As we farewell former Prime Minister Julia Gillard and former Education Minister Peter Garrett from federal politics, we pay tribute to their achievements in areas such as the reform of school education funding and the transformation of disability services provision. That famous observation by former British PM Harold Wilson ‘a week is a long time in politics’ captures not only the tumultuous nature of political life but also the significance of a day in parliament when legislation can turn a long-held vision for the future into a reality.

As the major parties prepare for a federal election, issues of affordability, access and flexibility in early childhood services are shaping up to be important priorities for the electorate. Early Childhood Australia members will be looking for policies and election commitments that respond to these issues within the context of a strong, long-term vision for young children and early childhood services.

Australia does not meet international benchmarks for investment in the early years. We invest only 0.3 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in early childhood education and care and, in a recent international comparative study, Australia met only two of ten benchmark standards relating to early childhood education and care, ranking in the bottom three of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. According to the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), one in five Australian children start school classified as developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains. Even more shocking is the finding that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, this figure is one in two. Clearly, much more needs to be done.

In this edition of Voice we have invited the major parties, sector and media representatives to share with us their vision for early childhood education and care. We thank them for their contributions.
The early childhood sector has made huge strides during the term of our Labor Government. Over the next four years we will make a record $25 billion investment in early childhood education and care, more than triple the budget of the Coalition when they were in power. The reality is because of our huge investment in child care assistance, families spend less on child care now as a percentage of disposable income than what they did under the Howard Government in 2004.

Our investments to make child care more affordable have supported almost a 30 per cent increase in the number of children accessing child care, hitting one million children for the first time. We will continue to support families to access early childhood education and care by providing record levels of assistance, through the Child Care Rebate which the Labor Government increased from 30 to 50 per cent of out-of-pocket costs up to $7500 per child per year.

Our Labor Government is committed to getting the early years right and that’s why we will continue to deliver the National Quality Framework with the States and Territories as a matter of priority. The early childhood sector has been working incredibly hard to lift the standard of child care across Australia. A re-elected Labor Government will continue to work with the sector to support the most fundamental part of delivering quality care, the early childhood educators, through training and by supporting childcare services to deliver better wage outcomes for workers that have been underpaid and neglected for far too long.

The Labor Government’s priority is also to improve access to affordable, flexible early childhood education and care. With the changing nature of the workplace and increasing numbers of children using child care, it’s vital that there are flexible childcare options that meet the needs of modern families. Over the next year the Labor Government is funding a range of childcare flexibility trials, supporting childcare providers and industry groups to test innovative childcare models to better meet the needs of modern families. These are being independently evaluated for a wider roll out. I believe that families, no matter where they live, have every reason to expect and demand a childcare place.

The availability of childcare places must be a priority issue for all governments and our Government is absolutely prepared to do our bit. Our Government has commissioned Associate Professor Roberta Ryan from the University of Technology Sydney to review the planning and development of childcare facilities. We’ve also announced new grants to help local governments across Australia deliver more childcare places for communities facing the greatest shortages.

The Labor Government has detailed, costed, ambitious plans for the future of the early childhood education and care in Australia. We will ensure Early Childhood Australia is informed of any further initiatives that may be developed prior to the election to address the key challenges facing the early childhood sector.

Senator Sarah Hanson-Young
The Greens

Investing in our children is one of the best investments we can make as a society. Early childhood education lays the foundations for a lifelong learning process, and I believe that universal access to quality early learning should be available to every child from birth.

Right now Australian parents are under pressure, struggling to find and afford quality child care that caters for the diverse needs of busy family life. Neither of the old parties has been willing to stand up and actually fund the assistance that parents and providers need to ensure high-quality, accessible and flexible early learning. The Australian Greens have proposed that we roll up our sleeves and find a better way to fund early education and care, by backing a Productivity Commission inquiry into options for funding.

The Greens recognise the key challenges, like reducing fees and costs for parents, supporting the workforce of qualified educators, offering more flexible care and expanding services where they are most needed.

Early childhood education lays the foundations for a lifelong learning process, and I believe that universal access to quality early learning should be available to every child from birth.

The Greens are committed to the National Quality Framework. We want to see each goal reached and celebrated, as the immense benefits of the reforms flow on to our children and our communities. But increased support from government is needed to give the reform agenda the backing it needs to flourish.

