

**Final Report and Overview of Outcomes from the Early Childhood Education and
Care Workforce Best Practice and Innovation Project
Lady Gowrie NSW
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Contact for this report

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Introduction

This project, funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) was developed by Lady Gowrie NSW the provider of Indigenous Professional Support Unit NSW and ACT (IPSU NSW/ ACT).

Lady Gowrie Child Centre NSW (Gowrie NSW) has been the provider of the Indigenous Professional Support Unit for New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) since 2006.

Project Background

This best practice and innovation project aimed to provide a 'sister service' opportunity through partnering MACS services, (two regional (Dubbo and Tamworth) and one city based (Campbelltown)) with a community based non-Aboriginal child care centre in the same locality to create an environment where there can be a mutual exchange of ideas and experiences. The project did this through conducting:

- joint staff meetings;
- staff exchange opportunities; and
- combined training sessions.

There are 10 MACS in NSW & ACT providing quality care and education to predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, though they are accessible to all children. The 3 MACS participating in this project were selected due to stable staffing environment, diversity of geographical location and ultimately willingness to participate. The identified MACS services are innovative and proud of the education and support offered to the children and families within their community. We acknowledge the undertaking from Mary Chatfield (Oorunga Wandarrah), Shirley Wilson (Allira), and Louise Cave (Birrelee) to support and encourage their staff teams.

The non-Aboriginal services were selected through reference to and advice from the Inclusion Support Agency (ISA) in each region. The staff in these agencies provided great insight into the services that might best meet the project objectives and had demonstrated inclusive practices in the past. The support of each ISA was instrumental in establishing the foundations of this project. Gowrie NSW was conscious of the importance of a streamlined approach using the existing structures and contacts with the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP).

Of importance in selecting the non-Aboriginal services was the need to include a diverse range of providers and we acknowledge the following:-

- The commitment of Dubbo City Council in support of this project allowing and encouraging Rainbow Cottage Children’s Centre to participate
- The commitment of Westside Baptist Church in Campbelltown in providing the opportunity for Guardian Angel Pre-School Kindergarten to undertake this project
- Ms Stacey Hardcastle, the Owner/Director of Rumpus Room Early Childhood Centre at Tamworth. Her commitment to participate has demonstrated her knowledge and understanding of the possible outcomes in working collaboratively with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Tamworth

Background Information

Campbelltown

Staff (primary care) employed in centre – Oorunga Wandarrah have 7, Guardian Angel have 6.

Staff (12) involved in Project by qualification

Teacher – 1

Diploma – 2

Associate Diploma – 1

Cert 3 – 4

No Formal Qualifications – 4

Years of experience at centres combined – 92 years

Dubbo

Staff (primary care) employed in centre – Allira – originally 6 but 1 left service after 1st session and wasn’t replaced, Rainbow Cottage have 7.

Staff (12) involved by qualification

Teacher – 3

Diploma – 3

Associate Diploma – 0

Cert 3 – 3
No Formal Qualifications – 4
Years of experience at centres combined – 145 years

Tamworth

Staff (primary care) employed in centre – Birrelee have 7 (cook attended all sessions and bus driver attended 1 – these staff assist in the rooms for staff breaks etc), Rumpus Room have 10 including part time.

Staff (13) involved by qualification

Teacher – 3

Diploma – 4

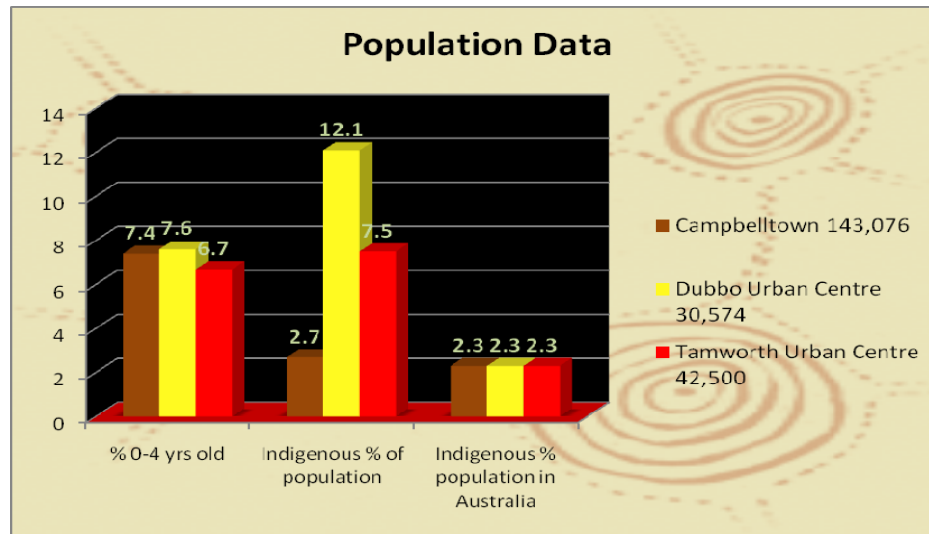
Associate Diploma – 2

Cert 3 – 3

No Formal Qualifications – 1

Years of experience at centres combined – 96.6 years

As background information the following information for each geographical area has been obtained through Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 (www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS):



