Excursions: get off the beaten track! NQS Spotlight: Leadership Community Management Matters + More
What an amazing year we have experienced in our sector! Hopefully you will have at least a brief opportunity to reflect before we leap into a new year... a year that will undoubtedly be about building on those solid foundations laid in 2011.

At Rattler, there has been no rest either as this fabulous 100th edition has unfolded. Over the years, Rattler has been, for me personally, the 'go to' publication for opinions, ideas and inspiration and this issue once again delivers on its original mission. The 100th edition (or 25 years of publication!) is celebrated and praised by some familiar voices and it is easy to see the impact Rattler has had. From a humble newsletter, a vibrant quarterly has grown and continues to be delivered with passion and journalistic integrity.

In this edition, the NQS Spotlight shines on Leadership and Service Management with the article 'Being and Becoming Leaders’ on page 22 in which Manjula Wanigangayake and Anthony Semann show how optimism, resilience and lifelong learning can have a strong influence in leading innovation and change within the early childhood setting.

Early childhood consultant Lisa Bryant checks in on the Regulations asking the important question: ‘How did NSW fare?’ on page 15.

Also in this edition, the livelihood of the community model goes under the microscope with a range of views presented in our vox pop piece ‘Is the Stand Alone Community Model All Too Hard?’ and we profile Inner City Child Care—an education and care service that embodies the core principles of community management.

Let’s not forget the community beyond the physical boundaries of services. Our ‘Step outside!’ article on page 18 explores the world of excursions—their value, opportunities for learning and some practical considerations.

So we know you will enjoy this last issue for the year and trust you will have a few moments to relish the thoughts, ideas and images within. Community Child Care hopes that once the final work is done for 2011 and your end-of-year festivities with children and families have drawn to a close, you will have that last burst of energy to celebrate your fabulous achievements with your own family and friends. We wish you all the best for a peaceful and relaxing break.

Here’s to a great 2012. Community Child Care looks forward to sharing it with you!

Leanne Gibbs, CEO
Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW)
in this issue

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Out and about … children from Auburn Child Care Centre visit the Royal Easter Show. PAGE 18
**Seen DEC’s new site?**

The Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate of DEC is gradually moving material on to the Department of Education and Communities website. The new DEC website can be found at: [www.educationandcommunities.nsw.gov.au](http://www.educationandcommunities.nsw.gov.au)

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**THE REALLY SIMPLE GUIDE TO THE REGULATIONS**

Community Child Care has created *The Really Simple Guide to the Regulations*—a 20-page guide for preschools and LDCs to the main points to know about the Regulations! It’s also available to download for free from [www.ccccnsw.org.au/changes](http://www.ccccnsw.org.au/changes)

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**Awarding sustainability**

The 2011 Sprout Awards recognised outstanding practice in sustainable projects at NSW children’s services.

This year’s winner of the ‘Connecting to Nature’ category was John Brotchie Nursery School in Botany, with Stewart Street Children’s House in Wollongong as runner-up. The winner of the Sustainability category was Bright Start Preschool in Bateau Bay with KU Rushcutter’s Bay preschool as runner-up.

The Sprout Awards were announced at the Community Child Care and ECEEN’s ‘Early Childhood Environments and the NQS’ conference held in Sydney in November.

Winners are grinners ... (above) director of Bright Start Preschool, Nicole Bollom; (right, pictured on right) Rebecca Andrews, director of John Brotchie Nursery School.

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**ECEC TEACHERS WHO ROCK!**

A range of NSW teachers are finalists in the National Excellence in Teaching (NEITA) Awards.

Community Child Care would like to congratulate NSW ECEC teachers, including: Jan Wright of Tregear Presbyterian Childcare Centre, Ainslie Quinn (Northside Baptist Preschool, Northbridge), Lisa McMahon (Kindilan Childcare Centre Inc, Tuncurry), Marg Driscoll (Narrandera Preschool Early Childhood Centre), Denise Harden (Bundanoon District Preschool), Tanya McGie (Northrocks Uniting Church Preschool) and Kristy Busuttil (First Grammar Early Education Centre, Seven Hills).

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**Hairy Maclary BARKS ONTO STAGE**

Most preschoolers have heard of Hercules Morse, Slinky Malinki, Bottomley Potts and Scarface Claw. Now Sydney-based children’s services can enjoy a theatrical adaptation of Lynley Dodd’s popular series of picture books. *Hairy Maclary and Friends* opens at the Sydney Opera House this summer (15 Dec–15 Jan). For bookings, phone (02) 9250 7777 or visit [sydneyoperahouse.com](http://sydneyoperahouse.com)

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COMPETITION: HEALTHY FELT FOOD PYRAMID VALUED AT $275!

Tell us how you promote healthy eating at your children’s service and WIN!

Thanks to Educational Experience, one lucky Rattler reader could WIN this fantastic Healthy Eating Felt Food Pyramid Set.

The 35-piece healthy eating pyramid is a great way for educators to provide children with an interactive representation of what foods to eat more of and what foods to eat less of.

To WIN, simply send us an email

Tell us in 100 words what you do at your children’s service to promote healthy eating. Send your entries by 11 February to

laurasportelli@ccccnsw.org.au

Meanwhile, congratulations to the children and staff at Mountain Community Children’s Centre who won Rattler’s dress-up pack in Issue #99.

ECEC KIDS HAVE BETTER IMMUNE SYSTEMS

According to new research in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, children in early childhood education and care services fall sick more often than children cared for at home but will grow up to be healthier than their non-day care classmates once at school.

The research team, led by Charles Sturt University’s Associate Professor of Education, Linda Harrison, say the study suggests early childhood education could help build a child’s immune system.

THE LITTLE REFUGEE

Australian comedian, Anh Do’s memoirs of his family’s escape from war-torn Vietnam, The Happiest Refugee, is now a children’s picture book. Illustrated by Bruce Whatley, The Little Refugee is an uplifting story about Anh’s journey to our shores on a leaky overcrowded boat (facing pirates, storms and starvation) and his subsequent life in suburban Australia. This book could help children at your service understand the plight of refugee children.

FAMILY DAY CARE AUSTRALIA’S NATIONAL CONFERENCE

18–21 July 2012

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre

More info:

or phone (03) 6231 2999

ACCs (AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY CHILDREN’S SERVICES)

17–18 May 2012

Novotel, Wollongong, Northbeach

More info: Phone Tracey 0409 849 463 or email: excellencecanhappen@ozemail.com.au

what’s on
CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

13TH NZ EARLY CHILDHOOD RESEARCH CONFERENCE

26–28 January 2012

St Andrews on the Terrace, Wellington

More info:

www.childforum.com

CHILDREN’S BOOK COUNCIL MULTI STORIED CONFERENCE

17–19 May 2012

Adelaide Convention Centre, South Australia

More info:

phone (08) 8379 8222 or email cbca2012@plevin.com.au

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Heard of ECEEN? Otherwise known as the NSW Early Childhood Environmental Network, ECEEN needs your help to come up with a catchy new national name. You could win a cash prize for your children’s service. To enter, visit www.eceen.org.au

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www.facebook.com/RattlerMagazine

IT’S A BABY BOOM!

It’s been a record year for Australian births. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported Australian women gave birth to 297,900 babies last year (2010), the highest number of births ever registered in a calendar year.

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IT’S A BABY BOOM!

It’s been a record year for Australian births. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported Australian women gave birth to 297,900 babies last year (2010), the highest number of births ever registered in a calendar year.
Rebecca Watson hopes to generate critical conversations in her new role as a manager at ABC Learning Centres/GoodStart Childcare. She shares her vision for children and communities with Rattler.

>> What drew you to a career in ECEC?
I have always been interested in children and communities. I wanted to find opportunities to raise the status of how communities positioned children and use early childhood education as a vehicle for this. I have worked as an ECT and centre director for most of my career as well as a co-ordinator for a large family day care scheme. More recently, I have led projects for Families NSW focusing on the potentials for children to engage with and be part of their local communities, before moving to SDN and now GoodStart.

I was part of the first early childhood course offered at the University of Western Sydney 20 years ago.

>> What made you choose GoodStart?
I have a broad set of philosophies that underpin my work. One of the strongest views I hold is that early childhood education is about advocacy with, about and for children. Moving to GoodStart is an opportunity to work with another dimension of the early childhood sector and to continue to centre children’s rights in the middle of everyday practice, so that we can, in the context of the new National Quality Framework (NQF), rethink what we imagine as quality experiences for children and early childhood educators.