Quality care starts with having well-qualified educators across the sector, who are valued and rewarded properly to reflect their skills and encourage them stay in their jobs. We believe all early childhood educators should receive a wage which reflects the importance of their teaching and caring role. The Greens have also announced a scheme to waive the university fees (HELP debts) of early childhood educators who choose to work in long day care rather than in primary schools.

Parents around the country are facing dire waiting lists and childcare centre closures. The Greens’ initiatives for a Capital Grants Fund and No-Interest Loans Scheme will mean that community and not-for-profit care providers can access the capital they need to build new centres, or expand existing ones, to open up more places.

We know that high fees are hurting families. The Greens have proposed a simple reform that will ease the burden on parents, by paying all benefits directly to centres, so that parents only have to pay the much reduced gap.

As a politician and a mother I rely on flexible care arrangements. The Greens want to expand in-home care to help more families find what they need. We care about bringing in affordable, intelligent initiatives like these to ease the pressure on families and providers, and we’ll stand up for quality care and the best interests of our children in the campaign, in the new parliament and beyond.
The Hon Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning

My thanks to Early Childhood Australia for this opportunity to present the views of the Coalition ahead of this year’s federal election. Opposition Leader Tony Abbott has described this poll as the most important in a generation. For the childcare industry and families this is certainly the case. Talking with carers, centre owners and their representative bodies over the last three years, there is obvious broad support for nationwide standards of excellence and improved recognition for the crucial role the sector plays in caring and developing our nought to fives.

The Federal Coalition fully supports these improved standards and conditions to ensure early childhood educators can provide quality care in these early years. That said, you can’t take on reforms such as the National Quality Framework and not back it up with solid and complementary policies, which recognise the issues facing the industry today and helps take it where we need to be tomorrow.

The National Quality Framework was always going to demand more qualified workers, yet there’s been insufficient incentive and appropriate training courses put in place to meet this demand within the Framework deadlines. Blind Freddy could also have told you asking for increased responsibility, quality and skills improvement from carers would mean they should be paid appropriately in recognition. Yet, the Government did not address this until their most recent budget and, even then, provided only stop-gap funding covering just 40 per cent of carers across the country.

The Coalition believes the issue should have been addressed at the very beginning by the independent arbitrator, the Fair Work Commission. Any positive wages decision could then have been planned for by operators and possibly even phased-in, much in the same way the National Quality Framework has a series of rolling benchmarks. If the Coalition is elected we do not propose major changes in policy. We will however task the Productivity Commission with an inquiry into any current impediments to a family-friendly childcare system.

... there is obvious broad support for nationwide standards of excellence and improved recognition for the crucial role the sector plays in caring and developing our nought to fives.

The aim is to assess how parents can better access existing services including long day care, occasional care, family day care and in-home care. A key element of that inquiry will be childcare affordability, not only on parents, but also to evaluate the direct impact on providers in implementing the National Quality Framework. We can all get to the same goals here. The key difference between the Coalition and this Government is how we get there.

Stephanie Peatling
Senior writer, Sydney Morning Herald

Affordability, availability and quality are all issues when it comes to child care.

Labor has made much of its efforts to make child care more affordable for families. Since it came to government in 2007 it has increased the childcare rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent—a significant contribution towards easing cost pressures.

However little has been done to address the critical lack of childcare places—particularly in inner city areas.

The Coalition has promised a review of all childcare policies with a view to making the rebate available to other kinds of child care, such as nannies.

However it has said any changes would have to be made with an eye on the budget which means it is highly unlikely to put any extra money into the childcare budget.

The Coalition has also not said what it would do about the Federal Government’s changes to staff to child ratios. Comments from its spokesperson, Sussan Ley, suggest it would be open to winding those back if a firm link could be made between the changes and fee increases.

Neither side has yet made any significant steps towards addressing the issue of low wages for childcare staff across the industry.

Jamila Rizvi
Editor, Mamamia.com.au

There is a special brand of joy that can only be experienced when spending time with young children. You start to see the world through their eyes: a place full of opportunity, of excitement, of love and of learning. We know that this joy flows from the fact that a phenomenal 90 per cent of a person’s brain development takes place in the first five years of life.

