



**Honouring
Indigenous Connections**

Linking culture
to education
and care practice

Culturally competent individuals are likely to have, among other things, a strong knowledge of how their own culture shapes their attitudes, perceptions and behaviours and an awareness of the limited value of stereotyping.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for the Council of Australian Government. (2010). Educators Belonging, Being & Becoming: Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Canberra: DEEWR.



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Introduction

Include Me Facilitators support education and care services in the Inclusion Support Program (Illawarra and NSW South East regions) and Supporting Children with Additional Needs Program (Metro South West and Southern NSW regions). It was through cultural competence discussions with educators that facilitators began to notice a common theme emerging. It was evident that some services needed support in their journey of achieving an inclusive Indigenous perspective within their curriculum.

Honouring Indigenous Connections

demonstrates how education and care services engage, embrace and embody the history and heritage of the Indigenous culture in their everyday practice.

Honouring Indigenous Connections is a collection of stories which describe how pedagogical practices honour culture; demonstrate engagement with cultural competence; and acknowledge the importance of developing relationships and connections within the local Indigenous community.

Include Me Child and Family Inclusion Programs would like to thank all the educators, families, children and Elders who shared their unique stories in this publication.

WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this document may contain images or names of people who have since passed.

Include Me acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and Elders past, present and future.

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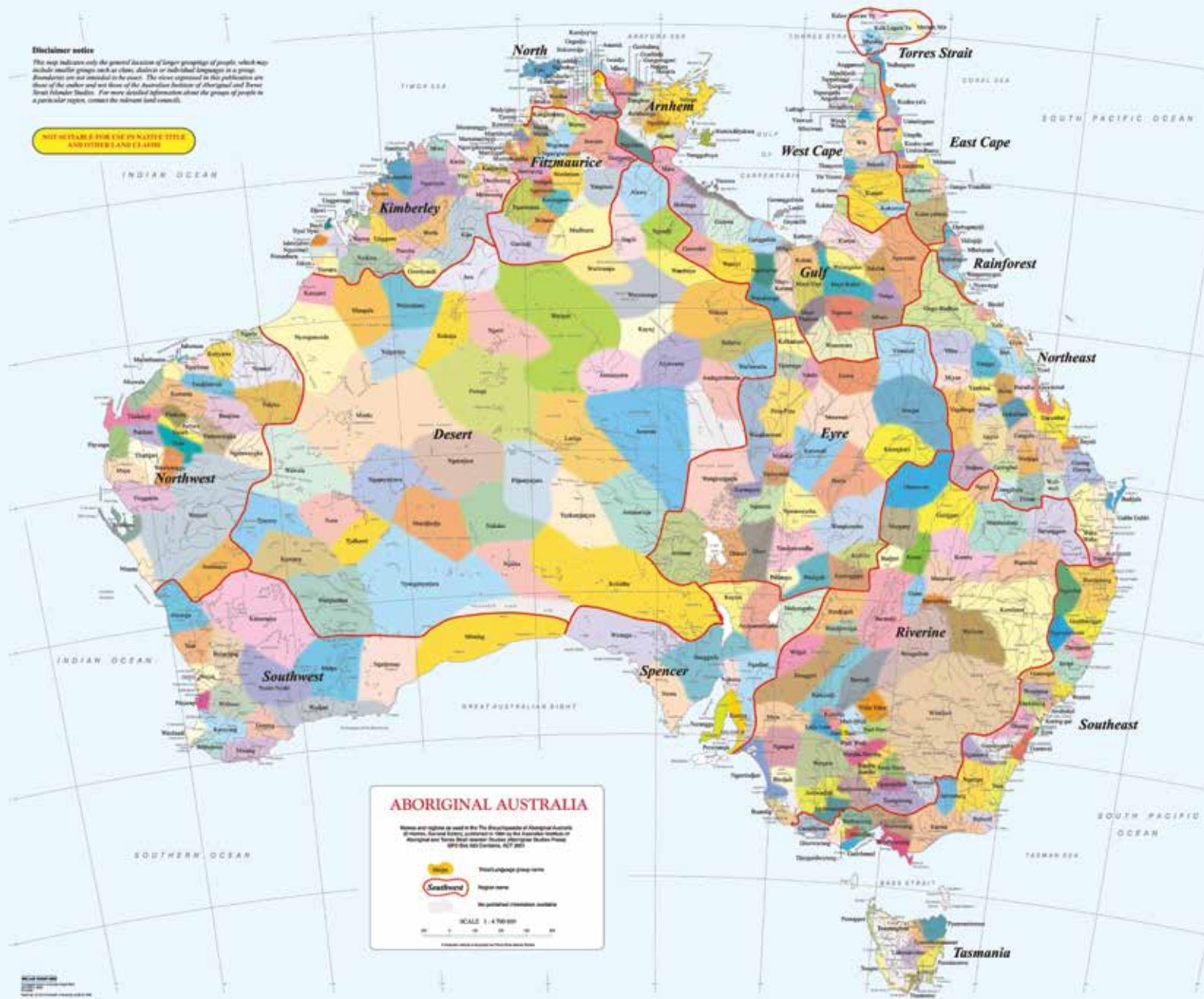
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Map of Aboriginal Australia

Disclaimer notice

This map indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people, which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not those of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. For more detailed information about the groups of people in a particular region, contact the relevant land council.

NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS



This map is just one representation of many other map sources that are available for Aboriginal Australia. Using published resources available between 1988–1994, this map attempts to represent all the language, social or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. This map is NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS. David R Horton, creator, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996. No reproduction allowed without permission.

Reflective Questions

1. How do you acknowledge, honour and value the Indigenous culture in your service?
2. How do you demonstrate a diverse understanding of Indigenous culture in your service?
3. Who do you have connections with in the community?
4. How might your views of Indigenous culture affect your relationships with children and families?
5. How do your interactions with families show that you respect, honour and value them for who they are?
6. How does the environment reflect a genuine knowledge about your local Indigenous culture and community?
7. Are the representations of your local Indigenous culture and community reflected in books, images and artefacts or do they fall into stereotypes?



The artworks above were created by children from Noogaleek Children's Centre and Winnanggay Preschool.

Sometimes good things fall apart, so better things can fall together.

Annette's Place

Our Bush Place

Annette's Place, is a multipurpose community based service located in the township of Young, NSW South East. Predominately a rural farming community with families from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, Young has a population of approximately 7,000. Annette's Place is one of five early childhood educational services in the township. There is also a vacation care service and a family day care scheme.

Annette's Place is in receipt of both NSW and Australian government funding, offering 76 long day care and preschool places and 30 school age care places for after school and vacation care.