>> What is your current role?
I am currently the Regional Manager for NSW and ACT. Working across two jurisdictions that have been working with different sets of regulations offers some interesting opportunities. For example, strategic planning around getting qualified teachers in centres as per the NQF.

Pedagogically, I like the challenge of bringing new ideas to early childhood educators that will stretch them and bring them into potential new ways of thinking about everyday practice. I also enjoy the challenge of igniting a sense of enthusiasm in educators with a view that they can recognise the importance of their everyday work in particular and how rewarding it can be for themselves as well as the communities in which they work. This is the kind of advocacy that I’m interested in.

>> Given your experience, what do you hope to bring to GoodStart?
Being part of the early childhood community has enabled all kinds of sharing throughout my career. I am also seeking out opportunities to work across a number of organisations in the interest of generating critical conversations between early childhood educators wherever possible. I also think that while, at times, early childhood organisations are set up to have to bid for funding, wherever possible, sharing outside these confines should be facilitated. I think it’s about being a little bit generous with each other.

>> Quality, social justice and equity are passions for you. Are they philosophies you hope to cultivate in your new workplace?
I am working explicitly to use language such as ‘social justice’ and ‘equity’ because while these terms recognise inequalities, they can be framed in positive and productive ways. I worry about the use of language that describes children and families as marginalised and lacking, because it potentially takes away any sense of power that people might feel.

I think if early childhood education is well resourced, then the work we can do in centres and drawing on early childhood expertise can address some of the inequalities children and families might face. Ideas such as social capital underpin how I envisage these kinds of practices, as well as seeing the evidence of working in this way from some inspiring practice that has been part of how communities have transformed themselves.

>> What future do you see for the community-based model in Australia?
Without my crystal ball, it’s hard to predict! But while I have always chosen to work in the not-for-profit sector, I think the way the market economy is going, there will always be a diversity of providers. GoodStart is now a not-for-profit organisation so we contribute significantly to this part of the sector. I guess I’m in a position to bridge two parts of the sector together now and I think my commitment to, and work for, quality, social justice and equity will be the underlying links between the past and the future. I’m an optimist!

>> What approach will GoodStart be taking to introducing the NQF and other reforms?
GoodStart has a number of strategies in place that involve managers, teachers, families, children and communities.

Because the organisation is national, approaches will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It is an exciting time because change on this level means that all kinds of opportunities are opening up. There is a great sense of renewal within the organisation with a clear focus on leadership. It has been really exciting to work with teams of educators in developing their vision and possibilities for new practice. The enthusiasm is really starting to build in terms of momentum and capacity. The opportunities to share knowledge and practice has really escalated and influenced a positive sense of community across the GoodStart centres I support. GoodStart is a large organisation and it will take time, but I’ll just hold onto my vision for children and the underlying principles that drive me to make this as fabulous an experience as possible.
Inner City Childcare demonstrates that a strong stand-alone community-based management structure can work for everyone. It is a shining example of what can be achieved when a group of passionate parents and educators come together. Ingrid Maack reports.

A community-managed children’s service is not just ‘managed’ by the community, it is ‘owned’ by the community. That is certainly the spirit at Inner City Childcare (ICC), which began almost 30 years ago when a group of working parents (mostly journalists) from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) lobbied for a childcare centre for its staff.

Inner City Child Care has had many ABC dignitaries through its doors over the years. The Wiggles, Giggle and Hoot and Big Ted, just to name a few...

‘Being in the ABC building offers access to a large range of different skills that our families have through their working environments,’ says centre director Cally Condliffe.

Triple J presenters have recorded the children at play for segments on ABC Radio, the Wiggles performed one of their early concerts at the centre and this year the children were even extras on the set of Playschool.

Not surprisingly, there is a strong interest in the performing and dramatic arts. And when Rattler visited Inner City Childcare to attend the long day care centre’s annual general meeting, we were treated to a performance inspired from the popular children’s book The Gruffalo.

Located in the Sydney suburb of Ultimo at the back of the busy ABC studios, 24 of the centre’s 44 places are reserved specifically for ABC employees.

As such, its management committee is made up of highly educated parents and business people who bring many specialist skills and a strong commitment to early childhood education.

Indeed, the management committee won a CeeCees award four years ago for its progressive staff management.

ICC was one of the first centres in NSW to offer a 1:3 staff–infant ratio and for many years now, employees have been paid above award wages and enjoyed paid maternity leave.

‘We have had above standard ratios for six years, so a lot of the NQF reforms haven’t affected us too much. And we’ve always believed in having highly trained staff. We have four early childhood trained teachers at ICC,’ Ms Condliffe says.

ICC has a stable team of staff, many of whom have worked at the centre for more than 10 years.

‘One area of the NQF I have no doubt we will continue to excel in is our collaborative relationships with families.’ She says this bond almost certainly stems from the many dedicated parents who have been committee members over many years.

‘I find that when families feel included in the operations and centre decision-making, they become as invested as the staff in managing and operating the service.’

Being located within the ABC studios means parents can pop in and out
1. ‘Committee People’ from left: Sara Andersson, Marie Gialourieis, Dr David Sutton, Eddy Rose, Sara Harrington with Evie, director Cally Condliffe, (front) Gavin Marsh.

2. Outdoor play area at ICC.

3. Former Foreign Correspondent journalist and One Plus One host Jane Hutchison with daughter Isla.

4. Parent body at the AGM and children’s concert.

5. Dressing up for Halloween!
throughout the working day and assist with centre functions and excursions.

The centre once offered 24-hour care, and while night-time care ceased in 1997, the tradition of parents spending time with the children and staff at ICC continues, says former director, Sara Andersson.

Ms Andersson, who works as a project officer at Community Child Care Co-operative (NSW) and currently sits on ICC’s management committee, says committee members are highly visible in the service and there is a culture of wider parent involvement.

‘They tend to have a desire to give back to the community and want to do the right thing by everyone’s children. As a committee, they all take their responsibilities seriously and are true guardians for the service.’

Ms Andersson says parents who serve on the committee bring with them a dossier of expertise but also leave armed with new skills and competencies.

‘They learn a lot about quality education and care for children, respect for reciprocal relationships (when they sit on the committee they get a different view of what the educators do) and they become really good at financial management, HR, fundraising and applying for grants.’

However, even parents who don’t work at the ABC are very good at getting involved, says Ms Condliffe.

‘We always try to maintain an even balance of ABC parents and community parents that make up our management committee each year and we find we have access to a whole range of resources with each new member.

‘Once parents join we try to make them feel as valued as we can to encourage them to stay on the committee for a number of years.

‘It helps to have a mix between new members and members that have been on the board for an extended amount of time in order to support and train each other.

‘An example of this commitment is Gavin Marsh who has volunteered to stay on the committee even though his daughter will next year start primary school,’ Ms Condliffe says.

Building meaningful and trusting partnerships with families and communities enriches the lives of children, staff and the community, she says.

‘Our families represent a range of cultures, predominately Anglo-Australian and Chinese, and, being so close to Sydney’s Chinatown, many are Chinese-speaking. We have a multi-cultural team as well. Our staff speaks a range of languages including Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, Spanish, Hindu and Bangla.

‘The key is in getting to know your families and knowing their occupations, as this will open up many opportunities to enrich the centre’s programs’.

At ICC, the AGM is a true celebration...
HISTORY OF INNER CITY CHILD CARE

Inner City Childcare (ICC) began operating as a childcare service in May 1982. Since late 1978, a group of parents (all Australian Broadcasting Corporation staff) had been lobbying for the provision of childcare in the heart of the inner city.

The service originally operated 24 hours a day catering to those ABC families who did shift-work. The original centre (in Bourke Street, Darlinghurst) was donated by the ABC Staff Association and was leased to ICC for nominal rent until the move to Ultimo in 1991.

In 1987, a campaign was begun to gain funds to enable ICC to relocate from Darlinghurst to larger premises. On 15 July 1991, ICC opened at the ABC in Ultimo, initially operating from Monday to Friday 7am to midnight. In 1997, the Howard Government cut the operational subsidy and, as such, all night-care ceased.

In October 2002, ICC entered into a five-year agreement with the ABC whereby the ABC provides a $60,000 annual grant to employ an additional early childhood trained teacher in exchange for 24 of the places to be reserved for the children of ABC staff.

The only other relationship with the ABC is that of landlord, as set out in the lease documents and memoranda of understanding which stipulate the conditions of tenancy (a peppercorn lease). This agreement with the ABC was renewed again in 2009 for another five-year period.