Project Aims

A key aim of the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS) / Non-Aboriginal Child Care Centres Partnerships project was to increase the capacity of Aboriginal childcare educators to work collaboratively with non-Aboriginal services to support engagement with local Aboriginal children and families. In broader terms, it was a local focus on “closing the gap”. The project also enabled non-Aboriginal childcare services to acknowledge and work with Aboriginal services in an experiential way where they were challenged to reflect on their own practice.

Achieving these aims required a collaborative partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early childhood educators to ensure that Aboriginal children and families experience the same quality services and educational opportunities as the rest of the community. This aim clearly aligns with DEEWR's early childhood agenda and that of COAG in building social capital and a competent and productive workforce.

The relationship that Gowrie NSW has established with the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) throughout NSW has provided a unique opportunity to enhance cultural awareness and professional competencies by linking these MACS with non-Aboriginal child care centres in their respective community.

Implementation of the Project

The MACS provided the venue for the initial meetings. Subsequent meetings rotated between the MACS and non-Aboriginal services providing the opportunity for all to showcase their physical environment and share ideas. The project funded up to five staff from each service to attend three staff meetings, including a training event. The commitment was such that up to ten staff from each service were in attendance at various times. Clearer communication may have resulted in more staff attending the first meeting as there was the assumption on the part of some centres that it was limited to five staff rather than funded for five staff.

An initial survey was conducted with all staff members from each service prior to the first staff meeting to establish the base level of knowledge and what each person wanted to achieve as a result of the project. 100% of surveys were returned within the requested timeframe. Of some interest in the results was the hope that they developed more understanding of the Aboriginal culture. This comment was made by both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff.

Some survey responses demonstrated diverse educational backgrounds and experience in early childhood rather than cultural diversity, as evident in the responses to the question 'What are the benefits of play for a child?':

A Teacher in an Aboriginal service replied 'play is a child's work, it is the way children learn and develop all areas. Imagination has no limits during play. This provides great opportunities to teach new concepts and re visit already explored ones. Play also benefits children further by developing social skills and sharing interest with their peers, building new friendships and exploring how to do things in a team'.

A staff member from an Aboriginal service with no formal qualifications but significant experience replied 'learning to have fun, sharing, caring and respect'.

A Teacher in a non-Aboriginal service replied to the same question 'play is the means through which children learn. Play allows children to explore & understand the world around them & provides an opportunity for all areas of development to be refined

and mastered. Play provides the opportunity for children to engage in relationships with others and challenge their own thinking.'

A staff member from a non Aboriginal service with no formal qualifications replied 'they learn through play how to take turns, how to socially interact'.

Cultural Diversity **was** evident in survey responses when asked 'How would you define high quality child care?'

A Teacher in an Aboriginal service responded 'when we have contributed to the development & ability of a child to belong & have a strong & healthy attitude to self'.

A Teacher in a non-Aboriginal service responded 'A service that is positive, nurturing and that caters to children's individual needs. A service that strives for best practice by ensuring that staff training is available regularly, policies & procedures are reviewed regularly and where staff, children & families communicate regularly and effectively'.

Survey Summary

Strengths Identified for Different Service Types

Aboriginal Services in Summary

- Knowledge of the community they directly service through interactions with the wider Aboriginal community members
- Family involvement through community life as buses bring most children to and from the centre
- Implementation of local Aboriginal language in the centre
- These services have a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and there is a very strong commitment of both in bridging the gap for Aboriginal children.
- Health screening for Aboriginal children
- All services provide time for staff to develop program and resources for children
- Strong emphasis on equity and accessibility for all socio economic groups
- Access to Aboriginal Elders to ensure cultural relevance and identity

Non-Aboriginal Services in summary

- Accreditation
- Diversity of cultures that attend the services
- Strategies for inclusion of children and the recognition of support agencies to build the capacity of families
- Family involvement through daily interactions at the service
- Holistic development of all children through programming and reflective practice
- Understanding of the regulatory requirements

Both service types

- Commitment to children and the importance of the early years of life
- Willingness to learn and share information
- Determination to form networking opportunities between the centres on an ongoing basis
- The recognition that each service needs to be warm and welcoming to all families and that you have to know your own community to achieve this
- Long term families using the service with generational attendance