Include Me Facilitator, Belinda Muldoon has established a relationship with Annette's Place and throughout this story she explains the connections the service has with its local Aboriginal community:

The numbers of Aboriginal families accessing the programs at **Annette's Place** have always been minimal. In 2012,

the service had three Aboriginal families accessing various programs. Educators observed that the Aboriginal children appeared disconnected from the environment and curriculum. The educators collaborated with the Aboriginal children and their families and it became evident that there wasn't a sense of belonging within the service's environment to the local Aboriginal history, environment and traditions. Educators were keen to establish this sense of connectedness and during team meetings, the nominated supervisor and educators brainstormed several ideas on how they could scaffold all children's need to connect and belong with the natural environment and their community.

Our Bush Place is Born

Our Bush Place was birthed out of a magazine article read by Jenelle, an educator in the 4-5 year care environment. Jenelle approached

Kathryn, the service's nominated supervisor, and showed her the article and expressed an interest in starting something similar at Annette's Place. Many discussions were held and it was decided that **Our Bush Place** would have a positive impact on all children at the service, as well as establish a sense of belonging for the Aboriginal children. Jenelle devised a plan; chose a suitable location within the local community, conducted a risk and assessment report, sought parent consent and sourced and applied for funding to support the program.

To fund the **Our Bush Place** project, the service accessed a grant of \$3000 through the Aboriginal project resource fund. This was used to buy the initial equipment required, such as the fire pit and cooking equipment with the remaining resources purchased with service funds. Due to the expenses of conducting the project, there were changes made within the service's budget for bus hire, additional educators etc. Jenelle also researched other early childhood services across Australia and internationally that had undertaken similar bush projects – paying particular attention to success stories and anticipated hurdles.

Before the first bush visit, Jenelle sought permission from the Young Shire Council for children to visit and use the area. The service explained how often they would be visiting; what they will be doing and, most importantly, why they were doing it.





To reinforce the original focus point (i.e. to engage Aboriginal children and their families within the local community), Jenelle and Georgina, another educator, researched the Aboriginal history of the land on which **Our Bush Place** was being held. The educators introduced this information as a learning experience at **Our Bush Place**, explaining to the children the history and traditions of the land they were visiting and exploring.

The Pilot Program

Our Bush Place commenced mid 2012. It was started with a small group of nine children from the 4-5 year care environment. The children came together on a weekly basis over a 10 week period, for a three hour session.

Initially, lunch was cooked on a small gas stove, but as the weather cooled down they began lighting a small fire and cooked lunch on the campfire. A billy was boiled for the popular hot Milo. Fire building became the responsibility of the children with the aim that by the end of term the children would work together as a group to dig, prepare and maintain the fire. It was hoped that along with the fire building skills, the children would develop an understanding and respect for the dangers of fire in the Australian bush. The children learnt how to move safely around fire. Regular contact with the same bush space helped the children develop a sense of belonging and familiarity with the area as well as a respect of the living bush. Preserving the homes of small creatures was also an integral component of this programme.

With the onset of winter, the children discovered another exciting, evolving element to the natural environment; sawfly eggs and spitfires. The children were fascinated to follow the weekly progress of both the eggs hatching and the clumping behaviours of the spitfires. A local environmental group also set traps to catch noisy Indian Myna birds which led to research and discussion on the impact of introduced bird species to the local environment. The children took seriously their responsibility for reporting sightings of the interlopers. The pilot programme was an amazing success.

Phase 1

Our Bush Place will move to bigger and better things in 2014. Due to many instances of vandalism in the community space, using public council property is no longer viable for the programme. After some discussions, it has been decided to hold **Our Bush Place** on the service premises. This will allow all children attending the service, including after school care and vacation care, to have the opportunity to experience what **Our Bush Place** has to offer. It will happen every day for every child.

In 2014, **Our Bush Place** will become a daily activity and a totally integrated component of the service's programmes. With the addition of Claire- Warden's tool

wrap, there will be a new focus and opportunity

for skill building and risk-taking in the bush. Jenelle is presently exploring ways of including families in the programme to a greater extent. **Our Bush Place** has been the perfect platform to develop sustainability with the service and community.

The journey so far

In summary, the educators at **Annette's Place** started with observations of a small number of children from the Aboriginal community with a goal of connecting them back to the local history and traditions. This resulted in the wonderful, exciting **Our Bush Place** project that immersed all children accessing the service into the local, natural history. Through floor books, discussion and drawing, educators are involving the children in the next planning stage of the new project. The ideas will be collated and a plan will be made for **Our Bush Place** Phase two... Watch this space!

Story told by Jennelle Haskew, Educator and Our Bush Place Co-ordinator • Written by Belinda Muldoon, Include Me Facilitator

The team believe this journey has been a major stepping stone for families and educators within the service.

Bunyip Harden Preschool

Creating connections

Bunyip Harden Preschool is located in the township of Harden, NSW South East. It is predominately a rural farming community with a high proportion of low socio-economic families. It has a population of approximately 2,000. Bunyip is the only early childhood early learning service in the town. The service was originally a two unit preschool and has since evolved to a 76 place multipurpose service offering both long day care and preschool places to meet the needs of the community.

Harden is mainly represented by non Indigenous people and a small group from China and Bangladesh. There are also a small number of Aboriginal families currently living in the immediate area. This is the reason why the service embarked on the journey to embrace the rich Aboriginal history of the local area.

Include Me Facilitator, Belinda Muldoon reflects on how **Bunyip Harden Preschool** educators are creating connections with the local Indigenous community:

Several years ago the previous service director, Annette noticed that Indigenous families were simply ticking the box to indicate they were Indigenous on the enrolment forms and nothing further was done by the service. Educators were not embracing this knowledge and inviting families to share their stories, nor were families stepping forward with cultural information. Annette

believed it was time for the service to step up and begin to introduce the local Aboriginal culture into their environment and curriculum, beyond tokenism. After lengthy

discussions, educators decided their first port of call should be liaising with the Aboriginal families who were accessing the service.

Erica, the current director, had also been involved in the project's planning stages and had a sound understanding of the direction Annette had in mind and was able to continue with this process.

Around the same time the service became aware of funding available from the NSW Preschool Growth Program for the purpose of gaining greater access to families and their knowledge of Aboriginal culture. Bunyip worked in collaboration with a preschool from a neighbouring town to compile an application with direction for the purpose of attaining funding, and was successful.

Relationships Matter

As a result, both services jointly employed a local female Aboriginal elder to support them in the early stages of their individual journeys and establishing relationships with the Aboriginal elders and community in the towns. From this relationship, Annette was able to source a wealth of information in order to determine the best person for each job.

After discussions and asking around, Annette invited Roy to play a lead role in their project. Roy is an Aboriginal identity in the community and a grandfather to a child attending the preschool and





had been coming into the service for several years. Annette formed a positive relationship with Roy and he became her advisor and facilitator on the project.

