Summer has arrived and while our thoughts rush to the New Year just around the corner, let’s pause a moment to reflect on the year that was.

I am now six months into my new role and the journey to build Community Child Care Co-operative’s strengths in this new era following the end of Australian government funding. I have particularly enjoyed the past few weeks on the Start Strong roadshows, where I met hundreds of extraordinary preschool educators.

Now is also the time of year when we prepare our annual report and reflect on our 2015/16 achievements. Some of the highlights include developing the professional knowledge and skills of more than 7,000 people, delivering nearly 400 customised training sessions, providing operational support to 40 preschools, managing two NSW ‘cluster trials’ to reduce the burden on small community services, sending 56 new Advanced Diploma graduates out into the world and enrolling nearly 30 more.

Reflecting on our membership, through our recent member survey, shows us the thing you value most is the information we bring to you in publications such as Rattler and Shortside, and in the members-only resources on our website.

The survey also gives us great confidence in our direction for 2017, with most of you asking for more face-to-face regional PD sessions, more webinars, more networking and peer support opportunities and even more practical resources.

We also canvassed our membership about policy concerns, identifying your top issues: funding for two years of preschool for all children and more grassroots representation in consultation forums.

Already, about 20 of you have nominated to be Community Child Care Champions for the early childhood topics that make you most passionate, and we look forward to building the Champion program to full strength in the New Year, as well as growing our advocacy reach.

Our team at Community Child Care have been engaged in planning new and wonderful ways to meet and exceed members’ expectations in 2017. We’ve worked together to create our Community Child Care values afresh and we are using your direction as we build our new business plan.

So much behind us, but so much ahead! Have a wonderful, safe summer and we look forward to welcoming you to more events and resources in the New Year.

Diane Lawson
CEO, Community Child Care Co-operative
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Up in Australia’s remote Far North, a life-changing service is deeply embedded in the community’s self-determination.
Learning an additional language has been made easier for Australian preschoolers, with the Australian Government committing $5.9 million to make its Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program available to all preschools from 2017.

ELLA is a series of play-based, interactive apps aimed at making language learning engaging and interesting to children. So far 35 apps have been developed (seven each for Arabic, Mandarin, Indonesian, French and Japanese), with additional language apps to be added over the next two years.

In 2016, nearly 300 preschools and more than 8,000 children participated in ELLA, following a successful trial in 2015. The program will be delivered on a “bring your own device” basis, although some funding is available to support preschools from disadvantaged areas in purchasing devices ($500 per service, available to the first 1,000 eligible preschools).

Applications to participate are now open for preschools. For more info and to apply, visit www.ella.edu.au

Improving service quality

The latest assessment and rating data from the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) suggests education and care services are on track towards continued quality improvement.

“Seventy-one per cent of services [are] now rated Meeting or Exceeding the NQS, compared with 66 per cent 12 months ago,” says Michael Petrie, ACECQA general manager of strategy, communications and consistency.

Petrie says the figures show the national assessment and rating system continues to “raise the bar” on quality and continuous improvement.

ACECQA’s latest report indicates more than 80 per cent of services have received a quality rating, with close to two-thirds of the 1,332 reassessed services receiving a higher overall quality rating.

Highlights from the report include:

- 45,429 children’s education and care services are operating across Australia
- 83% of these have received a quality rating
- 49 services have been rated Excellent by ACECQA
- 1,332 services have been reassessed, with 63% resulting in an improved overall quality rating.
With many of us shocked and saddened by recent reports about how our child welfare systems, particularly out-of-home care, are failing our most vulnerable citizens, the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University suggests brain science may hold the key.

In a recent paper, ‘Applying the Science of Child Development in Child Welfare Systems’, Harvard researchers highlight how science can be leveraged to strengthen systems that are currently failing children.

“An understanding of the science of child development,” researchers write, “has the potential to open up new ways of examining and explaining what [those connected to child welfare systems] encounter in their life and work. In so doing, it can promote openness to change and create new possibilities for action.”

Researchers identify three key factors to change, for children, parents/foster parents and welfare workers: reduce external sources of stress, develop responsive relationships, and strengthen core life skills.

“Science provides insights into factors for both children and adults that help build resilience and prevent or moderate the toxic stress response,” the researchers write, “that makes the risk of trying and testing new skills and behaviours manageable.”

To find out more and to read the paper in full, visit the website at www.developingchild.harvard.edu

Mr Huff, by Anna Walker (Penguin Random House, RRP $24.99) has taken out the 2016 Children’s Book Council of Australia Book of the Year: Early Childhood.

The story centres on Bill, who has woken up in a bad mood, which only grows as the day goes on.

Making matters worse, Bill discovers he is being followed by Mr Huff, a shadowy cloud that grows and grows the more Bill tries to rid of him.

Highlighting Walker’s stunning illustrative style, this award-winning book provides children aged over three years with tools to recognise and articulate their own ‘huffy’ feelings, and how to manage them before they become too big to deal with.

Now into the 70th year, the Children’s Book Council of Australia annual awards aim to promote quality literature for young Australians, support and encourage a wide range of Australian writers and illustrators of children’s books, and celebrate contributions to Australian children’s literature.

For a full list of winners, visit www.cbca.org.au/news

The 2016 Kidsafe National Playspace Design Awards have been announced, recognising excellence and innovation in the provision of safe, creative playspaces.

In the education and care services category, the winner was Wandana Preschool, Gillies Plains, South Australia (designed by JPE Design Studio). Fit Kidz Early Learning Centre, Putney, NSW (designed by The Gardenmakers) was highly commended.

Awards were handed out to the best playspaces in schools, as well as public playspaces, in various budget categories.

To see all the winners, and for some inspiration for your own playspace, visit www.kidsafensw.org/2016-kidsafe-national-playspace-design-awards
Developing everyday leaders, empowering local communities. This powerful phrase is written on the shirts of those on the board of Puuya Foundation and perfectly encapsulates the vision of the organisation, set up in the remote Aboriginal community in Lockhart River, Queensland.

“The majority of our board members are local leaders,” explains Denise Hagan, CEO, “so it means everything that’s done meets community needs and priorities.”

Puuya is Kuuku Ya’u for ‘heart’ or ‘life force’, and was set up by Hagan during 2008/2009, after recognising the community was largely dependent on government funding, but with programs that weren’t meeting community needs. “The leaders had great ideas of what needed to be done,” said Hagan, “but if it didn’t fit a government priority or grant or timeframe, well, then there was really nowhere for that idea to go.