Areas/knowledge to Develop for Different Service Types

Aboriginal Services

- Understanding of Aboriginal people outside their own direct community
- Understanding of other cultures and how to create an inclusive environment
- Accreditation and other legislative requirements
- Routines that support children's independence

Non-Aboriginal Services

- Understanding of Aboriginal culture and how to ensure they are welcoming
- Reflecting on current practices
- How to utilise more time out of the centre for the children and still meet all regulatory requirements

Both service types

- Knowing more about the Aboriginal culture outside of people within their own communities and their own individual stories
- Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Quality Standards

Project Components

Staff Meetings

These meetings were facilitated by Helen Lane, Executive Director Sector and Consulting Lady Gowrie NSW and Judith McKay-Tempest, IPSU Coordinator NSW/ACT. The 'rules of engagement' were identified and agreed within each group to ensure meetings were respectful. The agenda used as a basis for discussion within the meetings is attached to the report.

As in any new environment, some people were feeling self conscious and in some cases were keen to highlight the great things about their respective services. Each centre philosophy was discussed and reflection about what each service values. This action also created the opportunity for each service to reflect on the time span since the last review of philosophy. The non-Aboriginal services reflected on this requirement as part of the Accreditation process.

Children's behaviour was discussed, with staff from the Aboriginal centres explaining how their children are usually quite self sufficient and are generally given a fair amount of freedom in play. The staff said that while the children rely on observation to learn, the IPSU program and support during the past 2 years has demonstrated the enhanced outcomes possible when staff are selectively involved in play with the children. The staff spoke about how the Aboriginal children tended to sort out their own fights. The project was described in more detail and the staff swap opportunity was a point of great interest. By the end of the first staff meeting each service was talking about what activities they might both be involved in together – right through to next year!

Dinner was provided as part of the project and sharing a meal became an important feature of all events as it provided an informal opportunity for staff to get to know each other and 'yarn'.

The final staff meeting in all regions demonstrated a significant change to the first with all staff very engaged in conversation and more staff members attending. Staff discussed what new skills/knowledge they had achieved as a result of the project.

Campbelltown

Five staff members from Oorunga Wandarrah MACS and five staff members from Guardian Angel Children's Service each attended the initial staff meeting held at Oorunga Wandarrah on Wednesday 12 August 09 with ten again at the meeting held on 16 November.

Routines and practices were discussed at some length as each service revealed the different approach to transitions within the day. Staff commented that it was a good experience for them when asked to identify their strengths as they had not explored this before. This reflective practice provided affirmation of what they do well and provided the basis for further development from a strengths based approach rather than a deficit model.

Dubbo

Five staff from Allira and six staff from Rainbow Cottage attended the first meeting held at Allira on 26 August 2009. At the meeting held on 29 October 2009 there were also eleven staff in attendance.

The regional needs and political environment within the Dubbo region were very different to those identified in Campbelltown. Allira operates at 100% utilisation with an extensive waiting list. Rainbow Cottage has a number of Aboriginal children attending and looked forward to learning more and developing skills in engaging more effectively with the local Aboriginal community. The topics discussed during this initial meeting provided some challenges and wonderful insights as each team revealed current practices and outcomes for the children, staff and families.

Tamworth

Eight staff from Birrelee and five staff from Rumpus Room attended the first meeting held at Birrelee on 1st September 09. At the meeting held on 2 December there were sixteen staff in attendance.

The non-Aboriginal service (Rumpus Room) is actually situated in the predominantly Aboriginal area of Tamworth and next door to the Community Centre, which the Aboriginal community utilise regularly even operating a soup kitchen there on a Tuesday evening. The Director reported that although a significant number of their enrolments are children from an Aboriginal background, they had made no contact with Birrelee or the Community Centre. Staff from both centres spoke about their aim to come together but had just not had the time to do so. They spoke about this project being the catalyst for this and were very pleased to be involved. The services compared philosophies and established that the quantifiable difference was the absolute Aboriginal context in which Birrelee operates.

Staff from Birrelee spoke about the need to establish routines that met the needs of the children, were relaxed and more flowing in the structure of the day, including for example, a walk to the local park.

Training Event

There was significant discussion regarding the training component of the project and all the services requested the training be held at the second staff meeting rather than at the end of the project. The COAG Agenda has created a very dynamic environment for early childhood professionals and staff have reflected anxiously on how things might change through the introduction of the EYLF. Two of the three geographical areas requested their training be directly linked to EYLF and how practices would indeed reflect 'best practice' through EYLF. While the MACS services are not required to undergo Accreditation both Allira and Birrelee determined this would support their understanding and implementation of high quality child care that links directly to government requirements.