Embedding Local Aboriginal Culture

Erica, Roy and the team collaborated and set clear goals with direction. They took into consideration Roy's knowledge and skills and the learning experiences Roy could be involved in with both children and educators. After a discussion with Roy it was decided he would come to the service and conduct art sessions with the children in preparation for the local annual show.

Roy guided the children through traditional art techniques and use of traditional mediums. This process took several months in the lead up to the art exhibition. Roy also brought in various art pieces; both traditional and modern from local Aboriginal artists, which were used to inspire the children's own artwork.

Erica, Roy and the team also decided to introduce a sensory garden in the outdoor environment. The educators and children researched and discussed the bushland and native plants in the surrounding area and Roy incorporated a local history lesson about the various purposes of plants and trees, including; medicines, shelters, hunting/gathering and cooking utensils. The children selected and planted the plants.

Amanda and Roy also designed and a mural that was a reflection of the local Aboriginal community for another part of the garden.

The Projects Outcomes

The team at Bunyip embraced these positive changes into their environment and curriculum and believe it has reinforced their goal. The inclusion of local Aboriginal culture and history in their daily curriculum has fostered the children's love of and connection with the local land and traditions. Working in collaboration with Aboriginal elders and Roy has scaffolded the children's sense of belonging within the service and local community.

The team believe this journey has been a major stepping stone for families and educators within the service. It has enabled all to embrace and celebrate all cultures within the local community. They think it has opened doors for families to feel comfortable about sharing their beliefs - cultural and/or religious - with educators and children. The project has, and will, continue to broaden the children's perspectives on the world around them, especially living in such a non diverse country town. The team at Bunyip have continued to reflect and evaluate throughout the project. There are plans to continue Roy's work with and engagement in the service. The team aim to have other community and family members participating within the service in various ways.

Both services jointly employed a local female Aboriginal elder to support them in the early stages of their individual journeys and establishing relationships with the Aboriginal elders and community in the towns.

Story told by Erica Menz, Nominated Supervisor • Written by Belinda Muldoon, Include Me Facilitator

Closing the Gap by Opening the Door

Clipper Road Children's Centre

Closing the gap

Clipper Road Children's Centre is located in East Nowra. This service is managed by Illawarra Area Child Care (IACC), which also manages other services in the Illawarra. Clipper Road is located in a low socio-economic area and many of the families utilising the service are single parents; public housing clients and many Aboriginal families. Currently 50% of the families enrolled identify as Aboriginal. Clipper Road is a mainstream funded service, and receives no additional funding to support these children and their families.

Leisa King has worked in childcare for over 29 years and for the past eight years as director at **Clipper Road**. Leisa started at **Clipper Road** in March 2005 and it was her first

experience working with a large group of Aboriginal families. Leisa knew she needed to build relationships with these families and began exploring ways to connect with them.

Leisa began connecting with the local Aboriginal community and families through advocating key issues of importance to all government levels and local networks.

Advocacy by Leisa, the centre educators, and IACC management entails:

- Management and educators going to Canberra and advocating for the reduction of fees and acquiring funds

to purchase relevant resources.

- Attendance by educators at the local Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy (ACYFS) meetings and Aboriginal Education Consultative Group meetings. Attendance at these meetings is still a large part of how the service continues to connect with the Aboriginal community.
- Regular discussion by educators with local agency representatives - such as the Aboriginal Early Childhood Liaison officer, Aunty Yvonne Lester and Marg Sutherland from Noah's Ark Centre at Shoalhaven.

Include Me Facilitator, Julie Hemmings interviewed Leisa and the **Clipper Road** educators on what they do to close the gap by opening the door:

What were the main issues or barriers to Aboriginal families using your service?

- The cost of the fees
- Transport to the service for the families
- The environment - was it welcoming for Aboriginal people?
- Lack of resources - Aboriginal resources that related to the local, traditional Aboriginal people and land owners
- Educators recognising that there are different ways of learning amongst the Aboriginal community.
- Researching and understanding the needs of Aboriginal families in our local community.





How did you begin to address these issues?

- Leisa and the team of educators began researching the needs of Aboriginal children and families.
- Educators became involved in the Koori Kids project which looks at promoting mental health issues for Aboriginal children aged between three and 12 years.
- Clipper Road involved itself in the collection of data for research undertaken at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia.
- Educators networked with other Aboriginal educators and discussed the need for assistance and the most appropriate way to deliver an early childhood educational curriculum to Aboriginal children.
- Clipper Road negotiated for Aboriginal families to gain access to health services outreach such as Noah's Ark Early Intervention Service Nowra, Koori Health checks and Otitis Media checks.
- Educators acquired the assistance for their transition to school programs from East Nowra School, Nowra Public School and St Michaels.
- Educators have trained in cultural awareness and continue to gain

further knowledge about the local Aboriginal community.

They have researched ways Aboriginal children learn and how health is attached to the learning.

- Educators have researched local, Aboriginal artists and sourced some art works for the service.

What resources did you purchase to assist you on this journey?

Educators identified that there was not a lot of local community represented in photos used in the service; they identified the need for more posters and games for the children attending that related to the local Aboriginal community. They also needed more instruments, music and visits from Aboriginal dancers.

Educators wanted to maintain their connection with local Aboriginal people so they now only purchase resources or display works that have come from the local community. Some of these include:

- Local Aboriginal art
- Games
- Posters and pictures
- Musical instruments
- Aboriginal resources

What other connections with the local community are you involved in?

The service regularly participates in NAIDOC and Harmony Days. They have invited local Aboriginal dancers to the

Local Elders are invited and encouraged to visit the service

centre especially through the local high schools. They plan to invite the National Park and Wildlife to visit. Aboriginal Early Childhood educators and local Elders are also invited and encouraged to visit the service.

Clipper Road continues to improve their bush tucker garden and have connected with a traditional landowner, Noel Wellington. Noel has made outdoor furniture and a totem for the garden and given the service advice about what to include in their environment. He has become a regular visitor at the service.

What other strategies do you use to ensure your connection with the local Indigenous community?

Clipper Road was successful in one-off funding for Transition to School for Aboriginal Children, made available through ACYFS and Family and Community Services (FACS). This funding enabled Clipper Road to implement an intensive and successful transition to school with a local school – Nowra East Public School. It also allowed individual plans to be developed for each child.

The service employs and trains Aboriginal educators and will continue to do so.

Leisa contacted NGROO (www.ngroo.org.au/index) to organise a workshop for IACC services and other Early Childhood



providers within the Shoalhaven. NGROO was able to provide support to develop an individual service plan and Leisa has utilised the knowledge gained at **Clipper Road**.

Clipper Road continues to lobby for reduced fees for Aboriginal families in long day care centres.

Educators are working with the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP), Bicultural Support, service for an external audit of the service regarding their environment and how this can be improved to include Aboriginal families and children.