“So I worked to setup the Foundation so there was a place for leaders here to decide what they wanted to do and for us to bring in other partners, particularly non-government partners, to walk with us—in a mutual sense of them assisting us but also them learning from the community.”

This work has included involvement in a range of areas, from small business to education, literacy and health initiatives, but one of the biggest projects emerged four years ago, after the community leaders recognised a huge gap in early years education. “We were running learning circles where we would bring both people from inside the community...
“and outside the community to talk about the priorities for education,” Hagan explains. Priorities which included early years education.

“The leaders decided that early years was pretty well a mess, and there wasn’t enough focus and attention in such an important foundation to give kids the best start for life. There also needed to be a lot of work done with parents and families to get them involved in their kids’ education, right from the beginning. They asked the Puuya Foundation to take that on.”

Working with community leaders over the next four years, the Foundation was able to develop the community’s vision for an integrated early years service. This saw the development of the Kuunchi Kakana (Families Together) Centre, which runs a Montessori program for children with direct family involvement.

“Parents or carers or family members must attend with their little ones,” Hagan explains. “Tanya [centre manager] and our staff here actually work with the children but also gently teach parents parenting skills as well.

“We’ve got a beautiful new centre and we’re running that program—we’ve made lots of progress and we’ve got lots more to make.”

The service is funded through multiple sources, including a mix of state and federal government funding and philanthropic donations, which means there is uncertainty around funding beyond next year.

“It’s so disappointing and challenging in that it is a priority for the community, and it’s a priority for both the state and federal governments but we don’t have guaranteed funding from government beyond next year. If we don’t have that funding we can’t run the service.”

When the centre was in the planning stages, the Foundation went to both the state and federal governments for help to build a centre but were unable to secure any funding. “Then we had a philanthropist who approached us and offered us a small building,” Hagan says. “So we went back to government and leveraged that and then got a lot more money to build the building, which was absolutely fantastic.”

As Rattler has reported in the past, funding for remote services like Kuunchi Kakana is vital, as children would be otherwise unable to access early education. “I don’t know how you make such a facility sustainable in a community that has a high degree of poverty. How do you generate funding and charge money for services when you want people to attend and they don’t have the money? They can barely look after their families as it is.”

The Lockhart River community is one of the most economically and socially disadvantaged remote communities in Australia. With a population of around 660, the community is about a day’s drive north of Cairns. During the wet season, when the rivers are high, roads are cut off for several months of the year, so getting in or out of town is by plane or by boat. A plane to Cairns costs upward of $1,000.

“During the wet season, goods come here by barge,” Hagan explains, “so it adds about 30 per cent to the cost of everything, including food.”

The community has only had one student graduate from university, and there is an unemployment rate of around three times the national average. Added to that, around 30 per cent of

Planting of native plants and bush foods has also extended the connection to culture to include a focus on healthy eating, and encouraging parents and children towards healthy food choices.

—Tanya Koko, manager, Kuunchi Kakana.
their primary school-age children have a significant hearing disability. “But we’ve got parents who want the best for their children and we’ve got leaders who have got a great vision and what we’re doing is we’re building on that strength,” Hagan says.

Culture is very strong with the community, too. “The Laura Dance Festival is a very big festival up here, and Lockhart has been the winner of that dance festival for a number of years. It’s a culture, dance and art festival, and it’s very important here.”

Reflecting on culture

Culture and a sense of community is reflected throughout Kuunchi Kakana, from the local labourers who helped build the centre to the creation of the outdoor learning environment. “Our outdoor learning environment has a big dance circle in it which is culturally very important. We have artwork that was done outside and inside the building by local artists, many of whom are internationally known. We’ve got old photographs that have been donated here. So we’ve tried to and are continuing to involve the community in the creation of the centre.”

As well as the dance circle, the Elders built a humpy in the outdoor environment, and there is a play area featuring rocks and trees donated by the local clans.

According to Tanya Koko, manager at Kuunchi Kakana, planting of native plants and bush foods has also extended the connection to culture to include a focus on healthy eating, and encouraging parents and children towards healthy food choices. “We do food preparation with children [and families] in the program. They peel the eggs, they squeeze the oranges to make orange juice, they spread crackers and everything is really healthy.”

The choice to adopt a Montessori model is also linked to culture. “We went up to Thursday Island and we had a look at their Montessori program up there, called Strait Start, and we decided we can do that in Lockhart River—we thought it was a good idea that we should implement Montessori,” Koko says.

“Montessori is all hands on, role modelling and I think all children observe from what we do, they copy,” she says. “For culture, we get a class from the school, they come over and they do corroboree dancing and the little kids will join in by watching and observing.”

“I think they did it very well,” Hagan adds. “With the Montessori approach, the children come in and then they choose their activities and if they need the help of the teachers then they help or their parents but they’re able to follow their interests. That works very well also with this age.”

“It also fits very well with the Foundation, which is really about noticing people’s strengths and gifts and passions and working with that, then bringing some energy and a life force that is vital to life and to children having the best futures—and for parents as well.”

The program holds morning sessions four days a week, and since starting service last year, Koko is already noticing changes from children and families. “We’re finding that the children are becoming more independent, they’re making their own choices, they’ve got respect for self, others and environment,” she says.

“All activities are really, really structured. We also get good feedback from the schools, and for the children that attend our centre, there is a smooth transition into pre-prep.”

Hagan also adds: “the principal said, unprompted, that it made a huge difference for the school readiness for the children and the parents in the work that Tanya and our team have done here”.

Kuunchi Kakana caters for children from birth to three years at the centre, but they also run a home delivery program for homework resources, called PAL (Parents And Learning). “We do that
program with the four- and five-year-olds, delivering homework kits weekly,” Koko explains. “We also do FaFT (Families as First Teachers) on a Wednesday, where the children are provided with lunch from the school and the mums, carers, grandparents make educational resources for the children while the children play and get familiar with the school environment and meet the teacher and so on.”

From this, both Koko and Hagan are noticing significant changes in attitudes of families, particularly those who may not have had positive experiences or attitudes towards education in the past. The community’s vision for the future is for a fully integrated early years service, including early education and care, child and maternal health and family and parenting. Money is the biggest barrier to realising that vision.

“Our main funding is for the learning side and so at the moment the work that Tanya and our team do is integrated every day. For example, we have a lot of trouble here with otitis media [middle ear infections] and that causes huge problems with hearing for children, which obviously affects their learning. “One of the key things there is cleaning hands, cleaning faces, and so for part of the program, when Tanya brings the mums and the bubs in, they go and wash their hands, blow their noses, groom themselves.