Staff in the Campbelltown region determined that 'Guiding Behaviour' would significantly enhance their understanding and implementation of supporting children to develop strategies to enhance their self image and ability to manage their own behaviour in a cultural context. All these staff expressed the need to 'revisit' this developmental outcome as there were struggles with coping with perceived challenging behaviours.

Training facilitators were selected based on the knowledge, experience and cultural inclusion practices each person had demonstrated throughout Gowrie's significant network of early childhood professionals.

Campbelltown

Guiding Behaviour Training 'You're Not the Boss of Me' was undertaken at Guardian Angel Pre School Kindergarten with seven staff from Guardian Angel and five staff from Oorunga Wandarrah attending. The training included the work of Dr. Louise Porter to explore triggers to children's behaviour and approaches to guide children to explore their feelings and how they can cope with those feelings. Staff also explored how adults contribute to children's behaviour. Donna Brooks who facilitated this training has had extensive experience working in early childhood as coordinator of several long day care services, occasional care centres and a family day care scheme. Donna has been a Validator Support Officer for the NCAC and over the last six years, provided training for Lady Gowrie including Quality Assurance, Guiding Behaviour and Programming for all service types throughout NSW. Donna's work in very remote and regional NSW and her understanding of inclusive practice provided the opportunity for successful professional development.

Small group discussion during the training identified the similarities of behaviours that staff found challenging and how each person's background and experiences influenced how they reacted. This diversity could not be identified as cultural alone however the people from an Aboriginal background said that their direct knowledge of the family situation sometimes helped them identify why a child may be behaving in a way that could be seen as socially unacceptable or not appropriate.

Staff commented that it was helpful to reflect on the expectations they have of children and whether in fact they are realistic and appropriate for the individual child. A staff member commented that she wanted the children to sit still at extended group times because they'd have to do that at school or they would get into trouble. This was proving problematic as the children didn't want to sit. While this staff person was an Aboriginal woman, her expectations were based on her own experience at school rather than any cultural expectations. The trainer was able to support the staff by looking at the environment within the centre and how to establish a place where the children could be challenged safely and be provided with choices for involvement.

Staff commented about the strategies that were provided during the training as being really positive and things that they hadn't thought of using e.g. utilise small group activities throughout the day rather than one large group. The trainer has reflected on comments made during the training regarding the habits and practices that have been used for a long time and that they may not always be the best way of doing things. Staff expressed that they were keen to make changes in their own environment.

Dubbo

EYLF training held at Rainbow Cottage Children's Centre on 30th September 09 was provided by Melissa Smith, Lecturer at Charles Stuart University and most

importantly a local Aboriginal person. Participants were provided with an overview of the EYLF and an opportunity to workshop strategies on how they would proceed with the framework. Melissa has agreed to return to Allira for both staff teams to further develop their understanding of the EYLF and assist them in implementation.

Eight staff from Rainbow Cottage and three staff from Allira attended this training session. Staff who attended indicated that they would share the information with their colleagues at their next staff meeting.

Most useful results from this training were the importance of involving children and families in each child's learning. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff were challenged in reflective practices to establish where they felt the centre practices were in the sense of Belonging, Being and Becoming. The Aboriginal staff expressed the importance for Aboriginal children to develop their own sense of culture, background and belonging through early childhood. Several staff expressed the value in their own ability to advocate for the children both inside the child care environment as well as in the broader community. All staff commented how good it was to actually be introduced to the terminology in the document and to be able to reflect on what it meant to each of them. Some staff members felt the workshop was too fast and would like more time to reflect and learn about the EYLF and what it means for them.

Tamworth

EYLF Training was held at Rumpus Room Early Childhood Centre on 17th November and facilitated by Dr Leonie Arthur, Head of Program, Early Childhood, University of Western Sydney and a consortium member of the EYLF development group. Eight staff from Birrelee and nine staff from Rumpus Room attended this training. Staff from both services commented on how important it is to help children identify their own culture. A significant outcome was the commitment from three staff (two from Birrelee and one from Rumpus Room) to enrol in an Early Childhood degree course. This recognition was directly linked to the information provided by Dr Arthur from the COAG Agenda Early Childhood Workforce strategies with the aim of Certificate 3 being a minimum qualification in child care as well as the requirement of four year university trained teachers for children in the year prior to school. The Directors from both services have agreed to provide a 'cross mentor' role for these three staff. This workshop was evaluated as too short with so much discussion about the future of the early childhood sector and training that would potentially be required. These services had not previously had exposure to this type of academic understanding.

Staff Swap

This was the most anticipated component of the project and one that the staff were excited but nervous about. The swap was commenced at varying times by each area and was built around the needs of the centres rather than an arbitrary date set within the project. While the whole day of attendance was more effective due to the fact that they were in the centre for the longer time, it could not be determined that this was the correct timeframe for all the staff as each centre was so different. We recommend that if half days are to be the timeframe for the staff to swap, then they achieve this on multiple occasions. All staff said that they were glad this event was after the staff meeting and training event as they felt very comfortable both going to the other service and also welcoming a person into their own service.

