's happening during Children's Week in your area.

For more information visit the website, email info@childrensweekwa.org.au or call 9489 4022 (metro callers) or 1800 200 702 (regional callers).

Meerilinga™
enriching positive childhood

SUNDAY 23 OCTOBER
10 AM - 2 PM

Whiteman Park Lord Street Whiteman

FREE ACTIVITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT

PARENT EXPO

WIN
Enter a prize draw and you could win a family holiday in Seashells Resort - Mullineaux

With extra special guest: Fairy Queen Caroline™ and lots more!

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Go for 2&2

supported by: UWA, Department of Communities, Lotterywest, Healthway, Go for 2&2, The West Australian, 7, MTRIO, HILLARY, JACOBS, and others.

www.childrensweekwa.org.au



Early childhood centres in Perth, Harvey, Busselton, Bunbury, Newman and Geraldton are among over 100 services piloting KidsMatter Early Childhood throughout Australia. The framework is based on a positive psychology model that emphasises and builds on service strengths.

KidsMatter Early Childhood is a national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative developed for early childhood services. It involves the people who have a significant influence on young children's lives – families and early childhood professionals along with a range of community and health professionals – in making a positive difference for young children's mental health during this important developmental period.

KidsMatter Early Childhood has been developed in collaboration with *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, the Australian Psychological Society, Early Childhood Australia and, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*.

Four evidence based protective factors form the foundation of the KidsMatter framework:

1. Creating a sense of community

Focuses on centres building a sense of community which promotes feelings of belonging for all children, families and staff.

2. Developing children's social and emotional skills

Social and emotional development involves the ability to handle challenging situations, establish positive relationships and develop the ability to recognise and manage emotions.

3. Working with parents and carers

Working in partnership with families, providing information and support and helping connect families to the service and other networks.

4. Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties

When children experience mental health difficulties it can impact hugely on their everyday lives.

This component highlights the importance of early intervention.

For Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre, at Tomato Lake, building a sense of community has been an ongoing theme throughout 2010 and 2011. The centre recently held a welcome night for existing families, new families and children joining the centre.

“By looking through the KidsMatter lens, we started to explore how we connected with new families and begin on our journey of building true partnerships,” explains Amber Lee, Coordinator of the centre.

“This has led us to plan events that not only allowed families to connect with us, but also for families to connect with each other.”

The team at Lady Gowrie has been focusing on strengthening a sense of community within the team. Weekly team meetings provide opportunities for members to reflect on the work happening in the centre, both on individual and group levels.

“These meetings have been very beneficial for the whole team, as we are able to identify and celebrate our strengths and achievements,” says Amber.

The pilot will conclude at the end of 2011. An evaluation will be released in mid-2012.

Visit: www.kidsmatter.edu.au