“We’re just about to start cleaning teeth, and Tanya is doing parent education sessions as well around various topics to help them with their children at different stages. They do lots of ‘gentle mentoring’ I’d call it, on the floor, helping parents help the children learn, knowing when to step forward and when to step back and how to support that. They maintain good links with the clinic and with the health services that come here but we don’t actually deliver health services from here.”

When Koko and her team first undertook training before setting up the centre, through Montessori Children’s Foundation, the Puuya Foundation also opened the training opportunity to members of the community. “To any of the mums, to some of the unemployed, even secondary students who had an interest and who weren’t away at boarding school. We opened it up so that we were giving more people the opportunity to apply and understand children’s growth and development,” Hagan says.

There was a good uptake of that training, too.

“We did that last year,” Hagan says. “We started with 19 and we had 11 graduate, which is pretty good in a little place like this where education is pretty challenging. A number of those people then worked with us, but some of them have gone off to have more little babies.”

Attendance at the centre has been pretty good, though Koko admits they need to keep building awareness of the benefits to the community. “When we first opened we had a big mob come but I think the novelty has worn off a little bit,” she says. “We’ve got a little bus service as well, to do pick up and drop offs—we go around to all the houses and ask if they want to attend.

“We’re at the awareness stage at the moment, building awareness about the importance of the early years and building that as a habit, the habit of being involved,” she says.

Koko sums up the importance of this work simply. “Through the Puuya Foundation and the Kuunchi Kakana Centre, we will change the future of Lockhart River.”
The case for embracing cultural diversity is very clear, says Dr Tim Soutphommasane, Race Discrimination Commissioner. Organisations that embrace cultural diversity outperform those that don’t. They have lower staff turnover and experience better productivity. But, he cautions, “too often we think of diversity as just being about festivals, about lunches or maybe an event or two that we should have in our workplace to celebrate our diversity and show how inclusive we are. Let me ask you: is that enough? Are you doing enough? Or are the things that you’re doing designed more to mollify your own feelings than to tackle the real challenges brought up by diversity?”

It’s true that accommodating cultural diversity can look challenging from the outside. There are a range of religious holidays and activities to consider and perhaps cultural observances to note, and these may complicate operations at an early education and care service, especially if they involve staff absence and affect staff-to-child ratios. True cultural competence is not about ‘making exceptions’ for these practices, however, but having the flexibility in your service to not only accommodate them, but to treat them as business-as-usual.

The fact is, 28 per cent of our population was born overseas, another one in five have at least one parent born overseas and about 20 per cent of people speak a language other than English at home. Not to mention the significant number of Indigenous Australians who contribute to a culturally diverse society from which you will likely draw both...
staff and children. Diversity is the norm, and ensuring your service caters for all kinds of cultural activities starts with taking a walk in other peoples’ shoes.

**Lesson 1: Knowledge is power**

“If you don’t know something, you can’t change it unless you know what you don’t know,” says Jan Wright, executive director of Ngroo Education, which focuses on increasing Aboriginal participation in early childhood education and care. Ngroo also has training programs for services wishing to improve their connection to Aboriginal people in the community, which may include families and potential staff.

Wright speaks of the invisible barriers that you might not see without looking through the lenses of another culture. If your service has a rigid daily schedule, for example, the inflexibility may make some Aboriginal people uncomfortable and you’re therefore less likely to attract Indigenous staff and families.

Do a cultural audit to find out where the hidden obstacles are, she suggests. “People come back a lot of the time they say, ‘we’re not doing a lot of that’ and we say ‘well, that’s okay because now you know where to go’. If you are respectful and you do know about inclusion from a cultural perspective, it won’t be an unfriendly space where staff won’t feel welcome.”

**Lesson 2: Train your staff**

While good leadership is a prerequisite of developing a culturally inclusive service, it is also important your staff receive training that embeds this. This not only helps them to understand colleagues from a different cultural background, it will also assist them with dealing with children from a different cultural background.

“Many staff don’t receive adequate cultural education training through TAFE or university. If they do get training, it’s generic. You can only do so much with generic knowledge and it makes it really, really difficult for staff to know what they should be doing,” says Wright.

The solution is simple: bring someone in to raise awareness. It’s the first step to building a relationship with the community, she states. “We believe, speaking of the Aboriginal community now—though it would transfer into other cultures—that training needs to be delivered by trained and local people who belong to that culture.”

**Lesson 3: An inclusive environment**

If the service has been operating for some time, it’s possible its operations are unintentionally exclusive. Most directors, when they have a member of staff who has religious or cultural requirements, are happy to make exceptions but rarely make the time to be proactively inclusive of cultural diversity.

Running your service by exception is actually more difficult than having an inclusive staff culture because of the breadth of possible requirements.

“Most people understand diversity means differences but sometimes they overlook the fact that it also means individual uniqueness. So there are many differences in ethnic groups and Aboriginal communities,” says Marjory Ebbeck, Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of South Australia. “People are not homogeneous”

Wright adds, however, that often it can look more complicated than it actually is. “There are more commonalities than there are differences. It’s probably safer for centres to look at the commonalities than to get tied up in thinking ‘I have to know this about this mob and this about that mob’.”

What does inclusivity look like? It looks a lot like a work environment in which you value your staff members and allow them to be open with you about their needs, says Ebbeck. “Catering for differences really comes about through a positive relationship with the staff. There’s a human element to developing positive, trusting reciprocal relationships as fundamental.”

**Lesson 4: Build a framework**

Upon recruitment, make it routine to ask about any religious or cultural requirements that may affect the role, but also make it clear that you are asking so you can accommodate them, not as a point of exception. These requirements may affect what food staff can handle during food preparation, for example, or account for possible absence during holy observances or other community obligations.

Acknowledging requirements is not just a matter of compliance. Muslim staff, for example, may ask for space and time to pray (which takes, on average, 10-15 minutes). Small things can make a big difference, says Wright. The accessibility of transport, for example, is a point of exception. “If the centre has some teaching staff or support staff who are culturally diverse, then they will understand some of these traditions, and it’s very helpful if they can contribute,” she says. “Parents too, whatever the cultural background, need to be encouraged to contribute to the life of the centre in ways appropriate for them. For some of them, it may be sharing their talents and contributing to the curriculum if they have good language skills, for example.”

Small things can make a big difference, too. Wright says a small Aboriginal flag and a Torres Strait Islander flag on display in the window assures families that the service welcomes those groups: “The visibility thing is pretty important.”

