


A shared vision for **SUSTAINABILITY**



The concept of sustainability in the updated EYLF encompasses environmental, social and economic sustainability. Goodstart Early Learning Narwee was chosen to help trial the sustainability aspects of the update, and here Goodstart educator **Nicole Bunch** reflects on the process.

Goodstart Early Learning Narwee in Sydney's south was one of the 16 services chosen to take part in piloting the revised EYLF. We were provided with two Principles, two Practices and one Learning Outcome, with the focus being on sustainability. The trial provided us with the opportunity to consider our biases and preconceived notions of what sustainability means. Our pilot work reflected the definition of sustainability in the EYLF V2.0: 'seeking to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations' (AGDE, 2022a, p. 68).

Our service philosophy involves connectedness and a distributed leadership model, which we drew on when deciding how we would engage in the learning. We reflected on our current practices around environmental sustainability, building on our current understanding to encompass the two new dimensions of sustainability in the EYLF V2.0—social and economic sustainability. Throughout the trial, we drew on the experience and strengths of team members who could continue to influence change and inspire the team.

Reflecting on our commitment to social and economic sustainability particularly resonated for me. Element 3.2.3 of the *National Quality Standard* (ACECQA, 2018) (Environmentally responsible: The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible) and Learning Outcome 2 of the EYLF V2.0 (Children are connected with and contribute to their world) underpin our duty to instil in our young learners respect for the environment and an understanding of their role in its preservation, which promotes exploration and discovery in child-initiated play.

In the context of the EYLF V2.0, reflecting on economic, social and environmental sustainability involves considering how educational practices support the development of children in these domains. Once we unpacked this as a team, educators took their learning into their rooms to share with the children. At the time, New South Wales was experiencing floods, and the children were participating in discussions about environmental sustainability. We took this opportunity to introduce social and economic sustainability to children as well, discussing communities coming together to support each other. This is reflected in the role of the educator as described in the revised EYLF (AGDE, 2022a):

Educators provide opportunities for children to learn about all the interconnected dimensions of sustainability ... Children are supported to appreciate that sustainability embraces social and economic sustainability—as well as environmental sustainability—and to engage with concepts of social justice, fairness, sharing, democracy and citizenship (p. 18).

Our learnings one year on highlight the interconnectedness of these dimensions with children's holistic development in the following ways:

- **Economic sustainability** emphasises supporting children to understand how resources are distributed fairly in communities. Educators integrate experiences that promote understanding of concepts of replenishing and conserving resources at the service and how children can be active citizens and contribute.
- **Social sustainability** encourages social development by promoting interactions, communication and understanding among children. Educators create a socially inclusive environment where diversity is celebrated. By teaching empathy, cooperation and respect, children learn the importance of social harmony and contributing positively to their communities.
- **Environmental sustainability** highlights the significance of nature and the environment in children's learning. Educators facilitate experiences that promote environmental awareness, conservation and responsible resource use. These include gardening projects, recycling initiatives and outdoor experiences that connect children with nature.



Collaboration with families is crucial; their involvement amplifies our efforts, and their support validates our shared vision. As we navigate this journey, I believe we're not just shaping children's understanding of social and economic sustainability, but also laying strong foundations for them to become thoughtful and responsible citizens.

As we continue to use the environment as the third teacher, we need to consciously model sustainable practices within our learning spaces. This will empower children to explore, inquire about and engage with the environment, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of their role in a sustainable future. However, achieving this requires a holistic approach where we ensure that sustainability is **embedded** and not separate from our everyday experiences, routines and rituals. Some of the strategies we use to achieve this are:

- having a sustainability book library that families contribute to, giving all children an opportunity to engage with literacy
- having a Centre Community Garden: any excess food and garden goods are bundled and offered to families
- collaborating with children on how we contribute to social sustainability—this takes place through the children's project books
- engaging with children on decision-making in and around the service and the impact of the decisions we make.



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We strive to create spaces where a respect for nature, fair distribution of resources and uplifting social interactions are nurtured. Sustainability practices are a way for children to feel a sense of belonging to the world around them. Learning about social sustainability encourages acceptance, understanding and empathy—qualities that are essential for children’s present and future roles in society. An image of the child as capable and competent supports us to engage more deeply with children on economic sustainability.

The *National Quality Standard* underlines the importance of embedding sustainable practices in service operations. Reflecting on this, I recognise the collective effort we are making at Goodstart Early Learning Narwee to implement these values into our daily learning. However, this is an ongoing commitment, and we believe there are always opportunities for improvement and new learning. This mindset allows us to further enrich our practice and support our children in becoming responsible global citizens.

Reference

Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). (2018). *National Quality Standard*. www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard

