

TALKING QUALITY: SPECIAL EDITION REFLECTING ON COVID-19



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Welcome

Welcome to our second Special Edition of Talking Quality for 2020. In our first Special Edition this year we highlighted many positive stories that demonstrated the resilience and strength of the Education and Care sector.

In this edition we are again sharing positive stories and reflections through photographs and brief commentary. This has been provided by a variety of services in response to visits and calls made as a part of the Wellbeing Support visits and phone call program we have conducted over the past months.

This more pictorial coverage of the COVID-19 Pandemic allows us to share the impact this unusual time has had on educators, families and children. It provides an opportunity for us to become aware of others within the sector and to reflect on everyone's journey.

Each service will have a story to tell, this edition may prompt you to consider your story, what can be learnt from this story, and what changes could be instigated by reflection.

Guiding Principles of the NQF

- *The rights and best interests of the child are paramount.*
- *Children are successful, competent and capable learners.*
- *Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the framework.*
- *Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued.*
- *The role of parents and families is respected and supported.*
- *Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.*

But it is raining, we can’t go outsidecan we? Wattle Early Childhood Centre

At Wattle Early Childhood Centre, “We encourage children to play in all environments and weather and to experience the natural world in all its fundamental elements” – *Philosophy 2020*.

Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic this was an element that we truly had to reflect on and reconsider our practices. In a “normal” world, there are often times when the children come inside to do different learning experiences, have quiet time and eat meals or to simply engage in the indoor environment. To comply and implement social distancing measures as best we could, we chose to take the service outside which allowed more room and opportunities for children and educators to keep a safe distance more practically.



Heading into winter, the cold and flu season and with a pandemic on our hands, we discovered the need to re-educate our families and educators around the importance of outdoor play (intentional and free play), as well as address and recognise our philosophy statement of experiencing all fundamental weather elements and reminding ourselves that “there is no such thing as poor weather,

just poor clothing” as this was of paramount importance.

Canberra autumn was good to us with such mixed weather including plenty of rain and sunshine, and it was evident that engaging in the outdoors presented its own unique opportunities for learning and discovery, which we value as essential for a child’s development.

**Prepared by Ashleigh Daly (Director) and
Fiona Allen (Assistant Director/Pedagogical Leader)**



Wattle Early Childhood Centre continued...



Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ How well has your service's statement of philosophy informed your practice during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
- ⇒ How important is your statement of philosophy in explaining practice to families and in reassuring families through difficult times?
- ⇒ Reviewing your philosophy regularly is important. At your next review of your statement of philosophy consider asking the question—How well did our philosophy serve us during the Pandemic ?



Suggested Links

- ⇒ [Reviewing Your Service Philosophy](#)
- ⇒ [We Hear You – The cycle of self-assessment and Continuous Improvement. What do you need to consider? – Part 5. Philosophy.](#)
- ⇒ [Revising the Service Philosophy](#)



Early Childhood Australia

Australian Capital Territory Branch

As you may know the ACT Pedagogical Leadership Network (the Network) became a sub-committee of the ECA ACT Branch in 2019 as part of the Network's Strategic Plan. At the ECA ACT Branch AGM in 2020 Kylie Keane and Rowena Muir were elected as President and Vice President of the Branch and as such the Network was brought in as part of the Branch's regular functions.

This move will assist to streamline our communication, our advocacy, our commitment to professional learning and of course the ongoing Education and Care Gala Awards. Please ensure you are following the ECA ACT Branch Facebook Page for all future events and communication, especially news surrounding the

Education and Care Sector Gala. We also encourage ECA ACT members to update their contact details by emailing ECAACT@earlychildhood.org.au

Lastly, a quick reminder that membership of ECA ensures that you are kept informed of the latest practice, research and policy in the sector while also accessing exclusive benefits and discounts. Most importantly, you will be supporting ECA to be a voice for young children.

www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/become-a-member/

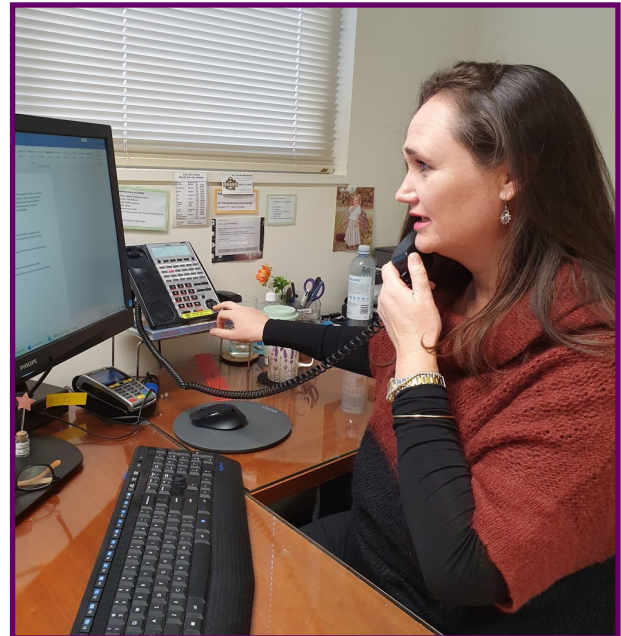
Our advocacy for strong open relationships with families informed our way forward

Gungahlin Children's Centre

The declaration of the Pandemic initially saw attendances decline. At Gungahlin Children's Centre we are advocates of building strong open relationships with families. We knew it would be critical to remain in contact with families self-isolating. Educators and Directors kept in touch weekly with all families by phone. These phone calls assisted us to continue to build relationships, check on personal and family wellbeing and gave us the opportunity to offer support where needed.

Our transition back to full attendance has been smooth and gradual and catered to the particular needs of each family and their children.

Prepared by Samantha Menzies, Director



Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ Has decision making been made difficult because you and your team did not reference your philosophy, any relevant codes of ethics, or sets of guiding principles to guides your actions?
- ⇒ Have you reflected on the decisions made, why they were made and how this process could potentially be made easier in the future?



Suggested Links

CECA worked with Catherine Hydon to develop the resource "Making difficult decisions—choosing the right thing to do to move forward". If you have not viewed this please use the following link

<https://vimeo.com/420908202/6d74c558e6> or view it on our [Facebook](#) page.

Focusing on the concept of “spread kindness”

Communities@Work Palmerston OSHC



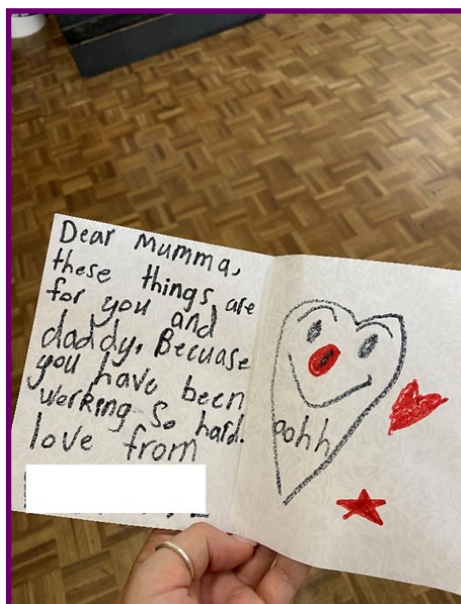
During the Covid-19 lockdown period the children at Communities@Work Palmerston OSHC service brought their parents/carers to tears when they surprised them with amazing hand-made care packages the children had thoughtfully made for their hardworking and stressed parents and carers (mainly essential workers).

One parent cried when she was given her gift by her daughter and read the lovingly written note. She'd had a very challenging day at the hospital as a nurse and the gift just made her day.

The baskets were filled with handmade bath

bombs, lip scrubs, calming lavender spray, beaded bracelets and keychains, and chocolate fudge brownies. Along with a jar full of IOU coupons for hugs and kind gestures, and handwritten notes to their loved ones. Just what they needed!

The children at Palmerston OSHC have since been focusing on the concept of “spread kindness”. This involves completing a set kindness task each week, for example writing a letter to a loved one.



Prepared by Brittney Crawford



A question you may like to ask:

- ⇒ How important has it been over the past months to work with children on concepts such as empathy and kindness? How have you included this into your program?



Suggested Links

[ACECQA Information Sheet – Supporting educator wellbeing through these challenging times](#)

[Be You – Coronavirus \(Covid-19\): Supporting educators, children and young people.](#)

“The Little Bird” Community Garden Woden Valley Child Care Centre

“The Little Bird” community garden and street library support children to build their sense of belonging and develop an understanding of how to build wider community connections. Woden Valley Child Care Centre created a little community garden over the past months. The garden is providing a peaceful spot for health care workers to rest and enjoy a good read among some greenery.