Ebbeck adds that having material in different languages has the same inclusive effect. “They understand that they’re welcome and that the centre is supporting their cultural background rather than supplanting it.”

Access to storybooks and toys from different cultures as part of regular play also normalises cultural diversity. And in the end, simply letting the children form their own relationships will go a long way towards this, Ebbeck says. “This is the social climate where children will truly be engaged in cultural practices in a non-artificial way. They’ll do many things together and they’ll learn to understand and respect one another.”

**INCLUSIVE PRACTICE**

Cultural diversity in an early childhood education and care setting should go beyond the ‘food and festivals’ where Soutphommasane says many people stop. Those two areas, however, are a great place to start, especially if the children have not been broadly exposed to cultural diversity. Having a special day or series of days to discover other cultures through traditions, languages and food is a fun way for children to get to know other cultures and religions and a great forum for them to feel comfortable asking questions.

Within that, however, is a need to ensure there is a partnership with people in the community who are able to show that diversity is part of the norm, not an exception, not a ‘special case’. Marjory Ebbeck, Emeritus Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of South Australia, believes both staff and parents from different backgrounds can play a key role in doing this.

“If the centre has some teaching staff or support staff who are culturally diverse, then they will understand some of these traditions, and it’s very helpful if they can contribute,” she says. “Parents too, whatever the cultural background, need to be encouraged to contribute to the life of the centre in ways appropriate for them. For some of them, it may be sharing their talents and contributing to the curriculum if they have good language skills, for example.”

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If you approach cultural diversity with respect and a willingness to learn and accommodate difference, then you’re more than halfway there.

five to 10 minutes), so ensuring you have an adequate number of non-Muslim staff to maintain ratios during that time is crucial—it might also help to roster enough staff to cover Diwali with non-Hindu staff or Chinese New Year with non-Chinese staff or Eid with non-Muslim staff, and so on. Having staff from different religious and cultural backgrounds is a clear benefit in this regard!

There are also a number of religions that practise fasting, including Muslims during Ramadan, Jews during Yom Kippur and Buddhist, Hindu and Eastern Orthodox practitioners at other times. That may simply mean staff need frequent breaks during fasting periods and may not be able to participate in high-energy activities.

Knowledge of different cultural practices will also help you build resilience so you are prepared when the unexpected happens. Many cultures, for example, place a high priority on family and community and it’s possible they will drop everything to assist ill family members or attend a funeral.

Wright gives the example of Sorry Business, where if there is a death in an Aboriginal community, it’s possible friends and relatives will disappear overnight to spend time in the community for up to a month. It might not occur to an Aboriginal staff member to tell you until much later, she says. “Services need to understand if they don’t have knowledge they can’t use the knowledge. If you know that Aboriginal families might disappear for a month on Sorry Business, and they might not think to ring you, you can have someone else in reserve to cover those times. You can have a system in place where you might say ‘Oh, I bet there’s Sorry Business—I’ll try and find out if that’s what’s happening,’ but you don’t penalise them and you don’t constantly ring them, you just let it be and sort it out later.”

An inclusive director, Wright notes, should be able to say, “I understand what’s going on in your culture on how important this is to you. I’m handling it.” It’s those sorts of subtleties that make a really positive, inclusive environment for Aboriginal staff. Good quality centres do that and do it really well.”

**Lesson 5: Enrich the learning environment**

Staff from different cultural and religious backgrounds are a great asset for children because not only do they understand early education and care, they can speak with authority and answer questions about what they practise and why. In many cases you will find staff diversity reflects community diversity and families will feel more comfortable leaving their children at a preschool where they can see parallels with the care they might receive at home.

If you approach cultural diversity with respect and a willingness to learn and accommodate difference, then you’re more than halfway there, says Wright. “When you have knowledge you stop being fearful of making a mistake or doing the wrong thing and you start to build relationships.”

“It’s about belonging,” she states. And that’s belonging not to a religious or cultural group discrete from the values of your centre but belonging to the community in which your service is a part.
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With her background in health law and advocacy for accessible education, **Kate Washington**’s passion for early education began long before she took on the role of NSW Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education.

**Did your children attend early education and care when they were younger?**
All types! Like everyone, different services suited us at different times. So my three children attended different mixes of long day care, preschool and family day care. We also loved attending local playgroups. The 10 years that I had children attending early childhood education and care services were expensive, and a logistical nightmare. At times, my income was only covering the cost of early childhood education and care. And I was a lawyer! I can only imagine how difficult it is for other families and single parents.

**How has your background prepared you for your role as Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education?**
Long before politics, I was elected as a Director on the Board of KU Children’s Services. Through personal experiences, I had become so passionate about not-for-profit preschools that I wanted to understand more and contribute more. At the time, I was lawyering and living in Newcastle with two preschoolers. It was rewarding experience, although somewhat frustrating, as it was during the Eddy Groves [ABC Learning] era, and we were witnessing the havoc being inflicted on the sector.

The campaign that saw me first enter into the world of politics was when I was P&C president of my kids’ primary school, and I was campaigning for a local high school to be built. The accessibility of educational opportunities has been a an ongoing passion of mine and it’s what drives my work as Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education.

I was a health lawyer prior to being elected to Parliament, representing people who had suffered harm. Essentially, in every case, I was fighting for people to be treated with respect. It’s this ethos, and those skills, that I apply to my Shadow Ministerial role.

**What do you see as the key challenges facing the sector?**
I have spent a lot of time meeting with centre directors and staff across the state and there are some consistent themes that I am hearing. I don’t need to tell your readers that there’s enormous frustration in the sector. While there are many sources of frustration, at its heart, it’s borne out of the lack of value placed on the sector by federal and state governments. The lack of value manifests itself primarily through a lack of funding for services and low pay for early childhood education workers. The deepest frustration stems from the understanding within the sector that a quality preschool education is life changing. The lack of funding means services are not accessible nor affordable and children are missing out. Worse still, they are often the children who would benefit the most.

So, a key challenge is to see greater value placed on early childhood education by federal and state governments, value that’s reflected in meaningful policy and funding. And while increased funding to the sector will improve accessibility and affordability, to achieve greater participation rates, we must also ensure that the community understands the importance of a quality preschool education. This is a challenge that we must meet if we are to see increased participation.

**How would you tackle these challenges?**
NSW Labor is committed to ensuring there is greater accessibility and affordability to a preschool education. We want to see every child enjoying at least 15 hours of pre-schooling in
The current NSW Government has underspent the preschool budget by over $350 million over recent years. It has even failed to pass onto the sector money it has received from the Federal Government specifically for ECEC.