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P.O. Box 135 Albion Qld 4010
25 years is a long time in anyone’s language. A child born in 1987 is now an adult and many things in our world have changed. In this our 100th edition, Eddy Jokovich and Ingrid Maack look back at Rattler’s advocacy roots and editorial policy of rattling the cage!

In publishing terms, producing 100 editions of a magazine over 25 years is the equivalent of going to the edge of the universe and back. Publishing is an incredibly fickle field and to provide an idea of how tough it can be, of all the magazines that were launched in 1987, only 5 per cent still exist. Of all the magazines that were being published in 1987, 90 per cent have disappeared.

In 1987, a publishing revolution commenced—production that previously required large-scale machinery and many staff to layout and produce a magazine, could now be published on a small computer that could sit on a desk, hence the phrase ‘desk-top publishing’.

The Board of Community Child Care Co-operative of NSW at the time agreed that it was important to have a publication as a way to communicate its own stories and information about all the many issues that were taking place in the sector.

It was decided that the magazine be called Rattler—a dual meaning, according to the minutes from 1987 in which it was proposed that the magazine’s reason for existence would be ‘to rattle the cage, to make noise, like a kid’s rattle, and be heard’. Although this seems an unambiguous title, we did once receive an enquiry about whether the magazine had anything to do with American snakes.

Rattler’s predecessor was the Community Child Care Newsletter. In Rattler’s debut editorial, Community Child Care Co-operative’s Co-ordinator at the time, Penny Ryan, wrote:

‘Try saying, “the Community Child Care Newsletter” ten times quickly and you’ll see why we decided to change it to something short, relevant and memorable.

Rattler will continue our policy of making a lot noise about issues that count in children’s services and shaking a few people up, as well as continuing to provide news and information to all children’s services. It rhymes with “battler” for all you hard working childcare workers and also “tattler” because we do tell a few tales…’

For a quarter of a century, Rattler’s most important role has been to act as an advocate for what is in the best interests of children and what is in the best interests of early childhood teachers and the professionals that care for children. Over the years, Rattler has tackled many of the big issues that have confronted the sector and, indeed, has rattled the cage on many occasions. Rattler has never been afraid to confront those that act against these interests.

The transformation of early childhood education and care to a recognisable profession has been well documented within our pages over the years. And the shameful practice of holding children in immigration detention, a practice that still continues to this day, was roundly condemned with a series of articles in the early 2000s. Railing against the removal of operational subsidies by the Howard Government in 1997 was another.

Rattler strongly argued over many years that corporatised childcare was not in the public interest and we believe that we were finally vindicated...
when the ABC Learning conglomerate collapsed in 2009. So, while these are some of the big issues affecting the overall sector, Rattler also promoted many successful campaigns that directly affect educators, including improving working conditions, better staff–child ratios (1:4 Make It Law), and the pay equity campaign.

Within this ‘big picture’, Rattler has also provided information about the many factors that influence the quality of each and every service—better quality menus, playground design, contemporary educational research, reviews of books for children and educators, music and drama for children, programming and policy development, behaviour management, working with management, Aboriginal and Indigenous issues, environmental awareness, multiculturalism, occupational health and safety, risk assessment, legal issues, the effects of new technologies on children, special and additional needs… an endless list!

And, of course, the many profiles and close-ups that we have had with many political leaders of all persuasions (even one Governor-General), children’s services leaders, academics, authors, educators and activists have added great weight to Rattler being the must-read resource for everyone in the sector.

Looking back, looking forward

Although the first issues of the magazine look completely different to the issues of today—the first issues were more strictly black and white, with a second colour on the cover to add a bit of class—the information contained within Rattler has always been high quality. Today, Rattler is a full-colour professionally designed publication and is available to be read on electronic readers, computers and over the internet.

In the same way that we can’t imagine what Rattler will be like in 2037, it’s difficult to imagine what our predecessors would have imagined back in 1987. But the most important thing is that they imagined that Rattler had a future and could be used as a driving force for change in the sector, as well as letting the world know about the good work that was taking place, not just within Community Child Care, but within the entire early childhood field.

It’s important for all of us to remember where we come from. Today, Rattler remembers its roots, from where it came from, and where it hopes to be. Let’s all remember this as we look towards the next 25 years and beyond. Remembering Rattler’s roots

Rattler’s co-creator, Penny Ryan, now director of her own consultancy, joined Community Child Care in 1981. In 1985, she became the Community Child Care’s first official co-ordinator and began to generate income for the organisation by selling a range of publications from Australia and the United States.

At about the same time, my colleague Lisa Ward and I decided to upgrade the existing newsletter into two different publications. Inspired by the National Association, Rattler was to be the ‘journal’ and Broadshe the monthly quick overview of what was happening. I think Lisa came up with Rattler as the title at a brainstorming meeting.

The only other early childhood journal at the time was put out by the Australian Early Childhood Association but Ms Ryan had a different vision for what it, Rattler, should be—i.e. ‘much more practical, more focused on quality issues and resources as well as advocacy.’

‘Advocacy was integrated into everything we did—we learned policy skills and negotiation as well as grassroots organising (we got 50,000 post cards delivered to Bob Hawke for instance), but I guess we always were completely focused on improving the quality of care.’

Ms Ryan fondly recalls Rattler’s section called ‘My Working Day’ which would profile a childcare worker.

‘At that time, there was a lot of division between differently qualified staff and I loved having profiles that demonstrated how everyone made the centre work for children and families,’ she said.

Jenepher Surbey, employed by Community Child Care as a project officer at the time, wrote several articles in Rattler’s debut edition in 1987. These days she is a business consultant but recalls how Community Child Care was an important advocacy training ground.

One article that stands out was an interview Ms Surbey did with the then NSW Nurses Association General Secretary, Bronwyn Ridgeway, who likened many of the issues faced by childcare workers with those of nurses such as poor pay, stress and funding cuts.

‘It was my second job out of university and I was passionate about industrial relations.’

Ms Surbey also wrote a publication on occupational health and safety for childcare centres.

‘Purpose-built centres were just being introduced so it was a testing ground for all sorts of OH&S issues.’

Louise Brennan was the director of Carinya Neighbourhood Centre in 1987, and was later employed at Community Child Care Co-operative where she too penned several articles for Rattler magazine.

‘In 1987, I was a graduating “mature
aged” teacher stepping into my first job in the lower Blue Mountains.
Neighbourhood centres operated similarly to current day multifunctional children and family services. And Rattler and the NSW Community Child Care team behind it were true lifesavers.

To make sure staff would read it, she recalls slipping Rattler into the middle of New Idea magazines. It worked!

Rattler was distributed at low-cost, carrying information that was straightforward, with contributions from practitioners, academics, management and economists, she recalls.

‘Newly released books for staff and management committee as well as children, were reviewed. And endless campaigns for change were created, promoted and analysed through Rattler.

‘I remember a photo of Louise Dungate, centre director of Dee Why Child Care, on the cover of Rattler. She was pushing babies up a hill, in a double pram out on an excursion. I had interviewed her following the centre’s experience of a validation visit. She and the team were on a high, following the centre achieving high quality through the quality improvement and accreditation process. Those were innovative and exciting times’

Throughout the 25 years of policy shifts, and practitioner changes, Ms Brennan has moved in and around the sector undertaking a range of positions and roles. These days she works at Marrickville Council in Sydney co-ordinating early childhood services, where she says Rattler is as ‘an accessible and important publication that continues to provoke, affirm and agitate for change’.

‘Well done Rattler! These days, you can stand against any New Idea on any staff room coffee table. Keep up the great work!’

Colour My World
Rattler has always been a quality journal and made the big leap forward to full colour printing in 2005. This edition coincided with the new push towards pay equity for children’s services workers, an issue that Community Child Care has long campaigned for. Pay equity held the attention of political leaders for several years, and Rattler published many feature articles relating to achieving pay equity during this time. This edition also received the prestigious Bell Award for Best Magazine (B2B Category).

14, We Made It Law...
If there’s a campaign going on in the children’s services sector, Rattler is there to report on all the details. Community Child Care campaigned for many years to the NSW Government to reach better educator ratios for children, culminating in the ‘1:4 Make It Law’ campaign. The 1:4 ratio, strongly recommended as the minimum ratio for provision of high quality early childhood education, was finally achieved in 2011. Rattler published many background articles, providing all the reasons for introducing the new ratio.