During those early years it is tremendously important that our children remain engaged, stimulated, safe and happy. Whether they are under the care of a parent, guardian or early childhood educator, we must ensure that our children are growing up in a supportive learning environment. It is through investing in quality education and care today, that we will help them become the confident and successful adults the world needs them to be, tomorrow.

Continued p. 3 ...
Geraldine Atkinson
President, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.,
Board Member, Secretariat of National Aboriginal
and Islander Child Care

Supporting better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the development of a sustainable and effective Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is a pressing concern. The importance of the early years for good outcomes for children, and particularly for disadvantaged children, is abundantly clear. While early childhood services are key mechanisms through which to reduce disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still under-represented in ECEC services and face significant barriers to accessing services.

A common need is emerging from a series of Indigenous early childhood policy processes for sustainable, integrated early childhood education, care and family support funding approaches to meet the needs of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander children and families around Australia. Some programs, such as Budget Based Funding, are capped and have adhoc allocations which are major limitations. Progression and investigation in future directions is required in this space. Inconsistent and inequitable funding needs to be addressed.

It is recommended that in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services and the service sector, a process is initiated to explore the potential consistency or inconsistency of the components of the National Quality Framework to ensure that it is appropriately reflects the core elements of ‘quality’ in these services. There are serious concerns that aspects of the National Quality Standards are not appropriate for application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, and that possible alternative approaches or adaptations are explored and considered.

Of particular importance is the need for a continuing commitment to Closing the Gap. The target of halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five by 2018 is on track, as is the target that 95 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four-year-olds living in remote communities will have access to early childhood education by 2013. However, enrolment is just the first step to access. We need to ensure that the barriers to attendance and engagement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed so that we can measure real outcomes and help close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

It is vital that all political parties make a genuine commitment and progress forward, in hopes that it will make a real difference for Aboriginal Torres Strait children and families and services.

Lance Emerson
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)

There are three strategies that I would like to see progressed over the next few years that I think will make a real difference for children and young people:

• **Working smarter**
  Given the significant returns through investing in children and young people, increasing funds for evidence-based preventive efforts is warranted. Committing new funds is difficult in this current economic climate—but we can work much smarter by stopping the things that don’t work and focusing on scaling up things that do. This needs to be accompanied by skilling those working to improve child and youth wellbeing, for example, in identifying those evidence-based practices and programs that work, measuring outcomes achieved through innovative programs and practices, and information on ‘best practice’ implementation.

• **Aligning the effort of the ‘sectors’ working to improve child and youth wellbeing**
  The fact is, Government will never be able to solve all the issues affecting children and young people. We have seen excellent effort in the early childhood, child protection and other areas, however we need to bridge critical gaps between existing plans and agendas (e.g. the ‘middle years’ of childhood), and better align efforts through a collaborative agenda. A common agenda for child and youth wellbeing is an essential starting point for assisting service agencies and governments better coordinate efforts and funding priorities.
  Such a strategy is being progressed through The Nest.

• **A national campaign**
  The most important factor influencing a child’s intellectual and social development is the quality of parenting and care they receive and the quality of the home learning environment that this creates—it’s not who you are as a parent that matters—it’s what you do as a parent that counts. The grass-roots work of practitioners and service agencies in engaging parents on ‘what they do’ in parenting can be assisted through a national social marketing campaign aimed at improving early childhood development. Based on years of evidence¹ on effective social marketing², this campaign could reach those majority of parents who never access assistance through ‘services’, empower them with options to provide the very best start to life for their children and help provide guidance through the service system.
  Importantly, it could also facilitate greater philanthropic efforts and volunteerism at the local level.

As an early childhood educator, I have learnt to expect the unexpected and to recognise just how amazing young children are in their ability to learn about the world around them.

From the Victorian bushfires to the Queensland and NSW floods, young children's knowledge and understanding can manifest itself in many ways. In 2010 during the federal election, their knowledge was made visible and very spontaneous during play and conversations.

While playing dominoes with four children, one child turned to me and asked 'Who do you think wins?'

I asked him what he was referring to and he answered 'The Prime Minister'.

I asked him what a Prime Minister was and he informed me that 'It's the Prime Minister who wins'.

This conversation lead me to consider how these children made sense of all the hype and just how much they knew about the federal election which had just taken place.