The service continues to focus on building respectful relationships with Aboriginal families.

As the service has made many connections with local Aboriginal people, some educators have been invited to be Early Childhood representatives on Aboriginal Children's Services interview panels.

Leisa has been involved in mentoring a director from Horn Island (located in the Torres Strait) during the Australian Community Children's Services (ACCS) Conference in 2012. From this experience, Leisa says she learnt a lot about the Torres Strait Islander people. Clipper Road has attended the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group

(ATSIECSAG) conferences for the past three years. They are now called the Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning Incorporated (AECSL). Website: <http://aecsl.org.au/>

What have been the benefits and outcomes of connecting with your local Aboriginal community?

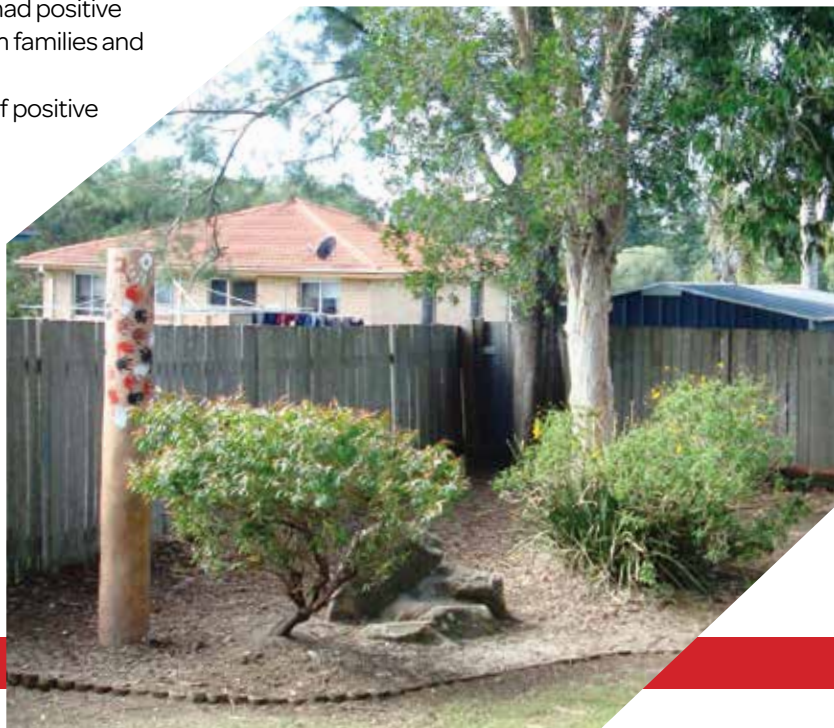
- Families have been happy
- The development of lasting relationships with families
- Siblings, extended families and friends have enrolled in the centre from recommendations
- Aboriginal families select our service
- Transient families have re-enrolled when they return to the area
- All children and families have learnt more about the Aboriginal culture
- Intensive Transition to School program has had positive response from families and children
- The delivery of positive programs for children

Leisa says that the journey continues...

In summary, the title of this piece is **Closing the Gap** by

Opening the Door, and my interactions with Leisa and the team have very much been an 'open door' experience. **Clipper Road** is a welcoming service, respectful, non-judgmental. They have tried to remove barriers for Aboriginal people; they have accessed support services such as health checks and speech; they have listened so that they can get to know their community; they have asked questions if there was something they were unsure about; they recommend that you use visuals in your service, network and build genuine relationships.

Story told by Leisa King, Nominated Supervisor • Written by Julie Hemmings, Include Me Facilitator





“Educators recognise that diversity contributes to the richness of our society and provides a valid evidence base about ways of knowing.”

KU Cobbitty Preschool

Environments, curriculum & Aboriginal culture

KU Cobbitty Preschool is located in a rural community within the South West Sydney region. The preschool caters for 30 children per day aged 3-5 years, and is surrounded by natural bushland and farming properties.

KU Cobbitty Preschool strives on providing for the inclusion of the Aboriginal culture throughout the environment and program. We believe in continually interweaving Aboriginal culture throughout our planned and spontaneous educational program in a respectful and meaningful manner. This has been accomplished through our relationship with a school in Western Australia and promoting the Aboriginal Culture within our daily curriculum.

Kandiwal School Relationship

At the end of 2011, a grandmother of one of our preschoolers visited Kandiwal School, located on Ngauwudu Land near the Mitchell Plateau in Western Australia. She shared her experience with the educators; talking about the dedication of the staff and how they operate from a tin shed with dirt floors in extreme heat. After listening to this story, our educators wanted to establish a relationship with the school and see how we could assist them in raising money for school resources. We felt this would also be a great way to facilitate learning about diversity, Aboriginal culture and lifestyle.

Our preschool community donated educational resources, and the children

sorted through the donations and created care-packages for the school. We all wrote letters and drew pictures to accompany the gifts. It wasn't long before the students of Kandiwal School, aged between four to 16 years, sent us thank you letters and artworks. Over the next two years we have continued to send letters, drawings and educational resources to the students. In return they have shared stories about their lives in Western Australia and also recently a Dreamtime Story which has been shared from generation to generation between the Wunambal people and Kandiwal tribe.

Daily Curriculum Experiences

We continue to promote the Aboriginal culture within our program, in conversations and relationships. This is done in a variety of ways from sand drawing around the sandpit to more planned activities including Dreamtime Stories and artworks.

Our children participate in a wide range of experiences including visual arts, boomerang and didgeridoo creations, hand prints and moulding with clay. Children complete natural resource collage and leaf tracing, discussing where the resources come from and the importance of caring for our earth.

Additionally, we participate in a range of Aboriginal dancing and musical experiences including tapping sticks, traditional rattles and rain sticks. The children have learnt the traditional way of

using tapping sticks, which requires them to hold the sticks in the centre and tap each end alternatively. Our children also particularly enjoy the “Wombat Wobble” dance which they have performed at many family events throughout the years.

We have recently introduced adapted, traditional Aboriginal games, including Gorri, Wungoolay where a ball is rolled from one teacher to another while the children aim and try to hit the ball with beanbags. This represents traditional hunting and spear skills.

Dreamtime stories and non-fiction literature have become a regular part of literacy group times and we feel these experiences further enhance the children's understanding of culture.

We have upgraded our outdoor environment to now include a dry riverbed where the children have pretend campfires and bush tucker. The children are responsible for caring for their environment - including gardens and our preschool chickens. We value the outdoor environment as an integral part of the children's education and Aboriginal Cultural awareness. Sustainability is an important part of educating the children about the ideology and beliefs of the Aboriginal people.

Written by Rebecca Fordham, Nominated Supervisor • Facilitated by Julia Caltabiano, Include Me Facilitator

Eden Preschool has had enormous success in its endeavours to be inclusive of the local Indigenous population.

Aboriginal numeracy & literacy pathway

Eden Preschool

Eden Preschool is a Bega Valley Shire Council managed service situated in Eden on the far South Coast of NSW. It has provided preschool programs for children aged 3-5 years since 1977. Eden is an area with a high Indigenous population.

Eden Preschool's Director, Dianne McCaffery, shares her and the centre's journey to create an environment and curriculum that is inclusive of the local Indigenous population. She encapsulates our endeavour to reach into every area of Eden; to seek out

children whose family may not have had a preschool experience and to give them the opportunity to engage in this learning environment.

It starts with a phone call and a meal

I started at **Eden Preschool** at the beginning of 2011. I rang the local Elder within the first month of starting and told him that I was ignorant of the local Indigenous culture and asked for him to help me to close the gap for the local Indigenous children. I met with the local Elders and they suggested that the best

way to make head way into the local community was to have a meal together. We paid for a local Indigenous artist to come to the preschool to paint with the children. This project was carried out over a three month period. When we completed the painting, we celebrated NAIDOC. The Koori dancers from the local high school, most of the Elders and their families, as well as the preschool community came to celebrate by sharing afternoon tea.

'Booris of Eden'

In the beginning of 2012, we asked the Elders again to participate in a project that would be significant for both the community and the children. The Elders wanted to focus on numeracy and literacy. Uncle Ossie Cruse told us his story and

I adapted this story so that it would be relevant to numeracy and literacy, and we produced '**Booris of Eden**'. The book was printed and sent to all the local libraries, preschools and schools in the Bega Valley Shire. We had requests for the book from places in South Australia, Newcastle, Sydney and the National Library in Canberra. The most encouraging news was that parents and grandparents who are illiterate had lessons so they could read the book to their children and grandchildren. From this initiative the number of Indigenous children attending the preschool has increased by 20 percent.

Literacy & Numeracy Pathway

During 2013, in consultation with the children and community Elders, a suggestion was made to construct a numeracy and literacy pathway. Painted by another local Indigenous artist, the pathway will encourage numeracy and literacy and will feature paintings of sea snakes, turtles, fish and children's signatures. To support the very active children, a climbing area and totem poles will be created in the space leading onto the numeracy pathway.

Totems

We have also invited Uncle Ossie Cruse to give talks on totems. We have constructed 50 totem poles and invited every family to paint a pole to represent who they are. There will be a plaque next to every pole indicating how people came to settle in Eden. The totem poles are the foundation for a living wall which





supports a vegetable patch, a bush tucker patch and Indigenous grasses patch, all of which will be planted by the local community.

Contemporary Mural

The teenagers being mentored at the local school have come to the preschool to undercoat the wall and totems. Some Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists (local teenagers) will work together to paint a contemporary mural on this wall. We celebrated this initiative on Reconciliation Day and called it

‘Everyone is welcome in Eden’. The whole community - including teenage bands, Koori dancers and singers - were involved in an afternoon tea together.

All of these projects were possible through funding supplied by the NSW and Australian governments. The funding was used to encourage inclusive practices; respect of boundaries; learning through play and synergy of environments; healthy food practices; and a love of the natural environment. The Australian Government funding

was provided as a grant to encourage ‘Closing the Gap’ focusing on language and numeracy.

Eden Preschool has had enormous success in its endeavours to be inclusive of the local Indigenous population and will strive to continue to promote, encourage and engage with the local community.

Written by Dianne McCaffery, Nominated Supervisor • Supported by Nerida Scholze, Include Me Facilitator

From little things, big things grow

Efforts to preserve the local Koori language have entered the mainstream through a children’s book about friendship and respect for the landscape.

The book, *Booris of Eden*, was written and narrated by Koori elder pastor Ossie Cruse and illustrated by Koori artists and the children of Eden Pre-school.

Supply has already been exhausted after a small grant allowed for a print run of just 300, with all books given to pre-school families and libraries.

The project was pulled together by Eden Pre-school’s educational leader and nominated supervisor Dianne McCaffery.

“I was wondering how to get the children to learn about a book being something that tells a story,” Dianne said.

“So then I thought, well, because it’s for the indigenous children coming to the centre I’d ask the elders if there was something they

wanted to teach.”

Soon, elders Pastor Ossie Cruse and his wife the late Aunty Beryl Cruse, Uncle Ossie Stewart, Aunty Liddy Stewart and Aunty Shirley Aldridge, along with Koori parents and friends of the pre-school got together to brainstorm ideas for the book.

They agreed to work on the book to foster understanding of their culture and language and to encourage new generations to have ownership of their own education.

They chose to include Koori words for people and children, the creator, the ocean and some of the creatures within it.

It contains art by Robyn Stewart and Joe Stewart and the children and photographs of them at play.

So far more than 200 Koori words and their pronunciations have been transcribed in a collection at The Keeping Place, Monaroo Bobberer Gudu, at Jigamy Farm.

But it wasn’t so long ago that the language, and the culture, wasn’t so generally appreciated by non-indigenous people.

“At a workshop earlier in the year Allison Simpson told us how her mother was hidden in the ground under a sheet of corrugated iron (to avoid being taken from her family),” Dianne said.

“She showed us documents about how most Koori people couldn’t get work in Eden unless they gave up their language and they couldn’t associate with each other.

“It seems like a long time ago but then I realised Allison’s mum is my mum’s age.

“We’re in a new world, people want money and things and they aren’t going to get them without an education.

“Numeracy and literacy are the things children need as a basis to go to school.”

The book was launched at Eden Library in December.

“As the director I felt it was important for all educators to explore their own cultural connections.”

Goodstart Early Learning, South Nowra

Consultation & reflection

Good Start Early Learning, South Nowra was established in 2006 and is a long day care service located in a regional coastal community. The service caters for 76 children aged from six weeks to six years of age, and contains five teaching rooms and two large play grounds.

Include Me Facilitator, Sharyn Palmer spoke with Amanda, the Director to find out how **Good Start Early Learning, South Nowra** is embedding consultation and reflection into their everyday practice.

It's about cultural connections

We promote a great amount of cultural diversity within our service and our educators feel that it is essential to embrace a multicultural program reflective of our families, educators and the community that utilises our service.

When our service opened, we intentionally employed a local Torres Strait Islander staff member to aid us with communication and relationships with families and community members. All our educators live and work in the Nowra area, which has a very strong cultural history. We have a strong connection to the community and want to continue to build upon this connection.

As the Director of **Good Start Early Learning, South Nowra**, I felt it was important for all educators to explore their own cultural connections, values and beliefs. As part of this reflective task, each

educator created their own totems - now displayed in the foyer. These totem poles are a representation of each educator's individuality, community and family.