A NSW Labor government will ensure that inputs from federal government are maximised and expended meaningfully. This is a sector that knows what works and what doesn’t work. I understand that different services have different needs so there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution. A NSW Labor government will consult extensively with the sector, as I’m currently doing, to ensure that funding is directed appropriately and effectively so as to maximise opportunities for children.

Do you have a vision for the sector in the future?
If I was designing an early childhood sector from scratch, it would look very different from the current patchwork system.

We have inherited a system whereby the government says, once your child turns five, we will guarantee them an education until they turn 18. But during those first five years, it’s up to you—you know how critical the early years are.

I want to see an early childhood education and care sector which is accessible and affordable for all families, regardless of where they live or their social, economic or cultural background. As all early childhood education workers know, this will give children the best start in life, and provide benefit to them over their entire lifetime. In turn, our communities will be stronger. The consequential benefit is the increased ability for parents, particularly women, to participate in the workforce. There are no losers in this scenario!

If there was one piece of advice you’d give your younger self, what would it be?
When I was younger, I thought the older you got the bigger the town you live in. I know, it’s ridiculous! But my parents were both teachers, my dad a primary school principal. In fact, at my first town—Mulwala, on the Murray River—my dad was my school principal. With dad’s work, we moved around a lot, and with each move the town got bigger.

I would tell my younger self to stop wanting to get older, to stop yearning for the unknown city-life, enjoy the freedoms that country towns offer and keep in touch with friends better (I’m a shocker at doing that).

What keeps you awake at night?
Thankfully, it’s no longer babies crying. Although, now we’re partly in the teenage realm, there’s another whole world of potential nightmares! My occasional nighttime jolts come from the fear that I’ve forgotten to do something that I said I would do. I hate not following through.

Can you share a quirky or little known fact about yourself?
With some hesitance, I can share that I usually have a creative project on the go. Sometimes it’s a painting, or some knitting. My hesitation stems from a complete lack of skill, so this is as far as the sharing goes!
Early childhood educators are stressed and overworked, with many even leaving or planning on leaving the profession within the next year. Children in our care are dealing with this stress, too, while learning how to focus and regulate emotions in a fast-paced and constantly changing world. Strong social and emotional skills are needed more than ever before. For children with mental health needs this is of extra concern.

These were the issues I found myself grappling with five years ago, working as a teaching director of a community preschool in Lilyfield. At the time, I could see children, families and staff who were busy and stressed, for many reasons—as was I, from being in a role with an overwhelming workload and in emotionally demanding profession. So I began to ask: what more can we do when we already seem to do so much?

The answer revealed itself to me as I underwent my own rediscovery of mindfulness. I had been taught these skills as a child by my mother who was a teacher of yoga and meditation herself, but it was only when I rediscovered these skills as an adult that I realised their potential power in working with children and families. While the word mindfulness has become something of a buzzword of late, research has been showing that the practise of mindfulness has the potential to help us navigate effectively through life’s challenges, deal with stress and live happily.

So what does mindfulness really mean? Jon Kabat-Zinn, the American scientist who pioneered mindfulness in the West, explains this age-old practice as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”. In other words, observing and experiencing the present moment as it really is, through one’s thoughts, feelings and bodily senses, rather than fighting against it, worrying about the future or mulling over the world can be a busy and stressful place. Modern life with its work, family, relationship and financial responsibilities places many demands on us. Combine this with the technological and social media advances of the last two decades and life seems to be moving at a faster and faster pace. Radha Babicci explores a remedy.
past. It can be practised with myriad meditations, yoga, tai chi, qigong, mindful walking, mindful eating, and so on. The real power, however, is bringing it into your day-to-day life.

For example, imagine you are driving to work and someone pulls out in front of you. You slam on the brakes, narrowly missing their car. What is your immediate reaction? Most of us would react automatically with thoughts of anger, annoyance or fear. Then what happens? There is no space between the stimuli—what happened—and your reaction, you inhabit that thought and become annoyed or scared. This could lead to acting on it then and there, beeping your horn, yelling or even chasing the person down the road! Or you may just internalise it. All these lead to a bad mood, stress and tension in the body, hurting you, not the other person.

However, with a little bit of mindfulness in this situation you might notice that your heart rate is going up, you are breathing faster, your brow is furrowed, your palms are clammy or you are having a burst of self-righteous or fearful thoughts and you think “I am getting angry” or “I am getting scared”. But you don’t necessarily need to act on it or internalise and let it overcome you. You just notice it.

Now you might be thinking, don’t I need to get angry or scared sometimes? Yes, but probably not as often as you do. The idea of mindfulness is not to become a non-reactive blob where people can do and say whatever they like to you and you just smile peacefully at them. The outcome is more that you learn to respond wisely to things that happen to you rather than just reacting blindly.

So how does this relate to early childhood education? We all know from our work with children that they are developing their social-emotional skills. The Early Years Learning Framework specifies a range of social-emotional skills across five learning outcomes, such as self-regulation, confidence, communication, sense of self, empathy and resilience. This tells us that young children need support with their social-emotional skills and that educators need to facilitate this.

Research also tells us that it is the early years before school where children develop the foundations of their social-emotional skills, such as sense of self, empathy, attention, self-control and self-regulation skills and that these impact on children’s future academic and life success. Many children in our care are also grappling with mental health needs like anxiety, ADHD and autism. The exciting thing is that studies show the use of mindfulness in education is supporting the development of these social-emotional skills, as well as treating mental illness in children, increasing resilience and reducing teacher stress and burnout.

At Emmerick Street Community Preschool we saw children who participated in our mindfulness program become more aware of their breath (which is a powerful calming tool), settle more easily into group times and become more emotionally literate, being able to name their emotions easily and feeling comfortable to talk about them with us and their parents. Parents also reported that children used some of the techniques for regulating their emotions during times of stress, such as starting school the following year. Some students even reminded parents to use the techniques when angry or sad.

Families embraced our practice of bringing mindfulness into our preschool community. We educated families about its benefits for children’s learning and development in our newsletters and at a parent meeting, but our community was always supportive of it.

Bringing mindfulness to practice
To get started, though, I had to begin with my own daily regular meditation practice. I believe this is important for anyone to do if they are going to bring mindfulness into their early learning community—just like riding a bike or swimming it is in the doing that we learn how to practise mindfulness.