Change is Coming...
There have been momentous national changes proposed for the early childhood sector since 2008, and many of these will be introduced in 2012. To assist educators direct their pathway through this maze of major change, Rattler 94 was published as a special 56-page bumper issue. Known simply as ‘The Change Issue’, it contained all the information about the National Quality Framework and the types of areas that children’s services would need to look out for, to ensure they complied with the new Regulations.
Congratulations to all involved in Rattler—25 years of providing a very significant advocacy voice for children’s services in this country is quite an achievement. The Rattler initiative was the first of its kind in Australia thanks to the vision and courage of Penny Ryan. It broke new ground as the strong advocacy voice for childcare.

The provision of childcare has always been intensely political and the magazine has provided the voice for these political debates, keeping the field informed of current issues. From 1988–1990, I was privileged to work as Co-ordinator of Community Child Care NSW on secondment from my academic position at the Institute of Early Childhood. It was always a challenge getting out each edition of Rattler—what were the current issues, who best to write about them, cajoling people to write and the balance between confronting the key political issues in a way that did not get the organisation de-funded but said it as it was!

While much has changed in children’s services over the past 25 years, much has also remained the same. Today there is as much a need for strong advocacy voices as there was decades ago. Rattler continues to fulfil this important role providing well-researched information written in an accessible style. It is my pleasure to wish Rattler and all involved a great 25th Birthday and may future publications continue to ‘rattle’!

Associate Professor June Wangmann, (Co-ordinator Community Child Care NSW 1988–90)

In 1987, I was working in the housing advocacy movement for people on low incomes, so I had not heard of Rattler at all! But all that changed in 1989 when I came to work for Community Child Care Co-operative. Rattler was a highly respected magazine. We knew that, because we would receive a lot of positive phone calls in response to the articles we published. It has always played an important role in providing accessible, up-to-date information about policy and practice in early childhood. I always recommend Rattler to students and I hope there’s a copy of Rattler in every early childhood education setting! Happy 25th Birthday Rattler!

Dr Frances Press, Charles Sturt University

Congratulations on the 100th issue of Rattler—25 years is a great achievement! Rattler has always been a quality publication that filled a gap in information for professionals and all involved in the growing and changing field of early childhood services. I have watched the growth of Community Child Care and valued the complementary role that Rattler provides. As Co-ordinator of Network of Community Activities, I always looked forward to receiving Rattler. Best wishes for many more years of successful publication and congratulations to all involved.

Judy Finlason, former CEO, Network of Community Activities NSW

Happy 100th Edition Rattler—I was there in No. 1! In the 1980s, the early childhood world seemed dominated by writings about preschool. As someone working in and teaching about childcare, I thought Rattler was wonderful! It was the right place to send my first professional article, titled ‘Planning and Programming for Occasional Care’, and I was thrilled to see it in print in the first edition, Rattler, March 1987. I had just completed my first year of tertiary teaching in the early childhood program at Mitchell College, in Bathurst, and was enrolled in a Masters of Education at Sydney University. Since then, governments have recognised the early years as a key period in the lives of children and their families.

In 25 years there have been so many important accomplishments, many of which can be linked to the breadth of ideas canvassed in Rattler and the ‘can-do’ attitudes of its readers, authors, and advocates.

Linda Harrison, Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, Charles Sturt University

Happy 25th birthday Rattler. Where was I 25 years ago? I was working for an early intervention program based at Mangere Hospital in New Zealand. We undertook home visits to support parents who had children with identified developmental risks. In the years since then I have moved to Australia and Rattler was one of the early childhood journals that helped me find my feet in the Australian early childhood scene. Over the years, Rattler has continued to offer useful information and I look forward to another bumper 25 years.

Professor Margaret Sims, University of New England
The dominant belief in NSW has long been that the requirements demanded of NSW services were higher than those demanded of early education and care services in other states. The requirement for qualified early childhood teachers in all centre-based services bigger than 29 places, for example, is often cited as the best example of why we needed to ensure that NSW did not lose out when national regulations were framed.

Even a cursory comparison with other state and territory regulations often showed areas where the NSW regulation required more of services. So when our regulators from NSW sat down with the other states and territories to nut out the ins and outs of harmonising all their regulations into a national one, they undoubtedly had a hard ask. Fighting for the preservation of our higher standards, was no doubt difficult.

Did they succeed? Now that the regulation is finalised, we need to ask this question. When all the meetings, drafting and redrafting is over, how do children in other states and territories fare? Lisa Bryant lifts the lid on the new National Regulations.

One only has to examine Chapter 7 of the Regulations (Jurisdiction-Specific and Transitional and Saving Provisions) to see that there will be differences in the care and education delivered to children based on their location. This section contains provisions of a ‘savings’ or ‘transitional’ nature that facilitate the change from the operation of former state and territory laws to the new National Law.

A transitional provision is essentially what is allowed to happen in an interim period of time after the Regulations become law. Most of the transitional arrangements refer to ratios and qualifications. Given that NSW had, on the whole, higher requirements in both of these areas, it is not surprising that in the short-term, NSW children will fare better than other children in other states and territories.

Unlike a transitional provision, a savings provision is more long-term—it stays in place until such time in the future that a specific amendment is made to change it. There are specific savings provisions for individual states and territories.

So what sort of provisions do the other states have? In Queensland, during rest periods, some services are allowed to have a 1:12 or 1:16 ratio for toddlers and 1:24 ratio for preschoolers. Until 2019 Queensland services will be counted as meeting required ratios even if an educator is out of the room on a ‘rest pause’. Queensland services can also get (on approval by their state regulator) permission to run at a 1:5 ratio for children aged 15 to 24 months until 2018.

Until 2020, South Australian services are exempt from the requirement to have a second teacher for services between 60 and 80 places. Similarly, family day care educators in South Australia, who currently have a ratio exemption that allows them to care for more children than allowed under the Regulations,
will retain this right until 2020. Some Tasmanian services have ratios of 1:7 for children aged two and over as long as no more than three of the children in the group are under three years of age. In Victoria, educators who have been working for five years full-time, do not have to obtain a Certificate III.

In contrast, NSW services are already on the regulatory ratio of 1:4 for babies; our 1:10 ratio for preschoolers is higher than the Regulations 1:11 and we will move on schedule to the 1:5 ratio for toddlers.

It is in the requirements for access to an early childhood teacher where NSW children will clearly do better than children in other states and territories —as long as they attend a centre above 29 places. Under a savings provision, our requirements for ECTs have been retained.

Therefore, in NSW, an early childhood teacher must be in attendance at all times that a centre is caring for 30–39 children; two teachers are needed when there is 40 to 59 children, three when there is 60 to 79 children and four when there are over 80. This is a lot higher benchmark than what the Regulations set for other states.

Essentially, the Regulations only demand of services in other states and territories that a teacher be at the service for six hours a day if the service operates for under 50 hours per week, or 60 per cent of the operating hours if it opens for more than 50 hours per week, if it educates and cares for between 25 and 59.

If the service has between 60 and 80 children, a second ECT (or another suitably qualified person!) must be there for at least three hours per day if open for less than 50 hours per week or 30 per cent of the operating of the operating hours of the service on that day, if the service operates for less than 50 hours a week.

In other words, whereas a child attending a centre with 45 other children in NSW would be at a centre required to ensure there are two teachers on the premises at all times the centre is open, a child attending a centre of this same size in any other state could be at a centre with no teachers employed, outside of a six-hour block in the middle of the day.

A centre in NSW with 75 children would have three teachers on the premises whenever it was open, whereas in other states, a similar service would only be required to have one teacher employed for six hours a day and a second for three hours. To add insult to injury, in the other states and territories, if an early childhood teacher is absent from the education and care service because of short-term illness or leave up to of 12 weeks, a diploma qualified educator can be counted as a teacher!

The National Regulations thus codify inequity of access to a teacher. A child’s access to an early childhood teacher should not depend on the state or territory they were born in or the size of the service they attend.

Even in NSW, although services licensed for over 30 children per day will be required to have teacher/s in attendance at all times, smaller services will only be required to have a teacher in attendance for six hours or less per day, and in services under 25, the teacher that is required to work with the service does not even have to work directly with children. No children should miss out on having a teacher. Every primary school child has a teacher!

Research consistently shows that early childhood teachers engage in practices that lesser qualified staff don’t and that these practices lead to higher quality early education and care. Research also shows that teachers interact more with children than other staff do, have more positive interactions and have a positive impact on children’s pre-reading and social skills.