It's about welcoming and acknowledging

We felt it was important to make sure that the community knows it is welcome at our service and that we are accepting of all cultures. We wanted to make a loud and clear statement. Our first step was to hang large Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian flags in our foyer entrance. These flags were donated by our local Federal Member, Joanna Gash's office. These flags have had a wonderful effect on our families who have brought in extra family members at arrival and departure times just to see the flags.

Our Christmas celebrations were held in the local park and attended by a mixture of our services families and also the community. After delivering an Acknowledgment to Country at the Christmas party, a local community member commented on how welcome it made her and her family feel. She then went on to comment on how she felt it was important to acknowledge all people who are a part of our service. Our team discussed this at the next staff meeting and decided to create an Acknowledgment to Country specific for our service and families. All educators participated in 'Welcome to Country' training and we consulted with our families and community throughout

the process. Today we have a specific Acknowledgment to Country that we use at all gatherings, this acknowledgment also hangs as a poster in our foyer.

After we had created our Acknowledgment to Country, we realised that our thoughts and practices had changed. As a team we discussed where we had come from and to where we were hoping to move. We realised that we needed to look at our service philosophy and ensure that it reflected the thoughts, feelings and direction of our centre. After consultation with families, we developed a new service philosophy that also hangs proudly in our foyer.

It's about cultural learning experiences

We started to talk to the children about the flags and they wanted to make their own flags too. For Australia day the children spent time making Australian and Aboriginal flags. We felt that it was important to make the Aboriginal flags as we recognise the Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of our land, before white settlement. During this experience many discussions occurred about the significance of the flags and meanings of the colours. By the end of the day we were left with a display cabinet full of very interesting flags; many of which are not in correct order, have too many stars with colours all mixed up, but this was the children's interpretations and are very important to us all.



"All educators recognised the importance of always talking with families and community members and also always looking at their own practices, continuing a journey of personal and professional growth."

We wanted to continue our learning journey so we asked Charlie Ashby from Noah's Ark Nowra to spend some time with us. Charlie works in a government funded position as a Cultural Support Worker. Charlie joined us for three consecutive weeks at the beginning of 2013. Charlie played the didgeridoo, told many Dreamtime stories, talked about Aboriginal symbols and their purpose and worked on many art projects with the children.

One fantastic experience with Charlie was the joint collaboration of 'Our Story'. As a group we talked about all the things that are important in our lives, and the children recorded them on paper using Aboriginal symbols. Charlie read the symbolised picture, turned it into a flowing story and retold it through both spoken word and didgeridoo.

Our story is about camping; walking tracks; kangaroo and human tracks; watering holes and the ocean. Each of these are important aspects within the lives of our families, children, staff and community. In our story, after a trip to the ocean, we walked back to our campground and had a campfire-cooked dinner. After the story was complete, Charlie shared two different types of bush tucker with the children.

Charlie often played the didgeridoo for us; the children loved this experience so much Charlie helped us to make our own didgeridoos using cardboard tubes,

which we decorated with symbols using brushes, foam filters and cotton tips.

Charlie helped us gain confidence in using our Indigenous resources, and also in our understanding of how to further incorporate culturally appropriate experiences within our curriculum. Charlie helped us to create an environment where we could talk openly, break down barriers, think outside the box and just have fun.

The children continue to have an ongoing interest in learning about different cultures and continue to talk often about the time they spent with Charlie and the other things that have happened since. Many months later, the children in the preschool room decided they wanted to create individual totems just like the educators had previously. The educators and children decided what they would like to add to the totem poles and collected the resources together. As the children worked on the totems, they spoke about things that are important to them and about how they wanted their totem to look. The children's totem poles were on display at our open art exhibition and now stand proudly in the cabinet of the service foyer. After many weeks the children still point out their totem to their families and conversations have continued.

It's about the way forward

We envision our centre as a community hub, a safe place for our centre's

community to spend time together. We have started to hold more events for the families, and with time, attendance at these events have increased. Our families are happy to spend more time in our centre and are showing more of an interest in what the children are doing on a daily basis.

What about the future?

We have continued contact with Charlie, and would love for him to return and continue this journey with us. We have built a connection with our local high school, which has a fantastic Aboriginal dance troupe. We have already had the opportunity to watch a performance and hope that in the future we will be able to see many more performances - both in our centre and out in the community. We want to continue to build on our cultural resources, carefully selecting these resources to ensure they are appropriate for all families. We are continually reflecting on our work, always looking at what we can do better for our families and community. We want all the wonderful relationships we have formed in our community to continue and hope that our service can be used by our community as a meeting place.

Story written by Amanda Vidler, Nominated Supervisor and Sharyn Palmer, Include Me Facilitator

"At Goulburn Preschool we believe in acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather together and share our day."

Goulburn Preschool

Our meeting place

Goulburn Preschool is a community based, not for profit organisation providing a preschool program for children 3-6 years of age in the Goulburn area. The preschool is licensed for 40 children per day and operates during school terms.

Include Me Facilitator, Melinda Goad and Director of **Goulburn Preschool**, Ann-Maree Fisher explain how local connections shape mutual understanding through our **'Meeting Place'** and **'Acknowledgment of Country'**:

Our Meeting Place

This project started from the need to revamp our performance area in the outdoor environment and, after one of the educators, Eileen, met Peter Swain, a local Indigenous artist at a local function. Eileen and Peter spoke about the project idea and Peter was very keen to be involved as both an artist and to advise educators on appropriate pathways to achieve our outcome.

Peter called in to visit the preschool one day and spent time discussing the project and talking about the significance of Goulburn as a **'Meeting Place'** for many different traditional land owners. The educators learnt that in the past, Goulburn was a place to meet, hold significant celebrations, trade items and share between the different Indigenous groups. Peter drew the educators a map that showed the pathways they travelled to Goulburn from the coastal areas, mountains and so on.

The educators reflected on what they wanted to achieve with their performance area and renamed it **'Meeting Place'** because it was for sharing stories, dancing and playing. With Peter's help, the design was developed to represent the water, earth and sky of the local Goulburn area.

Acknowledgment of Country

Peter also worked with the educators during the preschool's philosophy review last year to include recognition of the traditional land owners. The educators changed the wording used in the service philosophy and added an



'Acknowledgement of Country' with Peter's guidance. The **'Acknowledgement of Country'** below is now used by educators at the beginning of each significant gathering at the preschool:

"At Goulburn Preschool we believe in acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we gather together and share our day. We recognise Goulburn as a meeting place where the traditional land owners came together to share their stories, experiences and culture as we do each day."

Story told by Ann-Maree Fisher, Nominated Supervisor • Written by Melinda Goad, Include Me Facilitator





Winnanggay Preschool

Noogaleek Children's Centre

Keeping our Aboriginal culture alive

Noogaleek Children's Centre, a Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service and **Winnanggay Preschool**, were established for the purpose of supporting Aboriginal families. The sister services are situated in Berkeley, a suburb south of Wollongong.

Include Me Coordinator, Gloria Dalla Valle had the opportunity to visit these sister services. Gloria describes how Roslyne Webb, the coordinator of both **Noogaleek and Winnanggay** and the services staff are creating an environment where the Aboriginal culture is kept alive.

A Sense of Warmth and Belonging

While visiting these services, I felt a warmth and sense of belonging from the

moment I approached the front door. Jo Davis, a local Aboriginal artist donated to the services a ceramic vase with a hand painted platypus and painted Noogaleek's front door, which tells the following story:

- The tiny footprints represent little children coming into the service to learn;
- The educators are at the service to support the children's learning of the Aboriginal culture;
- The echidna and life from the ocean represents food for the people; and
- The larger footprints represent that when the children leave, they have grown in knowledge.

Examples of artwork are located throughout the interior and exterior of both services. All of these artworks depict the Aboriginal culture and tell stories of its heritage. Hallway walls are adorned

with Aboriginal artwork. Each piece is displayed with respect and the majority have been prepared by local community members.

The Door is Always Open

On my visits I also experienced **Noogaleek and Winnanggay's** open door policy. Locals Elders often pop in and visit the services. The Elders are part of both the services' curriculum and environment. They can be often found painting with the children, telling them yarns and handing down their culture to next the generation.

Noogaleek and Winnanggay stand proud of their heritage and commitment to providing care for Aboriginal children. Educators are passionate about providing a creative, supportive and loving environment for families and the local community and everyone has determination for the culture not to be lost.

Written by Gloria Dalla Valle, Include Me Coordinator

Noogaleek and Winnanggay stand proud of their heritage and commitment to providing care for Aboriginal children.



The land means a lot to both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the community.

Planet Early Childhood Learning Centre

Collaboration with our Mob

Planet Early Childhood Learning Centre is located in a small coastal community south of Sydney, on the northern beaches of Wollongong. We have a beautiful and dramatic escarpment to the west, and the Tasman Sea to the east with only a handful of streets. The community is very tight knit and carefully maintains their beautiful beaches and bushland. The land means a lot to both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the community.

Planet Early Childhood Learning Centre owner Susie Crick shares her experience of collaborating with the Aboriginal Mob of Coledale.

With one of our owners descending from the Worimi Clan near Myall Lakes, we understand the importance and have always embraced and respected the Aboriginal culture within our service.

We are proud to reflect Aboriginal traditions and beliefs within our learning program. As word grew that we embraced the Aboriginal culture, families sought to enrol their children at our service and we welcomed them to join our mob.

Collaboration with our Mob

The way we celebrate Reconciliation Week, Sorry Day and NAIDOC Week is special. We are so lucky that local Elders and artists love to come and share their culture and heritage with our children. Our mob has:

- Frances Rings, a choreographer from Bangarra Dance Theatre regularly facilitates dance workshops with the children;
- Two premier artists and Elders from the Coomaditchie Artist Community;
- Lorraine Brown and Narelle Thomas, who came to yarn with the children, create rock art and share some tucker;
- Local Elders who often visit to tell stories and teach the children about 'bush medicine' that can be found in the local hills, as well as performing smoking ceremonies;
- Many of our Aboriginal parents help out by reading stories and yarning with the Boori (Dharawal word for children).

We have days where all children arrive dressed in the colours of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flags. These experiences are truly memorable to the children and they still talk of the wonderful lessons shared with the local Elders.

The service self funds these learning experiences as we truly respect and appreciate the time that the Elders give to us. The lessons, activities and knowledge our Elders give us is priceless; we always consult with the Elders on what they think would be appropriate and respectful.





Our educators embrace a love of sharing the richness, arts, culture and history of the local Aboriginal people and empower the children to enter and lead their own cultural learning journey.

Collaboration with our Local Primary School

It is up to us to continue this journey of learning, to teach the children respect for the land and ocean. Part of how we continue to do this is by liaising with the local primary school.

Coledale Public School has an extensive outdoor learning program in place with a vast Eco Garden. They have included us in the upkeep of their 'living classroom'. Three times per week our older children go 'walkabout' over to the school to tend to the very large veggie patch where we grow all sorts of bush tucker and vegetables. We use the foods that the children grow in our daily lunches.

Collaboration across State Borders

We instigated a relationship with the Koonibba Aboriginal School in a small, remote community outside of Ceduna in South Australia. Koonibba was one of the first established Aboriginal Communities as well as one of the first Aboriginal schools that is still running today. They told us that there was a shortage of shoes for the children, we asked our

parents to donate any good shoes and the response was overwhelming.

Collaboration amongst Educators

All of these wonderful learning opportunities have occurred because our educators are passionate about sharing the Aboriginal story. Our educators embrace a love of sharing the richness, arts, culture and history of the local Aboriginal people and empower the children to enter and lead their own cultural learning journey.

*Story written by Susie Crick, Owner •
Facilitated by Kim Raffler, Include Me Facilitator*



Wanting to support the children to engage and learn more about the different cultures, the educators were looking critically into meaningful interactions.

Reynolds Street Community Preschool

Yipirinya School Project

Reynolds Street Community Preschool is a part of Big Fat Smile and is a community based long day care service located in Goulburn.

The educators and families at **Reynolds Street** are active members of the Goulburn community, always taking part in community events and projects. The families are committed to ensuring the children are engaged in ongoing proactive inclusion, and educators ensure this commitment is evident in the children's ongoing learning experiences.

Wanting to support the children to engage and learn more about the different cultures, the educators were looking critically into meaningful interactions within their service. There were lots of discussions happening between educators on what it means to be inclusive, how to promote diversity, and how to develop greater understandings about each child and family.

Yipirinya School Project Phase One

By chance, **Reynolds Street's** Director, Jo saw an article in the Sunday Telegraph about **Yipirinya School** and saw the potential for a wonderful partnership and learning opportunity.

Yipirinya School at Tennant Creek is an Independent Aboriginal School which was founded and continues to be run by local Indigenous Elders.



As an independent school, **Yipirinya** is always at a financial disadvantage as they are not entitled to full government funding and many of the families cannot afford to pay fees. The school offers many fantastic initiatives that take a holistic approach to wellbeing - including transportation, providing all meals, availability of a school nurse, home liaison team, counselling team and other specialist services.

After a team discussion, the educators thought they would like to get in contact with **Yipirinya** with the aim to start a working relationship where information

and ideas were passed between services. The educators started a consultation process with the children and families to find out their thoughts and feelings about the potential of a partnership with **Yipirinya**, and were met with a great response from all.