Each Director was asked to ensure a mentor or support person was available to guide the incoming staff person through the routines and practices on the day. All services have expressed their commitment to continuing the staff swap opportunity throughout 2010. The services that had advised the families using the service of their involvement in the project reported that they had been encouraged by the families' positive reactions. It is recommended that centres involve or advise their families of the project and the prospective outcomes at the commencement of any continuing project opportunities.

Campbelltown

Four staff from the Guardian Angel and Oorunga Wandarrah centres were involved in a full day swap across several weeks. The children from the MACS are dropped off daily by the centre bus and staff from Guardian Angel queried how the families are involved and how they find out information about the children without the daily contact at drop off time. The sense of belonging in the local Aboriginal community created very clear lines of communication at the MACS with the staff knowing what was happening with each family. The Director would call the family if there was any additional information required.

The staff from MACS commented on the routines and structure of the day at Guardian Angel as it was very relaxed and the children were expected to take responsibility for their physical environment by packing away equipment/supplies when they had finished playing with it. Guardian Angel staff commented on how there was a sense of a big family at the MACS with everyone feeling connected.

Children from both services asked about the staff on each following day and asked for them to come back.

Both services commented on the similarity in the community they serviced.

Dubbo

Four staff from the Allira and Rainbow Cottage centres participated in the staff swap and both services will continue this through 2010 as they simply ran out of time to get all the staff through. Challenges were trying to work out the logistics with different centre opening hours and shifts as well as who would go from a licensing/ratio perspective.

Staff from both services commented on how welcome they felt and that the children were confident enough to approach them. They did cooking experiences together and a MACS staff person did some informal story telling which was much appreciated by the children at Rainbow Cottage. She was specifically asked for by the children the next day. Parents from Rainbow Cottage gave very positive feedback to the Director about the MACS staff participation.

The commitment of these two services to the success of this project has been evident through the completion of two joint excursions with children and staff from both centres catching the train from Dubbo to Wellington, picnicking in the park together, and then returning to Dubbo by train. Staff and children from Rainbow Cottage attended Allira to celebrate National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week. Both Directors are hoping to organise a community picnic in 2010 inviting the families and children from both services.

100% of the staff involved in this project stated that it had broken down barriers within the community.

Tamworth

Nine staff from Birrelee (including the bus driver!) and three staff from Rumpus Room were involved in the staff swap in half days. The Rumpus Room was impacted on by staff shortages and was unable to send any further staff at that time though two of the staff that were not involved had completed a practicum at the MACS when studying. All staff commented on how good it was to be challenged going outside their own 'comfort zone' and enjoyed seeing the different ways that each service was setup and the experiences that were available to children.

Staff from Rumpus Room reflected on the words and interactions that they heard used at Birrelee and how the local Aboriginal language is a part of the children's daily routine through access to a DVD made locally through Birrelee.

Staff shared programming formats and offered to fill staffing gaps at each others' service when required rather than call for a casual staff person.

Project Outcomes

Enhanced Cultural Awareness and Professional Competencies

One of the main aims of the project was to break down some of the inherent barriers and misunderstandings between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early childhood professionals. Aboriginal professionals often operate in an environment where they are peripheral to the non-Aboriginal. This involves both positives and negatives. On the one hand, Aboriginal services are culturally responsive and staff feel valued and unique. On the other, staff can feel isolated from their non-Aboriginal professional colleagues and thereby miss out on professional development opportunities. For non-Aboriginal services, particularly in rural and regional areas, Aboriginal services and culture can be perceived as unapproachable and these services are often reluctant or don't really know how to build professional relationships.

One of the key approaches to the project was to demystify both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal services in the eyes of each other and to build genuine professional relationships based on knowledge and trust so that staff could exchange good practice and ideas and learn from each other

With an objective of 'closing the gap', the staff swap component of the project provided the most significant opportunity to work together in sharing the space and time to observe, play and enrich each other's lives with what child care means to each individual. The working conditions of each service were discussed displaying the openness and engaging commitment that had developed in such a short time. Staff from the MACS were involved in storytelling with the children at the non-Aboriginal service and staff from the non-Aboriginal service engaged in music and drama with the children and staff at the MACS.