Prepared by Paulina Jagus, Director



Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ How have you worked with your service community to be a part of offering support and solutions during recent months?
- ⇒ Have you formed any networks or support systems that you will continue to engage with moving forward?
- ⇒ How have the events of recent months helped you to form a concept of the importance of education and care in our community? How can this be used positively in the future?

Easing Anxiety About New Expectations

Wanniassa Out of School Hours Care

During term two, when supermarkets brought in restrictions and physical distancing markers the children spoke about this a lot during their time with us and some expressed their fears and concerns about the virus. The children then set up a shop and role played going to the supermarket and buying food with the restrictions and physical distancing markers. This has helped ease some of the anxiety the children were experiencing.

Positive feedback was received from parents. We found we were really able to make a deeper connection with families during the school shut down period.

Prepared by Kordie (Cordelia) Leicht, Wanniassa Out of School Hours Care Coordinator



Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ How can we use play to assist children in understanding their world?
- ⇒ What strategies can we use to better understand the impact of the past months on children and their families?
- ⇒ Where can we go to get help to support children and families?

Reflections on the importance of our role in School Age Care during COVID-19 and on the development of meaningful connections in our community.

Canberra Girls Grammar School Age Care

COVID-19 has presented varying challenges for our service over the past few months. In March when the school closed its doors to all but children of essential workers, we dropped from around 70-80 children a day to two to three children. We took the quieter period of time as an opportunity to refine our programming and planning, spending our time researching ways to improve practices and better meet quality standards. We simplified our program, and engaged the few children we had to help provide activities and experiences they wanted to participate in.

Our April school holiday period was quiet with no excursions or incursions, with three staff and about nine children we tried to make each day full of fun activities as it was hard on some students to still have to come to school every day. We aimed to make our environment the safest space, upping our hygiene practices and providing activities that children requested and enjoyed. We pulled out a large parachute from the sports storeroom and turned our service space into a huge circus tent, which was something the children found exciting, dance parties were requested often, and we even had a movie day in the tent.

During Term 2 we opened back up but suffered a reduction in the number of children enrolled with many families still working from home. Our casual staff came back, and we began the process of putting into effect the planning we had undertaken during the lockdown period, we took this time to transition back into regular and improved practices. We focused on building strong relationships with our students, some of which we had not seen for two months.

During our Winter school holiday period we made the decision to get out and amongst the community and engage in outdoor based excursions. We went to the National Arboretum, which despite being a foggy day with a grey view was a fun day out for our students. We also went to the Jerrabomberra Wetlands for a nature walk in the following week. We felt it was important that after cancelling excursions during Summer due to bushfire smoke and in April due to COVID-19 restrictions, that we took the chance to get outside and allow our children the opportunity to reconnect with nature. We ensured that we were allowed to undertake these excursions by contacting ACT Health, CECA and our school community, once we gained confirmation we set in place risk assessments and ensured that we would maintain effective hand hygiene while out in the community.

Term 3 proved to be a challenging time for us with fluctuations in bookings and with many educators requiring time off due to University commitments that had been postponed from the beginning of the year. We ensured that our program was child-directed, as one of our core philosophies is providing opportunities for children's agency throughout our afternoons. We engaged our older students and sought their help in running group activities, also gaining their voices in the program through requested activities, which they researched with an educator. Our focus for Term 3 was for children to feel safe, secure and supported within our environment, which we felt was especially important since their year had been full of routine changes and challenges.

In our upcoming Spring school holidays, we have planned an excursion and incursion every day to provide children with a truly fun filled holiday program. It was our view that our children had missed out on a lot in the past 10 months and we would provide them with an action-packed experience while we had the opportunity.

Canberra Girls Grammar School Age Care continued...



While this year has been challenging, it has also been a time for us to truly reflect on the importance of our role in School Age Care and focus on meaningful connections with those within our community. We have learnt to be flexible and resilient and hope that our experiences this year will help guide us in the future.

Prepared by Molly-Jean Hulands Manager After School Care/Holiday Program



Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ How have you used the last few months to reflect on the National Quality Standard and the importance of areas such as children's sense of agency and belonging to a community?
- ⇒ How important is children's sense of agency and belonging in enhancing wellbeing and reducing stress and frustration during difficult times?