The requirement to have an ECT in place for only part of the day points to a misunderstanding of the role of a teacher within an early childhood service. Services with teachers in attendance offer higher quality care not just because of the hours teachers deliver face to face.
‘A child’s access to an early childhood teacher should not depend on the state or territory they were born in or the size of the service they attend.’
These days it is rare to see young children walking hand-in-hand in our streets and public spaces. As young children spend more hours inside children’s services and fewer services travel beyond the centre gate, children are becoming less visible in our communities.

We know excursions can expand children’s concepts of the world around them and their role in society, so why are so many services still reluctant to take a step outside their doors?

For many services in low socio-economic areas, excursions are simply unaffordable for many families. Some services find the risk-assessments cumbersome, while others have a blanket ban on excursions.

Gerard Moon, Auburn Council’s Children’s Services Co-ordinator believes the risk assessment process in particular can be off-putting for services. “Even the word ‘risk’ makes people think there is a greater risk than there is and this is misleading. If it were called ‘future planning’ or ‘excursion plans’, it wouldn’t scare as many people off. Earlier this year, Mr Moon took groups of children over four days to the Royal Sydney Easter Show. He says it was ‘the easiest excursion’ he has ever done.

*Rattler* was fortunate to accompany Mr Moon and a group of children on one of these outings. The children travelled via train to Homebush. First stop was the animal nursery where they patted and fed the animals. This was followed by a quick walk-through of the cattle pavilions before morning tea in the member’s stand, where they watched some ring events. After a quick toilet stop, the children toured the district exhibits (fruit and vegetables) before hopping back on the train and making it back to the centre by lunchtime.

Next, Mr Moon hopes to plan a trip to the Sydney Aquarium—but first he will need to find two adults (parents or staff) with bronze medallions, because the aquarium is located at Darling Harbour.

Water is a contentious issue for excursions in coastal communities, says Leo Prendergast, Director of Ballina’s Rainbow Children’s Centre. “In our area a child who was cared for in family day care drowned while on an excursion to Tweed Heads. The Department is unwilling to define ‘near water’ but Ballina is [like] an

Excursions are valuable for everyone—children, educators and the community. Stepping outside the centre gate is not only an opportunity for children to see the world but also for the world to see what children’s services do. Ingrid Maack reports.
island. No matter where you go, there is water nearby, whether it is a lake or stream, creek or river.’

Within his region, there is certainly the feeling among directors that excursions are ‘all too hard’. Plus Ballina has very little public transport and hiring a bus is expensive.

Despite this, Mr Prendergast is a believer in the many benefits of excursions, particularly in building a breadth of experience for children.

He believes there are too many children, particularly those in full-time care, who miss out on those ‘everyday experiences’ they would normally do with mum and dad such as posting a letter or buying a bottle of milk.

‘Potentially, children will spend three to four years in the same two rooms and have the same playground and same faces around them day in and day out.

‘I think it’s really important children see the community in operation and have experiences they might otherwise miss out on. It’s also good for people in the community to see children’s services in action.’

He says more than 36 per cent of the children at Rainbow Children’s Centre come from single-parent families. And very often there is not a lot of extended family about.

So children and educators at Rainbow Children’s Centre regularly walk to the nearby shopping arcade of ten shops where they have seen bakers bake bread, taken trikes to be repaired at the bike shop and bought noodles or vegetables and taken them back to the centre for the cook to make for lunch.

Getting off the beaten track

At the Point Preschool in Sydney, Director Catherine Lee says her vision is for children to build a strong sense of themselves within the community and to make meaningful connections with the world outside the gate.

‘I’m amazed at the opportunities outside our gate to strengthen children’s sense of belonging, delight in their being and take them on a journey that will influence the adults they will become.’

Children and educators step out the gate as often as they can where, as Ms Lee says, there is so much to ‘explore, see, discover and experience’.

‘Sometimes we take just a few steps outside our gate to the reserve next to the preschool or we go walking (up to four kilometres) around our local neighbourhood with our Dharawal friends, looking for bush Tucker and tracks of native animals.’

Other times, the children go much further. They may catch a train, a bus or car pool with families or meet at the destination, Ms Lee says.

‘We did this one year when we visited Taronga Zoo. We personalised the excursion so everyone could travel to the zoo the way they wanted. Some families travelled on the coach with the teachers, other families travelled by bus, train, ferry and some families drove.’

Children can make the decisions of
RISK ASSESSMENTS: HERE’S HOW

According to the National Regulation, risk assessment must:

- Identify and assess risks that the excursion may pose to the safety, health or wellbeing of any child being taken on the excursion;
- Specify how the identified risks will be managed and minimised;
- Consider the proposed route and destination for the excursion;
- Example: Any water hazards, any risks associated with water-based activities; transport to and from the proposed destination; number of adults and children involved in the excursion; and given the risks posed by the excursion, the number of educators or other responsible adults appropriate to provide supervision and whether any adults with specialised skills are required (e.g. life saving skills); and
- Outline the proposed activities; the proposed duration of the excursion; and the items that should be taken on the excursion.

where to go, what to do, who to invite and how to get there, she says.

‘When we decided to meet the people in the nursing home nearby, I explained they could not come to visit us as they were old and sick. One child said we should “take the preschool to them” so that’s what we did.

‘Like some of our children in early childhood centres, these grandparents are often not seen in our community.’

Ms Lee says they deliberately do not have incursions (visiting entertainment) at The Point Preschool, although they do have visitors.

‘After critical reflection we decided not to have incursions. The very meaning of the word is the reason we don’t… I wonder when ‘incursion’ crept into our vocabulary and why this word became commonplace in early childhood.’

(Noun: 1 incursion – the act of entering some territory or domain (often in large numbers); 2 incursion – an attack that penetrates into enemy territory; the act of an army that invades for conquest or plunder; – a sudden short attack. Source: Thefreedictionary.com)

‘At preschool we don’t have an act of entering or raid or an invasion or conquest. We have family, friends and visitors who are invited, usually upon the children’s suggestion. We don’t have a sudden short attack. We have family, friends and visitors who share their time with us so we can get to know them and develop a meaningful relationship. We don’t have an infiltration or an onslaught, we don’t have an event that incurs liability. We don’t have words connected to war. We have words connected to people.

‘A colleague once told me it was just a matter of semantics whether I used the word incursions. I still don’t think so.’

Nesha O’Neil is the licensee of Top Ryde Early Learning in the Sydney suburb of Ryde. Ms O’Neil also finds the term ‘incursion’ problematic, preferring to use the term ‘on-site experience.’

‘An incursion is, in fact, a hostile entering of territory… and I don’t think that ’watching hatching ducklings’ is all that hostile,’ she jokes.

While she believes on-site experiences have their place, she also thinks excursions provide children with emergent learning opportunities and are a form of ‘social advocacy’.

‘When children are taken out into the world, they have a voice. They are members of the community and it helps to spread the word about the importance of early childhood.’

‘Excursions give the children an opportunity to respond to diversity—in the people they see, as well as the environments in which they are immersed.

‘And they learn social skills that simply can’t be taught in the centre, about how to behave in different environments such as shopping centres, cafes, restaurants or libraries.’

Ms O’Neil says the bigger-scale excursions (zoo or aquarium) can quickly become an exercise in ‘herding children’, so she encourages regular small group outings and walking excursions that are interest-based.

‘Walking to the post office is a great excursion to tie into emergent literacy, as the children can write letters to themselves or to their parents at home or at work, and post them at the local post office. They love the anticipation and surprise of receiving letters.’

risk assessments: here’s how

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- Example: Any water hazards, any risks associated with water-based activities; transport to and from the proposed destination; number of adults and children involved in the excursion; and given the risks posed by the excursion, the number of educators or other responsible adults appropriate to provide supervision and whether any adults with specialised skills are required (e.g. life saving skills); and
- Outline the proposed activities; the proposed duration of the excursion; and the items that should be taken on the excursion.
Ms O’Neil told Rattler of a recent interest that highlighted the children as civic participants in our community. ‘We had a traffic issue at the centre, and had written to local government about it. When this was ignored, we involved the children in renewed pleas to government.

‘The issue went to Council and the children went along to the chambers to see how it was being managed and even spoke to the councillors. They learnt a lot about government and we didn’t ‘dumb down’ the learning—we had high expectations of them to grasp the concepts. Traffic planners later visited the centre to talk to the children about road safety.

As the EYLF states, children are ‘connected to and contribute to their world’. Ms O’Neil believes children gain a strong sense of identity by working out where they fit in the community.

‘We had a wonderful “book pass” excursion, when the local library was moving sites. The children and hundreds of members of the community all lined up in a long human chain and passed the books hand-to-hand from the old to the new library. It helped cement the children’s position in the community.’