Anecdotal reflections included how confident children were in both environments, demonstrating the self esteem and identity they hold. The relevant environments are obviously enriching the children's lives, setting a great example for families and community. Comments from staff in one of the non-Aboriginal services after the staff swap such as 'the MACS day was so relaxing', 'the children were engaged in play without direction' and 'it felt like the whole thing was one big family' emphasise the cultural relevance and importance of Aboriginal child care and education being provided by Aboriginal organisations and staff. Staff in a MACS service commented on how the children in the non-Aboriginal service took responsibility for their environment and initiated putting materials and equipment away. The structure of each service and operational issues were identified as diverse and relevant to each of the communities they serviced. Participants compared the advantages and disadvantages of each and considered what aspects of their own service could be improved through this information. The community involvement was reflected differently in each area and of particular note was that at Rainbow Cottage, Dubbo, all parents were apprised of this project prior to its commencement.

Development of “Best Practice” that is Meaningful and Respectful

Best Practice is often a contentious term as it implies that one way of doing things is “the best”. However, it is also a useful term because it helps professionals engage with the idea of striving for continuous improvement and new ideas. In the early childhood environment this also links to evidence based practice and the regulatory environment and accreditation. The project challenged all participants to reflect on their interpretation of best practice as well as how they have experienced it in their professional practice.

The project enabled staff to engage with the EYLF in an experiential way and to use evidence based practice to identify good practice and to identify areas where they could learn new things or engage in the diversity of ideas. In relation to “Belonging” the non-Aboriginal services learnt a great deal about community capacity building and identity from the Aboriginal services. For example, children arrive at the Aboriginal services by bus and the non-Aboriginal services wondered how they would engage with families if they did not see them at drop-off. The Aboriginal services demonstrated how extended Aboriginal family and cultural networks mean that there are many opportunities through community cultural events and family meetings to engage with families. This lack of formality and level of engagement with the community as a whole is a strength of the Aboriginal services.

The project enabled participants to reflect on how the idea of best practice is culturally determined and how each professional and service had their own way of interpreting this. For example sharing centre philosophies and how those philosophies impacted on practices, guiding behaviour strategies that were culturally appropriate in each setting, and observing the routines established within each service. Significantly, the routines emphasised the different approach each service incorporates in planning for best practice and in fact what best practice means in each environment. New skills noted by staff included visuals to guide children, allowing children more opportunities to ‘own’ their environment and the minimalist approach to setting out experiences and allowing children to add to them. All staff indicated that they needed more time in larger blocks in each service to truly appreciate the meaning of culturally ideal practices.

Meaningful Professional Development

Staff in each service identified their training needs through peer group discussion and reference to the goals of this project. Participants noted that the COAG Early Childhood Agenda was impacting on all child care and education environments at this time and that it provides opportunities and challenges for the sector. The EYLF is challenging early childhood educators on many levels and this impacted on the staff training selection. Staff identified that a sense of Belonging is a fundamental area to extend practice and that guiding behaviour was an area for practical skills development.

The EYLF has been discussed on government websites, sector organisations and the Professional Support Coordination teams in each state and territory, and early childhood professionals have been very keen and anxious to find out as much information as possible. The document had just been distributed at the commencement of this project and the staff involved took the opportunity to access this information and determine how it might be utilised. The EYLF has been embraced as a new tool to highlight quality practice and interactions with children and families. However, it also challenges professionals to reflect on their own skills and understandings in a range of areas.

The diversity of skills and professional development identification resulted in very different training events in each location. For example, in one area the group reflected on the current skills within the teams and identified the need to build their knowledge and capacity to respond to children in a culturally appropriate way. Staff sometimes struggle with the best way to deal with “challenging behaviours” and conflict between children. Rather than presenting a rule book to be followed, the professional development activity focussed on the developmental needs of children and how staff can appropriately respond in a respectful and appropriate way. Gowrie NSW identified an appropriate training package ‘You’re not the boss of me – what happens when children’s behaviour challenges us’ and this was embraced by participants and expressed through evaluations where 100% of participants rated the workshop as effective for them and helpful. The scenarios presented and strategies to explore were a reminder to look beyond the behaviour and explore the feelings and intention of the child.

Further professional development was embedded in the staff meetings and staff swap opportunities.

Skills/Knowledge/Outcomes achieved through project

Campbelltown

- Learning to listen to other stories
- How similar the values shown at the staff swap were to each service
- How culturally diverse the non-Aboriginal services are
- New music to use with all children with specific mention of the ‘Wombat Wobble’ – This music and dance was used with all staff and facilitators at the final staff meeting to close the project and say farewell
- Children can be expected to take some responsibility for their own environment and pack away equipment or activities that they have used
- How much the content and set up of equipment influences how the children interact with it and each other

- Allow children more opportunities to own their environment
- Support children in setting rules
- Need for consistency
- Start with small steps in self-reliance
- Use visuals to guide children
- Using journals for recording
- Use staff meetings to make sure we reflect on the strengths that we have
- How much children mimic our own behaviours