Jo made initial contact with **Yipirinya School** Principal, Ken Langford-Smith via email. Ken quickly replied advising Jo that for the majority of children, English is a second language and that the school has limited funding so communication via computer may be challenging. Ken asked **Reynolds Street** to come up with some ideas around communicating and learning together without the internet or email.

After consultation with the children, families and educators, **Reynolds Street** devised the following list:

Children's responses:

- Talk on the phone
- Send a letter
- Give the children a surprise
- Fly a paper aeroplane to them - with a message in it! (very popular!)
- Send the children a new didgeridoo we have made.
- Send the children lollipops



- Send the children a Lightning McQueen toy!
- Send the children hats
- Send the children photos of us!

Family responses:

- Design a PowerPoint and copy to CD so the children can play it on a laptop, or a filmed DVD of the children undertaking a Yipirinya-inspired art/craft experience
- A CD of the children singing their favourite songs/record greetings and messages for your students.

Educator responses:

- Begin pen pal set up and share drawings, paintings, postcards, photos (from our school as well as our homes/farms etc), experiences and knowledge via mail!

Further discussions led to the collaborative decision that the initial package to Yipirinya would contain drawings along with some information about each of the children within the service. The preschool children grabbed hold of this idea and immediately began planning artwork, photos and thinking about what information they would impart with their new pen pals.

Phase 2

The children got busy creating self-portraits to pass on to Yipirinya School. On the back of the portraits were the following questions, with each individual answer.

- Q1) What do you like about the face you have drawn?
- Q2) What do you like to do best?
- Q3) What is your dream?

The children's comments included the following responses:

- I like my eyes; I can run really fast; I want to be a cake maker-vanilla, rainbow, chocolate and blueberry are my favourites. I want to be an artist and builder when i grow up.
- I like my cowboy hat and my eyes; I'm going to big school next year; I have blue eyes; I have blonde hair; I like to wear my cowboy clothes; I like to help my dad with everything. When I grow up I want to be a cowboy and round up sheep on the motorbike.
- I like my eyes because of the different colours; I like going outback and playing. When I grow up I want to live in Ken and Barbie's castle as Barbie.
- I have brown hair; I'm going to big school next year; I like my house; I like

some of my toys; I love going to day care. When I grow up I want to be a mum with a baby.

- I have blue eyes; I have some freckles on my nose; I like to play with toys; I like to climb on my climbing frame; I like to play with rockets. When I grow up I want to be a gator boy.
- I like eating oranges; I have blue eyes; I have blonde hair; I like to draw; I like to paint; I had a haircut. I'm going to be a policemen when I grow up.
- I like my happy face; I'm just slow but I'm good at peddling my bike. When I grow up I want to be a doctor. I will take babies out of tummy's.
- I have brown eyes; I'm wearing a spotty top; I play with toys at home; I like to play with my friends at preschool; mummy braids my hair. When I grow up I want to be a fairy.

The children and families have also drawn a map of Goulburn and marked out all the places within the community that are important to the children. The artwork will be transformed into books and posted to Yipirinya School.

Story told by Jo Mavrigiannakis, Nominated Supervisor

We learnt the Elders are very approachable and willing to come and spend time with us.

Robertson Community Preschool

Taking our first steps



Robertson Community Preschool is part of Big Fat Smile and is located in the Southern Highlands. The service is a 28 place community based service catering for children aged 2-5 years and is staffed by all long term employees.

Director, Jenine Callaghan, explains how working in an early childhood service dominated by Anglo-Saxon families has presented unique challenges and opportunities to make changes.

Our First Step... Local Elder, Uncle Garry and his Family

During a professional development session on traditional Indigenous games, we met local Elder, Uncle Garry. Uncle Garry was fantastic to chat with; he answered a lot of questions and encouraged us to think about what it was we wanted to achieve. We approached Uncle Garry to ask if he was interested in sharing his culture

with us by coming to the service and spending time with the educators and children - he agreed.

The day of the visit arrived and we were pleasantly surprised to find Uncle Garry and seven other

family members on our doorstep. They played traditional music for us using their own instruments, before long we picked up our own instruments and joined in. The sound of everyone playing music together was wonderful; it became one large jam session with the sounds of the

didgeridoo and tapping sticks everywhere.

Uncle Garry retold Dreaming stories; the children were able to learn many stories and also different storytelling techniques. To follow on from these stories, we participated in art experiences. The children and educators created beautiful works of art using dot painting. Uncle Garry explained that traditionally, within our area, art was not created with dots, but with lines.

The end of the day arrived and we thanked Uncle Garry and his family



We learnt that there are Elders and community members in our area who have a wealth of knowledge about the land, the local people and the local history.

for spending time with us and helping broaden our thoughts and knowledge. Uncle Garry said he and his family would come back when it was warmer and use the sandpit to tell other Dreaming stories, using the sand to show animal tracks.

Our Second Step... Dirt from Central Australia

We wanted to continue to use the knowledge passed on to us and started to see opportunities we previously had not. During a holiday to Kings Canyon in Central Australia, one of our educators collected some red dirt and brought it back to our centre. We felt this was a great experience for the children as they were able to see and touch the earth from a different part of Australia. The children commented on how the dirt felt and looked different to our local dirt. Memories were sparked from when Uncle Garry told



stories by drawing in the dirt, and the children started to use the red dirt in this way.

What We Learnt

We learnt that there are Elders and community members in our area who have a wealth of knowledge about the land, the local people and the local history. We learnt the name of the local area, and we found out we have to ask for permission to display this within our service. We learnt the Elders are very

approachable and willing to come and spend time with us, we just needed to take the first steps to show our interest and extend the hand of friendship. We feel that we have established some wonderful friendships and hope these continue to strengthen throughout the years.

Story written by Jenine Callaghan, Nominated Supervisor and Sharyn Palmer, Include Me Facilitator



Uncle Garry retold Dreaming stories; the children were able to learn many stories and also different storytelling techniques.

Useful Links and Resources

Aboriginal Australia Map

www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/map.html

Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)

www.aecg.nsw.edu.au www.aecsl.org.au

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)

www.aiatsis.gov.au/main.html

Care for kids' ears – strong hearing strong start

careforkidsears.health.gov.au/internet/cfke/publishing.nsf

Deadly Tots

www.deadlytots.com.au/Resources

Implementing an Aboriginal Perspective into any everyday early childhood environment

www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ecconnections/CCH_Vol_11_No1_February_2008.pdf

Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC)

www.indigenous.gov.au/icc

Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU)

www.ipsunswact.com.au

Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC)

www.alc.org.au

National Aboriginal Islander Children's Day (NAICD)

www.snaicc.asn.au

Yulunga – Traditional Indigenous Games

www.ausport.gov.au/participating/indigenous/resources/games_and_activities/full_resource



Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences.

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for the Council of Australian Government. (2009). Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Canberra: DEEWR.



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