Another practitioner’s perspective:
Candy Lawrence is an early childhood educator on the north coast of NSW. She is also an avid blogger (auntannieschildcare.blogspot.com) with a strong following. Her article on the practicalities of excursions can be viewed at http://ccccnsw.org.au/aunt_annie

FROM THE FIELD: EXCURSION TIPS ‘N’ TRICKS

- Always plan, plan, plan for every contingency. Take extra cash with you.
- Always have a fully charged mobile phone. Do constant head counts.
- Prepare children beforehand: tell them exactly what they will be doing/seeing.
- Remind them of the rules—hold hands, come when called, keep hats on!
- Risk assessment is important: see it as an exercise in planning.
- Know your venue. If you can, attend the venue beforehand to get the lay of the land. If you can’t, ring and ask where the toilets and other facilities are.

—Gerard Moon, Auburn Council’s Children’s Services Co-ordinator.

- Have an excursions bag packed with essentials, contact numbers, first aid kit.
- Consider all health needs, even asthma or allergy to plants. Will children with a nut allergy be exposed to risks that you cannot control?
- Take prams, snacks, nappies, and change of clothes, medication. You name it, you probably need to pack it!
- Remember, excursions are still worth the exhaustion!

—Marie Smith is the co-ordinator of Early Years Care, a private family day care scheme on the South Coast (www.earlyyearsicare.com.au). Marie is also the editor of Early Years Magazine, a free bi-monthly magazine for families in the Illawarra.

- Have an ‘excursion bag’ ready. This way you don’t have to gather everything anew each time you set out.
- Invite parents to join you.
- Students and volunteers count as ratio for excursions, so plan excursions when you’ve got students on prac weeks.
- Ensure risk assessment is done. This involves ‘walking the route’ within an hour of setting out, so you’re not surprised by any unique experiences along the way.
- Prepare questions and points of interest in advance. You can then talk to adults and children about the kinds of things they’ll be seeing and doing.

—Nesha O’Neil, licensee of Top Ryde Early Learning.

- Make sure you’ve double-checked the latest regulations before you start.
- Parents are notoriously slow at getting permission slips back, so start early.
- At least two people should do their own risk assessments, then compare notes.
- Spread the load! Communication with your team is vital. Don’t assume something’s been done. Someone has to tick everything off.
- Some parents will be anxious, and the only cure for that is information. A map of where you’re going, clearly stated schedule, a blurb about what will happen, a list of what to bring, and a contact number for the group’s mobile phone.
- If it’s a walking excursion, stress the importance of children wearing appropriate footwear. You can take extra raincoats and jackets, but shoes?

—Educator Candy Lawrence.
Leaders, leadership and learning are inextricably linked. So is leadership and quality in early childhood settings, say Dr Manjula Waniganayake and Anthony Semann. This is enshrined in the National Quality Standards (NQS), Quality Area 7 which focuses on Leadership and Service Management (ACECQA, 2011).

WHAT IS THE QUALITY AREA?

7.1 Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.
7.2 There is a commitment to continuous improvement.
7.3 Management and administrative systems enable the effective provision of a quality service.
7.4 Adults working with children and those engaged in management of the service or residing on the premises are fit and proper.
7.5 Grievances and complaints are managed effectively.
7.6 Information is exchanged with families on a regular basis.

Throughout 2011 and 2012, Rattler turns the spotlight on the seven Quality Areas of the new National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Care.

The National Quality Standard includes seven areas of quality for early childhood education and care services:
1. Educational program and practice;
2. Children’s health and safety;
3. Physical environment;
4. Staffing arrangements, including improved staff-to-child ratios and qualifications;
5. Relationships with children;
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities;
7. Leadership and service management.

Being and becoming leaders

Quality Area 7 is concerned with establishing effective strategies to achieve national benchmarks that guide self learning as well as the learning of others, including children, families and colleagues. Leading within these contexts means accepting responsibility for learning by being and becoming leaders. Now more than ever, we need early childhood leaders to be courageous, to step up and demonstrate their commitment and capacity to nurture learning within their organisational settings. This view is based on the belief that effective leaders can make a difference by leading learning in multiple ways.

Within the NQS, leadership is defined as ‘a relationship between people and the best leaders are those who are able to empower others’ (ACECQA, 2011, p.171). Noticeably, the NQS does not provide an operational definition of management, and leadership appears ahead of management. Within early childhood settings, almost everyone performs administrative functions, such as checking the sign-in book or collecting consent notes signed by parents for an excursion. Not everyone however, may be involved in management and leadership roles.

In preparing for NQS assessments, it is therefore prudent to reflect on what is expected of individual staff in terms of administration, management and leadership roles and responsibilities. There are no right or wrong answers here, it is a matter of being clear about what happens in your own organisational settings. Taking stock of what is current practice, can not only be helpful in understanding what everyone is
supposed to do, it can also provide a baseline against which you can discuss directions for leadership and service management in the future.

**Leading learning for self**

Luthans and Avolio (2003) suggest that effective leadership can be defined as being self-aware, genuine, optimistic, balanced in terms of decision-making, and transparent in enacting leadership that energises people. These characteristics and strategies can build trust, as well as reinforce and develop the leaders’ and followers’ strengths, especially self-awareness. As such, self-awareness is at the heart of any learning.

Effective leaders have a strong commitment to life-long learning for themselves as well as others. It is, however, not unusual for those in positions of seniority within organisations to ignore or not consider professional development needs and opportunities for themselves. Anecdotal findings also suggest that managers or directors of early childhood settings are busy mentoring colleagues occupying subordinate positions but often do not have mentors for themselves. Slattery and Davies (2010) report that within the early childhood sector, mentoring may be understood as a leadership strategy for optimising learning and professional development and is viewed as a viable strategy to enhance the professionalism of early childhood staff.

**Resilience**

Resilience is a hallmark of how your identity as a leader is formed. More recently, there has been a growing interest in leadership research that invites individuals to explore their personal experiences, theories and enactment of leadership. It is inevitable that as individuals enact leadership, they will encounter a range of challenges. Perhaps reflecting on the role of resilience is timely in such instances. Resiliency is defined as the ability or capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility (Huey and Weisz, 1997). In early writings, resiliency was portrayed as a rare gift that only a few people possessed, similarly to the way charisma was isolated as an essential leadership quality.

Leaders are also role models as they are being observed in the way they behave whilst going about their day-to-day functions. Behaviour reflects one’s attitudes, beliefs and values in both words and deeds. In this sense, it is imperative that leaders are mindful of what they say and do, to ensure personal integrity through ethical practice and the ways in which they respond to the challenges around them.

**Leading learning for and with others**

For those who work in early childhood settings, teamwork is not a new concept. However, learning to work collaboratively can take time, and challenges often emerge, especially in times of staff turnover or when competing pedagogical approaches become evident.

Teams often encounter challenges given the hands-off approach adopted by some leaders in establishing and maintaining a co-operative work environment. Our personal experiences as researchers would suggest that attention is often afforded to teams in times of crisis. This could suggest several things including:

- Leaders experience competing tensions in what they should focus their attention on in their day to day role,
- A lack of knowledge about the theories of how teams are established and function,
- A belief that teams just work and little intervention is required in developing and sustaining effective teams.

Creating an effective team is not the sole responsibility of the leader. Instead, it is the responsibility of each individual to craft productive relationships, govern their own behaviours and take responsibility to address professional issues that may arise in the workplace. In turn, the role played by those with leadership responsibilities, will vary according to how specific functions...
Leaders are also role models as they are being observed in the way they behave whilst going about their day-to-day functions ... It’s imperative leaders are mindful of what they say and do.

are defined and shared within each organisation. Clarity and transparency of expectations around staff and management responsibilities can make a difference in the way leadership is enacted, creating efficiency and satisfaction for everyone.

Creating learning communities

Within early childhood organisations, creating a community of learners where all staff critically engage in reflecting on their own contribution to teams is fundamental in the delivery of excellent quality programs. Leaders can create learning communities within their own organisational settings as well as externally, within their neighbourhoods, local regions as well as across states/territories and more globally, involving colleagues working within Australia or internationally.

Arranging to meet on a monthly basis as a regional group, by holding meetings in each other’s preschools or childcare centres after hours, is a popular strategy. Holding a public forum on a particular topic of interest with a guest speaker or having a full-day forum two or three times a year, can also provide a focus for collective learning. The standards and elements of Quality Area 7 reflect and extend these possibilities in a variety of ways (ACECQA, 2011).