Dubbo

- To be more flexible and take challenges
- To make contact with the staff in the Aboriginal centre (this had been a goal for some time)
- The different ways of settling children into the centre eg. Using attachment theory knowledge
- Feeling confident and comfortable inviting each other to activities and sharing time together eg. NAIDOC week/excursions
- How valuable it is to share information with parents and community
- How often there are reconciliation opportunities
- How the amount of things put out for children directly influences the 'feel' of the day
- That children can be expected to help look after their play environment

Tamworth

- The confidence to communicate with each other professionally and beyond the work setting
- The extended confidence in welcoming Aboriginal families into non-Aboriginal centre

- The awareness of non-Aboriginal services and what they actually do
- Mathematics/science program that IPSU had been delivering in the MACS and how effective this had been for Aboriginal children
- The importance of maintaining the home language
- Highlights included meeting the staff from Gowrie and access to Dr Leonie Arthur through professional development
- The value of simplicity in programming with both services sharing their programming methods
- Observing culturally respectful and appropriate interactions

Where to from here

Campbelltown

- Joint excursions/incursions – to be decided in January and shared with other service
- Access community buses to share excursions
- Joint resource and information sharing through the Directors of each service
- Joint celebrations for all Aboriginal and other cultural specific celebrations
- Joint training events to reduce costs
- Staff swap will continue through 2010
- Each service will now recommend the other to their communities

Dubbo

- More time and larger time blocks for ongoing staff swaps throughout 2010
- Attempt to engage additional centres in Dubbo in principles of the project
- Establish visits for ancillary staff
- Develop more activities with community involvement eg. Family picnic for families from both services
- Children visit each other centres

- Provide a study support program for each other
- Joint training events eg. Guiding behaviour, Music and Movement, 0-3's ideas
- Explore opportunities to market both services in community and Council
- Both services will recommend each other now
- Combined staff night out in 2010

Tamworth

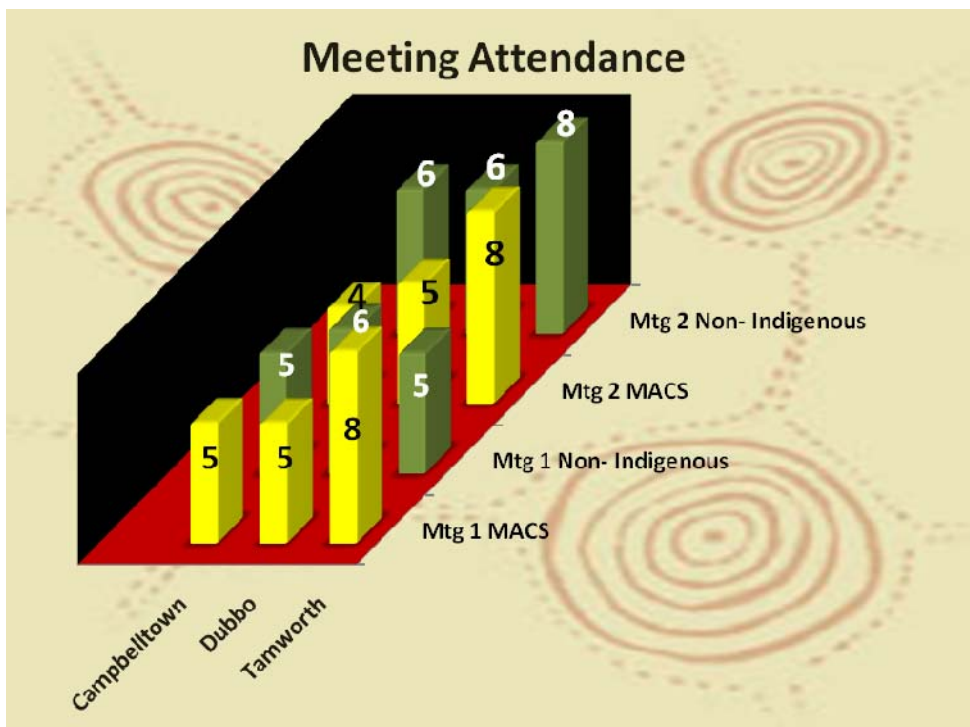
- Joint events for families
- Combined staff meetings to continue unpacking EYLF
- Unpacking EYLF together
- Yarning session
- Opportunities for outside agencies in supporting both services eg. ISA, Aboriginal Employment Service
- Excursions together
- Sharing programming
- Combined training events
- Accessing support through bicultural support
- Ongoing staff exchanges
- Swapping staff to support regulatory requirements eg. Ratios and qualifications
- Referring families to each other's service