I engaged some children in further discussion during the afternoon. Henry announced 'I voted for Tony Abbott. I went with my Mum and that's who we voted for!'

Melanie interrupted and informed Henry that 'I voted for Julia Gillard because she has red hair'. Jasper chimed in that if anyone is wearing a red shirt they can come to his house.

A few weeks later, when all the hype has died down, I overhear three children playing 'Julia Gillard, Tony Abbott and Kevin Rudd' where they have small rocks and vote for each other.

When heading home for the evening one of the children explains 'Mum, Julia Gillard has a party room, you know'.

Children are competent thinkers and we must respect their ability to strive to understand the complexities of the world. It should come as no surprise that theories and hypotheses start to evolve as they interpret what they hear and discuss among themselves.

As educators we need to be curious and adopt an attitude of wonder. It is important to listen and develop a respectful relationship with the children which allows us to enter into a conversation where we can encourage their questioning of 'Where do I fit, where do I belong, why is this happening?'

In the build up to this year’s Federal Election, it has been interesting again to listen and observe the reactions of the children.

What is a Prime Minister?

'They're on the news'

'They tell everyone what to do'

'They tell everyone to sit down quietly'

How do you get to be a Prime Minister?

'You're in charge of NSW, you have to go the building and get voted in'

'You have to wear Prime Minister’s clothes'

'You have to wear a bow tie!'

Margaret Hammersley
Director, The Kindergarten in Kempsey, NSW

Please note: The children’s names have been changed.

WHERE IS YOUR SUPER INVESTED?

At HESTA, we’re committed to helping members reach their retirement goals. After all, we’ve had 26 years of experience in the health and community services sector. We deliver our financial education and advice services in easy-to-understand language, using real-life examples.

Led by CEO, Anne-Marie Corboy, our role is to inform you about your options — so you can build a better retirement savings balance, whether you’re 25 or 65.

HESTA now has more than 750,000 members, 119,000 employers and more than $22 billion in assets.

HESTA’s size means we can offer many benefits to members and employers. These include: low fees, a fully portable account, easy administration, access to low-cost income protection and death insurance, limited financial advice (at no extra cost), super education sessions and transition to retirement options.

HESTA members also have access to a range of great value products and services including health insurance, banking and financial planning.

We are at the forefront of super innovation. HESTA was the first major super fund in Australia to introduce a sustainable investment option— Eco Pool—and assess fund managers on their after-tax investment returns.

For more information visit hesta.com.au or free call 1800 813 327.
CULTURAL AWARENESS

As part of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), all Early Childhood Australia employees will participate in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Awareness Training this year. The first workshop was held last month during Reconciliation Week. Our staff found it really valuable and took home the following key messages:

- Cultural awareness is an essential skill for everyone.
- Training in cultural awareness gives us a better understanding of how culture influences differences in opinions, beliefs and actions and the way in which we perceive ourselves and interpret our environment.
- It is important to be self-aware and conscious of judging others’ behaviour and beliefs according to the standards within your own culture.
- We don’t have to be experts in every culture or have all of the answers to be culturally aware.
- Past practices and policies still greatly impact today.

Everyone learned something they didn’t already know, either about Aboriginal and Torres Strait culture generally or more specifically about the Ngunnawal and Waradjuri people who are the traditional owners of the Canberra region.

If you are looking for cultural awareness training in your area, Reconciliation Australia have an online register of training providers at: www.reconciliation.org.au/home/resources/cultural-awareness/cultural-awareness-training-register.

Cooking with kids

Banana and Pear Pikelets

Ingredients (makes about 24 medium-sized pikelets)

- 200 gm self-raising flour
- 1 soft banana, mashed
- 1 soft pear, peeled and mashed
- 2 eggs
- 300 ml milk
- Small knob of butter (about the size of a large marble)

Method

1. Mash the fruit in a bowl.
2. Measure the flour into a mixing bowl. Add the eggs and mix. Slowly add the milk, mixing as you go, to create a smooth, thick batter.
3. Mix in the mashed fruit.
4. Heat a non-stick fry pan until hot and melt the knob of butter. Pour the melted butter into the pikelet mixture and stir thoroughly.
5. Spoon or pour the pikelet mixture into the hot pan. You can make the pikelets as big or small as you want. Experiment with how much mixture you will need to make the size you like. Turn the pikelets when they have began to firm up and you see air bubbles start to appear (and pop) on the uncooked side of the pikelet. Flip the pikelets over and cook for a few seconds on the other side.
6. Remove from the pan and keep warm while you cook the remainder of the mixture.