Once I was practising mindfulness, the personal benefits I was experiencing flowed out into my interactions with others, creating more meaningful connections with children, staff and families. Before this, while people had
always described me as calm, I was constantly worrying and planning and experiencing stress and tension responses to children’s noise and emotional needs and parent complaints. Underneath it all I was stressed and anxious. Practising mindfulness, however, helped me become more internally calm and confident and less reactive and stressed. This led me to be more relaxed and present in my interactions with children, families and staff and to be more productive with my daily workload.

Learning to meditate may sound complicated but it is really quite simple. All you need to do is sit or lie in a comfortable position with your eyes closed in a space where you won’t be disturbed. Next, bring your attention to feeling the breath, which is the key between the body and mind. The breath excites us when it is fast and calms us when it is slow. The breath is also the constant factor that is always there, so by observing it we become part of the present moment. Nevertheless, some people who find this too challenging may prefer to begin with mindful walking or movement practices, such as yoga or even just sitting in nature and mindfully feeling the breeze on their skin or watching the trees move in the breeze.

For young children, like those at our preschool, I make them aware of their breath with different techniques to make it visible. At Emmerick Street, we used games such as blowing feathers up in the air and catching them, blowing ping pong balls across the floor to each other, blowing bubbles or blowing pin wheels. We then progressed to different types of controlled breathing, such as balloon belly breathing, where we breathe into the belly, expanding it like a balloon, or breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth, or only in and out through the nose or in one nostril and out the other. These experiential games make the concept of the breath easy to grasp as they see it and feel it. As the children became more experienced we brought their attention to the feeling or sound of the breath.

To cater to different interests and learning styles and keep children’s engagement, I added a variety of meditations that staff learnt from too. These involved bringing their attention to different sensory factors, such as listening to sounds inside and outside, clapping their hands together three times and holding them apart feeling the sensations on their hands, eating a raisin or piece of chocolate mindfully or smelling different smells mindfully. Other meditations and games include body scans—bringing awareness to each body part—and listening games, where children put up their hands when the sound stops. All these require children to use and practise attention and self-regulation skills and exercise self-control. Above all, though, they are fun.

Mindfulness for children and adults can extend beyond sitting and, in fact, mindful movement practice is a prerequisite for studying to become a mindfulness teacher. In our mindfulness program I added weekly yoga for children’s mindful movement. This was a fun and active time with games and songs that connected children to their breath, bodies and each other, and always ended with a relaxing meditation. We also did mindful walks together, silently noticing the colours, sounds or smells around them, or just the feeling of their feet while walking.

Bringing mindfulness into your everyday life comes with practice but you can help the process with some exercise. For adults, schedule in mindful moments throughout the day, scanning your body from head-to-toe and toe-to-head for how each part feels, sitting in silence or just focusing on your breath. For children, you can do these as games before a group time and remind them of techniques they have practised in meditation to calm them down when they are being overcome by an emotion. For example, bringing their attention to their breath or doing belly breaths.

Another mindfulness technique I use with children is to just sit with them and acknowledge their feelings, naming it and asking them to notice how it feels in the body and that it is ok to feel this. Mindfulness has been suggested as a potential solution to many of life’s stressors. In our case, it gave children positive outcomes for their social and emotional development and supported us to reduce stress, connect to children and families and get work done. With the early years being the important period for social and emotional learning and the emotional demanding nature of our work, mindfulness could be the tool we have been looking for. While it is not a magic cure that will make every day all butterflies and rainbows, it can make life easier and happier—and who doesn’t want that?

Radha Babicci is former director at Emmerick Street Community Preschool, where she implemented mindfulness into daily practice with children. Radha now runs Super Kids Yoga (www.superkidyoga.com.au), offering yoga programs for children aged two to 12 years, as well as running team building workshops for teachers on children’s yoga and mindfulness.
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www.ella.edu.au
PET peeve

When graduates first enter an early education service, they may be unprepared for the reality of working in a service. Ruth Weinstein explains what she’d like to see offered through the education and training process, to ensure graduates—and children and their families—have a smooth transition.

It’s the first day of the year and there is an excitement and buzz in the centre as staff busily prepare the environment and familiarise themselves with the names of new families. Preparing for a positive start to the year the new graduates (teachers or diploma-trained) are eagerly waiting their chance to be part of the team and make a difference in children’s lives.

The first children arrive, but mingled with the excitement is the pandemonium of crying or aggressive children and anxious, weeping parents. For the new graduate, this is nothing they have ever seen before. During their student experience they had only ever witnessed the calm of their prac periods, where children were already settled and used to the environment and the parents were happy and secure. The new staff ask themselves: what can I do, what can I say, what are the words of wisdom I need to say to help the child feel secure in separating?

I believe it would be so much more helpful for young graduates to have spent at least one day a week for an entire year in a centre as part of their training. This would give them an overview of the development of the children in terms of their building relationships with staff and peers, their settling into the environment, and witnessing the developing of wonderful relationships with families. The picture that would unfold slowly every week would equip each student to understand that not everything follows a predictable script; each child (and parent) is unique and their journey is the result of the many experiences and interactions that happen along the way.

Often diploma-trained students spend as little as one week as a prac period in an unfamiliar centre. It’s almost impossible to even get to know the children by name, let alone understand their personalities, their interests and their developing skills in one week. Many teachers come to their pracs with a huge amount of
work to complete and therefore this becomes their focus. This does not really give them time to hone their skills of group management, practical ideas for transitioning children or diverting their attention in difficult situations. It doesn’t give them the time that is needed to form strong secure relationships with children, to have the time to observe and listen in an unhurried and unpressured way.

I think early childhood training institutions need to think very seriously about how they can prepare their students with practical skills. Theory is wonderful but in the stark reality of practice, theoretical knowledge does not give you the necessary skills and knowledge to calm a crying parent or distressed child. Institutions need to arm their students with lots of practical skills to help support them in those first few days of their career, and the only realistic way to do this is to be in a work environment with opportunities to observe and reflect and practice their skills during their training.

When a new graduate starts work at the very beginning of the year, the other staff are often so busy with supporting new children and parents, they don’t have the time or the ability to help these new employees with ideas. And where does that leave the new staff member: feeling frustrated, inadequate, disillusioned and feeling they are letting everyone down.

Let’s look at a more practical way of allowing students to see the big picture in reality, to learn how to become part of a team over a year, to build relationships with children over a year, to watch the changes in the children, the program, the families, the whole centre over a year, and, most importantly, to gather a repertoire of practical skills by observing and learning alongside educators. As employers, we would then feel more confident about employing newly-graduated applicants.

Ruth Weinstein is director of Wee Care, Bondi Junction.

Do you have your own pet peeve, dream wish or gripe you’d like heard? We’d love to hear from you. Send your ideas to rattlermagazine@armedia.net.au You can remain anonymous, if you wish.