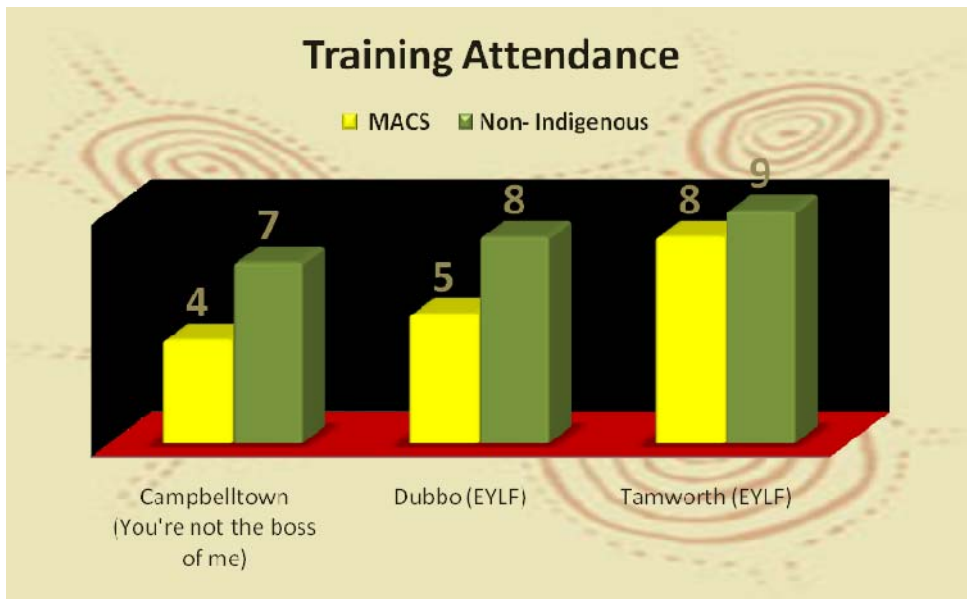
Evaluation

The project was evaluated through focus groups at the end of the project where participants discussed the efficacy of the project and how they would continue to work together to close the gap for Aboriginal children and families. In one area, 2 staff from the Aboriginal service and 1 from the non-Aboriginal service decided to

enrol in Early Childhood Teaching Degrees with UWS and to mentor each other through the process.

- 100% participants wanted the project to continue and have identified next steps to work together by having joint training activities and other professional development.
- 100% participants described their learning as meaningful and relevant to their expectations
- 100% participants reflected that they got more from the project than they ever anticipated
- Aboriginal staff in all services stated that they would recommend the 'sister service' to the Aboriginal community
- 18 staff from the MACS and 20 staff from the non-Aboriginal services participated in staff meetings
- 16 staff from the MACS and 23 staff from the non-Aboriginal services participated in training events





Barriers identified for participation in project

- All centres said the timeframe was too short and would recommend a year to complete this project
- Diverse hours of work and shifts in each centre
- Nervous coming into new service and not knowing what to expect
- Getting to know each other was challenging to begin with
- Funding for 5 staff not enough as centre had to fill the financial gap

Dissemination of information

It is anticipated that this report and/or summary information will be distributed through the IPSU website and Newsletter, National IPSU Alliance Forum, Early Childhood Australia, NIFTeY NSW, NSW IPSP Forum (hosted by DEEWR), Reflections (Gowrie's national magazine), the participating centres, TAFE NSW and Rattler.

Conclusion

For such a small and modestly resourced project this project has had some very effective and potentially enduring outcomes. It enabled a "full and frank" reflection and discussion of different approaches to early childhood education and care and created genuine partnerships between staff and children and families. Over a period of 4 months staff moved from no contact or collaboration to openly engaging with

each other in a professional capacity and establishing practical arrangements to continue working together. Centres have been on joint excursions; arranged to swap staff over Christmas and to establish an Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal community picnic.

The achievements of the project clearly illustrate the ripple effect of using early childhood education and care as a non-threatening and universal contact point to explore common goals and reconciliation. Gowrie is keen to explore further opportunities to extend this project to the other MACS services during 2010. The seed funding has enabled the model to be “test-run” and with sufficient additional funds Gowrie could rollout phase 2 in the rest of NSW and the ACT. This would provide an excellent opportunity to further engage services in the Government’s Early Childhood Agenda in a practical way and to enhancing service delivery for all families.

Prepared by:

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Staff Meeting Agenda

1. Sign in and name tags
2. Acknowledgement of Country
3. Housekeeping and Introduction of each participant
4. Discuss 'rules for engagement'
5. Discussion point – suggestions include but are not limited to:
 - Centre Philosophy
 - Strengths of each service
 - Areas each service would like to improve or learn more about
 - Challenges for each service
 - Guiding behaviour strategies that work well
 - Routines that work well
 - Cultural practices and strengths for sharing
 - Practices to assist transition to school
6. Discussion of staff swap opportunity