Variations: You can add almost any fruit you like to this. Banana and pear are good because they mash well but you can also grate an apple and add it to the mix or throw in some berries.
In light of the upcoming federal election we were keen to hear from you about what policies you would like to see put forward by our political representatives. This resulted in some lively discussions on our Facebook page.

Voice 1: The government could allocate more money to support educators (in Early Childhood centres and schools). A lot of our children aren’t getting the support they need and educators are under a lot of stress.

Voice 2: To advocate for children and their families arriving in Australia and offer them the support and care they desperately need, instead of locking them up in off-shore detention centres. Also to support and care for our Indigenous children, families and cultures, to close the gap! Adhere to their obligation of United Nation Convention Rights on the child. See www.unicef.org/index.php.

Voice 3: Greater recognition of the importance of early and middle childhood social education, at all levels of community and government!

Voice 4: Advocate for the best possible start in life for the most important people, our children. One dollar spent in early years can save so much. Prevention is better than cure and education is the key.

Voice 5: Better education for new parents about their importance in their child’s education. Help them understand how important reading to their child is from the beginning, etc. I worry that parent accountability is altering.

Voice 6: Agree that we need to value early childhood education and educators! As a nation we need to acknowledge the importance of early childhood, and be more aware of how to support the development of young children’s mental health and wellbeing.

Voice 7: Pay the educators properly, especially the co-educators. In Victoria, a pre-school co-educator (assistant) on the TOP LEVEL of the pay scale, whose work involves direct involvement in planning, recording and evaluation of the educational program, is earning $17.48 an hour (after annualisation). We are haemorrhaging good people because they simply can’t afford to stay.

Voice 8: We need to address the real issue of how much it costs now to provide a quality childcare service—it is not only how much our staff earn on a hourly rate but affordability for services to be able to provide professional support, release time and professional development—as a private owner who wants to provide this for my staff I am continually torn by not being able to financially provide this for myself and my staff. Services do not need any more fancy cue cards or posters and other promotional material from the government—what we need is for services to be supported operationally by addressing what the real cost of running a quality service is.

Join this and many other conversations about the sector on Facebook.

We’re as passionate about super as you are about children

We’ve been passionate about the super of early childhood educators for 25 years.

Our consistently strong returns, low fees and industry leading insurance mean more people in your sector choose HESTA for their super.

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WHAT’S ON ...

Calendar of events

AUGUST

29 JUL–4 AUG
National Literacy and Numeracy Week

3
Cultural Awareness Training
Valuing Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures—ACT

4
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day

6–16
Safe Sleep Space conference series

12
International Youth Day

19
World Humanitarian Day

SEPTEMBER

26 AUG–1 SEP
National Skills Week

1
Father’s Day

1
Early Childhood Educator’s Day

8
International Literacy Day

12
R U OK? Day

30
Family and Community Day (ACT)

Upcoming conferences

Young minds 2013 Conference
Sydney Town Hall, Sydney
17–18 June 2013

The 2013 ECMS Conference: Beyond Tomorrow
VIC—7 August 2013

Growing Together Conference
ACT—24 August 2013

NSW Family Day Care Association Annual Forum
NSW—4–6 September 2013

ACECQA: National Quality Framework Conference
NSW—12–13 September 2013

The Good Childhood Conference
Moonee Valley Racecourse in Melbourne
10–11 October 2013

For more information, please head to our website:

Free community forums

Maroondah City Council is holding two free forums for Early Childhood and Outside School Hours (OSH) educators, presented by Early Childhood consultant, Catharine Hydon.

Strengthening Teams
Tuesday 20 August

Thinking About Excellence
Thursday 24 October

Both forums will be at Mahon Theatre, Aquinas College, Great Ryrie Street, Ringwood from 7pm to 9pm.

Bookings are essential.
Email Cathie Wills on cathie.wills@maroondah.vic.gov.au or call 9294 5740 to register. Visit Council’s website for more information.

www.maroondah.vic.gov.au 1300 88 22 33