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Sharp knives. Raw meat. Cooking on the BBQ. Does this sound risky or does it sound like real cooking experiences for children? **John Stewart** shows services how to bring more risk into the kitchen, and beyond.

In an early childhood education and care setting, educators may well be challenged by the thought of cooking with children, even though the act of cooking itself can be appealing, not to mention the final product and the joy felt when loved ones gather to socialise and share their stories and food.

It makes me wonder about the types of cooking opportunities that are being provided for children: are they cultural, meaningful, age appropriate, enjoyable, a learning opportunity and healthy, or are they the experience which sees four children seated around a table as an educator passes a bowl for the permitted six stirs before it is whisked away out of sight to the kitchen to be cooked and then represented at afternoon tea time?

In an ideal cooking experience, I see children involved from the very start, connecting with their family and community, with preliminary conversations that provide opportunity for relationships to develop. Through these relationships I see educators and children planning future cooking opportunities. These opportunities support using sustainable practices, too, with the prime objective being fresh from the garden and onto the table through the hands of the children.

Unfortunately, the reality is often a different story. During a recent cooking workshop, I asked educators about their views relating to the cooking opportunities provided for the children in their education and care services. I had hoped to be inspired by some new and exciting ideas. However, when the educators reflected on their current practices and level of engagement with food, safety and nutrition in general, it seems that there is work to be done.

Personal barriers rated highly, educators explaining that they were often at a loss as what to provide—they were educators not cooks! A few also suggested that it was probably wiser not to let children near a kitchen anyway. Others were worried about other issues, including allergies and health management, limited cooking resources, sustainability considerations, hygiene concerns, risk and hazard management and, the big one, cost.

Educators have often asked me what they can do to make cooking opportunities easier. My response is simple: just get
in there and do it! You don’t need a fancy kitchen, or a large cost outlay for ingredients. Start by reviewing your service philosophy, nutrition policy and QIP, and then to maintain momentum, raise the topic at the next staff meeting to get everyone exchanging ideas.

To enable meaningful and rich learning environments, we should always be responsive to the children, utilising their strengths, abilities and interests. And we know children learn through play, so cooking opportunities need to be more than a 15 minute session once a week—to provide a cooking experience daily doesn’t mean it has to be a high performance and costly experience, it can be as simple as a manual juicer and a box of cheap oranges next to the water station, or a toaster at your progressive morning tea.

Creative and safe learning environments welcome children, so take a look at your current environment and check to ensure that it incorporates continuity of learning. Does it encourage children to explore and interact and develop constructive meaning and knowledge in relation to food and nutrition?

Educators are brilliant at working with children and co-constructing learning opportunities, so maybe it is time we allowed ourselves the opportunity to learn from them. After all, we all think we have the next prime minister in our group, why not the next world-class chef?

Let children create and experience cooking and food throughout the day. Bring your slow cooker to work next week; have the children work together to create a recipe for lunch and set them to work. Or grab a free-range Halal chook, use the herbs from your garden and make a stuffing—and wheel in a borrowed Webber (BBQ) for lunch, pull up some spuds and carrots that are growing in the boxes out back, cut a home grown lettuce for the salad and sit back and get involved with a lunch that is completely prepared and cooked by the children. Try John’s sample recipe for white beans and chicken breast on page 35.

John Stewart is a former chef, and manager of Program Delivery at Community Child Care Co-operative. He also runs Community Child Care’s Food for Thought workshops. The next workshop will be held in Marrickville, Sydney on 10 February 2017 (cost, $200). Places are limited, so book online at www.booking.cccnsw.org.au/sessions

PHOTOGRAPHY: TRUDY BEALE, BRADBURY COMMUNITY PRESCHOOL
Cooking with kids is not just about ingredients, recipes and cooking—it’s about harnessing imagination, empowerment and creativity.
—Guy Fieri, celebrity chef.

After attending a workshop on healthy eating and taking risks with the play environment, I came away wondering why we didn’t also take risks in our cooking experiences, and why we stop at cupcakes or pancakes. Why don’t we cook meals with the children; really explore, understand and experiment with food we may be growing in the garden or other ingredients?

At Bradbury Preschool, children bring in their own lunch, and they tend not to explore a variety of food choices, or always bring the healthiest option. We also have children with dietary needs, allergies or cultural beliefs that affect what they eat. I wanted to embed the passion for food and cooking into our preschool programs, so I attended another workshop exploring fun, easy ideas on how to implement cooking into our program, with recipes that can be used in the preschool environment.

I set up a learning station to encourage cooking. We had sharp knives, potato peelers, graters, measuring cups and spoons, scales, wooden spoons, mixing bowls, chopping boards and cook books. We created a shelf for the basic ingredients: gluten-free and self-raising flour, sugar, salt, olive oil, coconut oil, vanilla essence. We also have eggs from our chickens, milk and butter in the fridge. This was the start to an engaging journey with our early childhood learners.

I recently overheard a child reflecting about a cooking experience they had undertaken. It was joyful to witness the child’s ability to recall and detail the steps, how the children worked together, and describe the sensory overload. These small accomplishments provide us as educators enormous confidence to continue to extend our special roles. So we have taken our cooking outside with the introduction of a fire pit, where we have cooked a variety of delicious meals with the children actively involved. This has brought a new level of risk and excitement, connecting with nature and community into our experiences.

What about risk?
There is always risk when you are dealing with sharp objects, heat and fire. That is where our risk action plan helped—not forgetting using common sense! Sometimes it’s too easy to focus on negative possibilities, rather than really looking at the benefits of the action. Creating a risk/benefit plan will highlight whether the benefits outweigh the risks. And ask yourself, are we holding back as educators because we are uncomfortable or lack motivation? We need to get out of our comfort zone and step it up, take it further!

Through cooking, children are learning communication and self-help skills. They are developing fine motor skills, patience, self-esteem, confidence, curiosity, achievement and a sheer joy of food. We make sure to explain to the children about the risk, demonstrate correct techniques and always scaffold as we are working through the experience. Learning in this meaningful way is intrinsically beneficial for both the learner and the educator. When I see faces light up throughout these experiences and the eagerness to have a try of a new food, or even just to touch the food, there’s a sense of achievement and accomplishment.

When introducing more meaningful cooking experience, families can find these experiences challenging and not always be on the same page, initially. From my experience, communication is the key. Just as we explain the risk to the children and how they need to act during these experiences, we need to inform families and show them the benefits of these activities for their children.