Though not limited to geographically isolated centres located within rural and remote communities, innovative solutions to learning through networking could be found with effective engagement with technology. Use of online social media, such as wikis, Twitter and blogs, can enable leaders to create virtual learning communities. These online strategies offer flexible opportunities for learning not bound by time, travel and space limitations because individuals are usually free to come and go from the online forums. In essence, being a leader is not an endgame: instead it is a continuous process. Your interest in staying connected and building learning networks therefore also reflects your capacity to stay up-to-date with emerging community trends, innovative technologies, new knowledge and skills.

Pedagogical leadership

Effective leaders have a strong sense of identity. Giving shape to this identity requires leaders to be professional, and demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of early childhood contexts. It also highlights the critical role leaders can play in achieving excellence in pedagogy. That is, whilst pedagogy is connected with professional practice, it takes leadership to support the development of effective programs. This is what pedagogical leadership is about.

Pedagogical leadership therefore involves working side by side with colleagues who design and deliver children’s programs to support and/or guide decision-making in relation to learning encounters involving children and their families. Leading learning in collaborative ways can, not only enhance children’s learning, it can also strengthen teamwork. This can also mean there is a coherent approach to practice and policy within the setting, making it possible for everyone to work towards achieving the same goals and vision. It will be easy to see that, much can be realised through trust and respect amongst staff. Accordingly, effective early childhood leaders can create ‘a positive organisational culture that values openness and trust, where people are motivated to ask questions, debate issues and contribute to each other’s ongoing learning and inquiry.’ (ACECQA, 2011, p.171)

Leading change and innovation

One of the certainties in working in early childhood programs is that change is constant. However the pace of which change is being experienced at the moment does create some unique challenges for individuals who are either leading or recipients of change. So how do leaders and teams prepare for change? Step one is to take time out and decide on how you wish to conquer and work through the change at hand. We are aware that there are hundreds of models of change and we don’t aim in this article to privilege one model over another. However, it is important when facilitating change that leaders are acutely aware of the ultimate destination they are hoping to arrive at. Whilst there are no certainties that this end point may be achieved, most people who are recipients of change require some indication of the journey ahead of them.

In addition, leaders require quality resources to achieve successful change. Unfortunately, there is a long history of early childhood practitioners just making do with what is there, despite evident gaps in resource allocation. We have a collective responsibility in aiming to deliver excellence in standards for every child in Australia. With many changes fast approaching, we suggest that leaders identify the resources, including well-qualified personnel and infrastructure they require to promote learning by all—children and adults.

It takes courage to accept your leadership responsibilities. Leaders who can create opportunities for the meaningful engagement of others, understand the benefits of shared learning. As such, leadership for learning is a journey of joint inquiry, exploration and reflection that can involve everyone who believes in making a difference for children.

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References


A stand-alone managed service

‘Every service needs to have a leader to bring staff together so they work in harmony under the philosophical mantle of the service. I like to think of myself as a conductor of an orchestra full of highly talented people who make beautiful sounds together,’ says Paula West, director of Northern Nursery School.

Managing a 60-place community-based preschool in the Sydney suburb of Mosman, Ms West says she gets particular professional fulfilment from watching her team of 14 educators ‘grow and shine’.

‘My role is facilitating continuous improvement within a culture of inclusiveness and belonging. Watching people become skilled and confident gives me such enormous pleasure in the role I have in leading the team. Each of us works together to build on what we have, continually looking for ways to enrich the environment and program that we offer children and ourselves—building our community.

‘We are all equally important, and together we take responsibility in making a difference, using our many different skills, talents and experiences.

‘I create opportunities where we work together to make change happen—creating a sense of “Belonging, Being and Becoming”… People need to feel they “belong”, to feel free to “be” who they are, to continue to grow and “become”.

The Northern Nursery School has a 75-year history within the Mosman community and there is a long tradition of family involvement at the service, which has a particularly active and passionate parent management committee.

The parents want to be ‘highly involved’ in the program and the continued growth and wellbeing of the preschool. As such, Ms West says she has a very motivated team of educators as well as a ‘team of highly motivated families’ to support her.

‘This strong sense of community really supports the work we do with children’.

This year the management committee has specialised, forming four sub-committees that focus on different aspects of the preschool’s management.

‘So, for example, there is a sub-committee that looks at people (staff/parents/children/community), one that focuses on the physical environment (environmental sustainability/outdoor spaces/buildings), another that looks after the preschool’s finances (awards/budget/fundraising/building fund), and another that looks at the program for children (professional development/NQF/Regulations/current best practice).

Educators at the Northern Nursery School are involved in continuous development and growth through staff appraisals, staff meetings and staff development days, and staff and the management committee also appraise the director annually.

‘It gives you terrific insight into how people see you, which allows you to work more effectively… If the leader is open and inclusive then that flows from the top of the organisation down.

‘That is the challenge and appeal with this position (being a leader and advocate), you never stop learning and growing.’
A cluster-managed service

Leadership and corporate management skills are transferable to the children’s services sector, says full-time manager of Queanbeyan District Preschool Association, Rod Pymont.

A n electrician by trade, Mr Pymont had his own business and once worked for a multinational before turning his hand to managing a cluster of four preschools in south-eastern NSW.

‘Project planning, timelines, budgets and networking are all skills that have followed me across from the corporate world.’

The community-based preschool association operates three preschools in the growing regional city of Queanbeyan (Harris Park Preschool, Waratah Preschool and Karabar Preschool) and Jingera Preschool in the neighbouring village of Captain’s Flat.

‘I became involved as a parent volunteer and never left.’

Mr Pymont’s daughter, who is hearing impaired, attended the preschool for three years.

‘Preschool made a huge difference to her and I wanted to give back those three years by volunteering my time,’ he explains.

Under Mr Pymont’s leadership, the group recently secured funding to extend one of the preschools from a two-room to a four-room centre, as well as additional funding to build another preschool in Queanbeyan.

Mr Pymont oversees the management of the association and is monitored by a community management board. As manager, he is responsible for appointment of staff, setting of fees, formulating and managing the budget, maintenance, project management, strategic planning, as well as helping and advising the parent committee. As well as sharing administration resources (enrolments and wages are centrally managed), all preschool staff meet monthly and fortnightly to network, engage in professional development and share ideas.

Mr Pymont has also recently revived a defunct e-newsletter after staff feedback revealed just how much it was valued as a resource. It includes staff profiles, important events, dates for the term, funding announcements and information about the EYLF and the NQF.

‘Communication is a big thing. Sharing information and positives news with staff is great for boosting morale. When you share positive stories, it helps create a positive culture—and staff feel the difference that they are making in children’s lives.’

There is also a culture of staff appraisals and plenty of professional development and in-house training.

‘We have a stable staff with very little turnover. One staff member has been here for 26 years and another for 20 years—so there is a wealth of knowledge internally.’

A privately managed service

Kellyanne Gianatti wears many hats as the licensee, director and early childhood teacher at Adventure Preschool, a private 18-place preschool in Penrith, Sydney.

I look at leadership like a herd of cows. They herd together but at certain times one cow has to lead the herd home. There are times when you have to make decisions and the buck stops with you. That’s what leadership is. When the crunch comes, someone has to lead the cows home.’

Adventure Preschool was founded in the late 1980s with Ms Gianatti purchasing the preschool 10 years ago. Located beside the Nepean River in a converted cottage, Adventure Preschool is the smallest preschool in Penrith.

‘We cater for only 18 children per day in a small, home-like environment.

The small size of the service has allowed the preschool to develop a reputation for catering to children with additional needs, and there are several children at the service with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

‘It seems to be our niche. We provide a quieter environment than larger centres, which can be overwhelming for those children.’

Mrs Gianatti believes additional needs children learn a lot by being in a social group with their peers and says play therapy for these children is as important as occupational or speech therapy.

She is such a passionate believer in the benefits of play for these children she has started a weekly play therapy group.

‘I see advocacy to governments as an important role and recently our local federal member wrote a letter about including play and music therapy on the FaCHSIA funding model, just like speech and occupational therapy.

‘Leadership in early childhood is like that … you can’t just think about what you are doing today but also about how you can reflect and affect positive change for the future.’

Mrs Gianatti was inspired to create the play therapy group after completing a 12-month Semann & Slattery leadership program last year. As part of the leadership program, she now regularly networks with directors and room leaders in an area hub based in Blaxland.

She is also currently a mentor under the Children’s Service Central mentoring program.

‘It’s a bit like having a big sister or big brother. My protégée is in a red-dirt country area managing a mobile service. I’m a willing ear over the phone or via email and someone who she can bounce ideas off so she doesn’t feel alone and overwhelmed.’
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Some talk in the sector suggests the community-based model has had its day, with many services exhausted by recruiting parent committees and administering the model. Others articulate the model’s benefits, remembering why community-managed children’s services really do matter. *Rattler* talks to opinion leaders and practitioners from the field and asks: **Is managing the stand-alone community model too hard?**

**DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE?**

The response is a mixed bag, but indicates this is a hot topic for the sector.

**Community Development:**

Lynne Wannan, Director, Office for the Community Sector for the Victorian Government’s Department of Planning and Community Development:

‘There will be renewed interest when people really grasp the critical need we have for locally-managed services that people can engage with and help build community. Without them, I think we are going to be in real trouble.

Early childhood services are often the first point of contact families, particularly women, have with their community and can become a part of a local network.

If you want people to know each other and become part of a really genuine community, where people feel safe and connected, then it has to be the kind of model where they are actively participating in what is delivered—and that has to be the community-managed model.’

**Renate Gebhart-Jones, Director, Glenbrook Preschool:**

‘I believe passionately in the principles of community-based service, and I also believe there are inherent weaknesses in the way the model is operating.

Generally, the volunteer parent committee turns over every one to two years. During their time, they have to get up to speed on all the relevant legislation and regulations.

The director in this model becomes the central point of communication, and is often “training” new committee members. The director is trained as a teacher and may not have held a management position. So how does this one person get and maintain the level of knowledge and skills required to be able to ensure that the finances, technology and staffing are all being managed—given that committees turn over and some will have these skills and others will not?

How do committees get their head around the huge amount of information? It all relies on significant volunteer hours, which has always been the case. What has changed is that the hours are now required to understand and implement compliance requirements, rather than being about the service itself. We need to find other models that allow services to maintain community ownership and participation, and manage the “business” aspects another way.’

**Ariane Simon, Director, St Stephen’s Preschool:**

‘As a director, you are managing up to your management committee and you are managing through and around and down to your team.

I think the key is to have a non-teaching director, otherwise it’s a challenge to both teach effectively and run a service. I am a real advocate for non-teaching directors but I also think we also need to look at the model of management.

There are directors burning out left, right and centre and walking away from the sector. When you are a teaching director you put your head in the sand at times because you can’t take it all in. The solution is to fund governance and make sure each service has the funds to have directors that are managers.’

**Jenny Matulovich-Meda, Director, Doonside Kindergarten Inc:**

‘We have never had a problem finding a committee but it can be hard for some to attend all the meetings. In our case they tend to be working parents or parents who are on the P&C’
Is the stand-alone community model all too hard?

at schools. We find that they are very skilled. They are good networkers and they tend to be clever, well-informed women (mostly). And they are usually very passionate about the community model. We have had many children come to our service from private centres because the parents want them to attend a community-based preschool—they see value in it!

The parents who set this preschool up visited the service two years ago. When they established this service, it was for the local children in the area to have access to a quality service, and they resisted being taken over by local council. They still spoke passionately about the preschool and their involvement 45 years on.

Jason Cummings, Executive Director, Childrenfirst:
‘I think there is a danger that we lose quality providers through the current system, and we end up with a homogenous delivery service that might limit future development of service delivery models. There is also the very real danger that delivery agencies lose touch with the communities they are supposed to serve.

On the other hand, I believe there is merit in scale. Scale makes it easier to ensure quality, and scale makes it easier to provide a larger number of services for lower cost.

Governance is the largest single challenge the sector faces. There is currently a mismatch in the community sector between what we expect our governing bodies to do and the skills they possess.

There may also be a case for redefining the role of community governance boards and removing the community advocacy role from their agenda and transferring it to an advisory board rather than the board of management.’

Ian Alchin, Services Development Manager, Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA):
‘Much of the discussion around the challenges of community management does not reflect the purpose and benefits of giving stewardship to communities. The community-based governance model can make a strong contribution to the health of communities as well as learning for children. Research shows it develops social capital through building connections, relationships and networks for families as well as building knowledge and skills that are used elsewhere in the community. It is particularly important to those in regional and remote areas.

Community management is not too hard but does require commitment and appropriate investment. The challenge of increasing and maintaining the capability of both directors and committees can be addressed through regular opportunities for professional development.’

Christine Legg, CEO, KU Children’s Services:
‘There are so many great benefits that come from the community-based services model, such as the lasting relationships, the unique reflection and representation of local needs, and the social capital that is built within the local area. However, in a time of ever increasing fiduciary duties, obligations, risks and liabilities, the success of a stand-alone service is heavily dependent on the sophistication and professional expertise of the management committee.

The role of a committee member can be very demanding, and attracting suitably skilled volunteers can be a challenge! I often think one of the greatest conflicts arises for parents who are expected to act as the employer of the staff who teach their child.

I think the ideal model for many services allows interested parents to be involved in the governance of the centre in an advisory way, without having to be burdened by many of the legal, industrial and operational obligations of managing a service.

At KU, we feel we have achieved this balance with a Parent Advisory Group in each of our centres. We find it ensures parents have input into their child’s early childhood education experience, while allowing KU to give consistency and long-term sustainability to staff and the wider community.’

Leanne Gibbs, CEO, Community Child Care NSW:
‘Community management of children’s services—at its best—offers professional and personal growth for all involved, an opportunity to make a civic contribution and a chance for a community to develop and flourish in collaboration.

In the real world of community management, I have seen parents and professionals achieve goals and visions together they didn’t think possible and always because they shared the common interest of children’s rights and wellbeing. I have certainly seen groups challenged and have been challenged myself...but only to be more accountable, collegial and responsible.

I don’t think ‘the stand-alone community management model is all too hard’ but preservation of community management needs resources such as good pre-service training for early childhood professionals; support and training for management committees that is well-funded, sharing of knowledge and wisdom across locations, and good succession planning.’
In *Rattler*’s literary roundup, Ingrid Maack previews what’s new on the shelves…

**Mrs Echidna’s Dilemma**
*By Betty Johnston*  
*Published by 3E Innovative*  
*Cost: $39.95*

Originally an embroidered quilt, a grant helped author Betty Johnston to turn her textile creation into an exquisitely crafted children’s book. The resulting *Mrs Echidna’s Dilemma* takes children on an interactive journey through the Australian bush. Each image has been hand-sewn—even the words of this picture book are stitched! Some of the images are embossed to provide children with a tactile experience while reading.

The book’s prologue explains that the book’s roots lie in early childhood. The author’s daughter, who works in a service, requested some finger puppets of Australian animals as a resource. Her colleagues and the children loved them, but said they needed a story, too.

Adults will also learn about native fauna. For example, did you know echidnas live for up to 50 years? Or that a baby echidna (called a puggle) suckles from pores called a milk patch?

**Savannah Dreams**
*By Lolla Stewart & Elaine Russel*  
*Published by Little Hare Books*  
*Cost: $24.95*

From Sunday to Saturday Savannah and her family collect bush tucker. Each day they go to a different place—river, sea, bush, mangroves, billabong, the hills behind the community store. Each time, every member of the family finds something to eat (catfish, goannas, blue-shelled crabs, bush plums) except for Savannah, who only finds junk.

Savannah says each piece of rubbish is part of a monstrous barramundi, and when the family comes together to feast on what they have gathered, she places her pieces together to represent the spirit of the barramundi. Then Savannah catches an enormous barramundi.

Children will learn about indigenous culture, bush tucker and the value of imagination. There is also lots of repetition, rhyming and counting in this beautifully illustrated yarn. *Savannah Dreams* will encourage young and old readers alike to look at things a little differently—just like Savannah!

**Two Peas in a Pod**
*By Chris McKimmie*  
*Published by Allen & Unwin*  
*Cost: $29.99*

Marvin (nicknamed Marvellous) and Violet are best friends. ‘They’re like socks and shoes, salt and pepper, a pie and sauce—two peas in a pod’ reads the opening paragraph of this gem of a picture book, which explores the power of childhood friendships faced with separation.

**Nog and the Land of Noses**
*By Bruce Whatley*  
*Published by Scholastic Australia*  
*Cost: $26.99*

This is a story about difference! In the Land of Noses, every nose is different. There are long noses, short noses, thin noses, straight noses, curly noses, blocked noses, running noses and even picked noses! The book’s protagonist Nog thinks his nose just sits on his face and does nothing at all … until trouble arrives and Nog smells it first.

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