We recently posted a video on our closed Facebook page in which I demonstrate different cutting techniques, with the...
The reviews and comments from the families were amazing. The families are even excited about what we are cooking next.

"I love how it is teaching the children useful skills, it allows them to try new foods and experience a variety of cooking styles, while encouraging a good relationship with food. The smile on my son's face is proof of the pride he has in eating something he has prepared and cooked himself! I love the suggestions he now comes home with for dinners and food we as a family have never had before," writes one parent. We've also had comments expressing gratitude that we included various dietary requirements and cultural beliefs without fuss.

There are endless possibilities when it comes to cooking. Our next step is to create an outdoor kitchen with a barbeque, working sink and a bench for preparation. We will be able to cook indoors or outdoors any time of the day.

If you're unsure where to start, an important thing is to take small steps. Start simple, by introducing a vegetable such as a carrot. Talk about it, explore it with the children, brainstorm ideas, ask questions: what would they like to cook with the carrot? Explore different techniques with the children but, most importantly, engage, have fun and enjoy.

Bon appetit!

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Trudy Beale is educational leader, Bradbury Community Preschool.

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White beans & chicken breast

**Ingredients:**
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts – Halal
- 1 can crushed tomatoes
- 1 can white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 red capsicum, chopped
- 1 tsp Italian dried herbs
- 1 tsp dried basil or (better!) fresh basil from your garden

**Method:**
1. Place chicken in a slow cooker and sprinkle with basil.
2. Add capsicum, beans & tomatoes evenly over chicken.
3. Cook on high for 3-4 hours.
4. Serve with pasta or rice or a garden salad made from all those great ingredients from your garden.

This recipe promotes a social working environment, some great motor skill development, language and STEM opportunities. How exciting to make this early in the morning and have it cooking away in the room ready for lunch time. And grab a handful of mint and a lemon from the tree and infuse with cold water and ice, for a refreshing summer drink.

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How many early childhood teachers have been accredited so far?
Over 7,000 teachers were accredited by the end of October 2016. This represents the vast majority of early childhood teachers in NSW.

Who acts as the Teacher Accreditation Authority (TAA) for early childhood teachers?
BOSTES is currently the TAA for early childhood teachers. From 1 January 2017, BOSTES will become the NSW Education Standards Authority, which is expected to be the TAA for teachers in this sector.

How long does it take to be accredited by BOSTES?
For anyone seeking provisional accreditation after 1 October 2016, it will take five to 10 working days for an application to be processed. It involves the assessment of all relevant documents and information submitted by teachers, including verification of Working with Children Check clearances. Any teacher who started to teach for the first time in NSW from 1 October 2016 is required to be provisionally or conditionally accredited.

How has the accreditation process been received?
Feedback has been very positive, with early childhood teachers welcoming the professional recognition provided by accreditation. Teachers have already started maintaining their accreditation and logging professional development (PD). Sector representatives and employers have been very supportive in encouraging teachers to complete the accreditation process as quickly as possible.

Are the accreditation requirements for early childhood teachers the same as for school teachers?
Yes. All teachers are required to meet the same Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) and complete at least 100 hours of professional development to maintain their accreditation. Accreditation sees early childhood teachers recognised as teaching professionals alongside NSW school teachers.

How can a teacher fulfil the 100 hours requirement over the five- or seven-year period?
For early childhood teachers, like all other teachers, accreditation is a process and they can plan their PD over time to achieve their professional goals. Remember PD might be identified as part of performance and development reviews and can include 80 hours of teacher identified PD. At least 20 hours must be registered PD.

What is the difference between teacher identified and registered professional development?
Teacher identified PD is as it sounds; professional development selected by the teacher that relates to their professional goals and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Registered professional development is endorsed by BOSTES.
What should teachers have in mind when they are looking for PD courses?
It is important teachers set professional goals and look for PD that will help develop their teaching. There is a lot of flexibility, allowing teachers to tailor their PD to their own experience, situation and interests. It’s also important that professional development relates to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

How do teachers find appropriate professional development?
The simplest way for teachers to find a course to log into their online teacher accreditation account (accessed via www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au/login) created during accreditation process and search for registered courses. Employers or others in the early childhood sector may also offer courses and training that can count as teacher identified professional development. This is also true of other courses or training an early childhood teacher can undertake to help improve their professional knowledge, practice and engagement.

How are professional development courses endorsed?
There is an application process for providers of professional learning to register their course with BOSTES in line with recommendations of the recent BOSTES Review, new approval criteria and processes for professional development providers will be available in 2017.

How do teachers achieve accreditation at Proficient Teacher level?
A graduate is initially accredited as Provisional and Conditional. They then work towards achieving Proficient Teacher over three (full time) or five years (part time/casual). This involves collecting evidence about their practice and demonstrating they meet the Proficient Teacher Standard Descriptors of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

What is Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher status?
Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher levels of accreditation are voluntary. The development of support materials for these career stages for early childhood teachers is a current focus for BOSTES.

Interested teachers should contact BOSTES for further information.

Can an accredited early childhood teacher now work in schools?
Once accredited, early childhood teachers can seek employment in schools if they have the qualifications to do so. Teachers should provide evidence of their accreditation to any potential employer.

What happens if a service employs a teacher who is not accredited?
Any teacher employed in an approved centre-based early childhood education and care service is required to be accredited, under the Teacher Accreditation Act 2004. From 1 January 2017, the NSW Education Standards Authority (currently BOSTES) will be responsible for overseeing this requirement.

What happens if teachers fail to pay their accreditation fee one year—can they pay double the following year?
To be accredited there is an annual, tax deductible fee of $100. Teachers can have their accreditation suspended for not paying their annual fee. This means they are unable to work as a teacher.

At the end of the five- or seven-year maintenance cycle, who completes accreditation reports for early childhood teachers?
Teachers are responsible for completing their Maintenance of Accreditation Report and submitting it to their Teacher Accreditation Authority (TAA).

Take it from me
Early childhood teacher Belinda Crothers, from Ross Circuit Preschool in Lavington, was accredited at Proficient Teacher in March this year and welcomes having professional recognition.

“The process was smooth and straightforward and the staff at BOSTES were really helpful.”

She has already started planning her PD.

“As a starting point I consulted the Standards and using them as a guide I listed the areas I wanted to gain more experience in, such as training on dealing with challenging behaviours. I then planned out what was possible making sure all PD requirements would be achieved within the five year deadline.”

Information on endorsed professional development providers who offer QTC Registered Courses tailored specifically to the needs of early childhood teachers can be found on the Teacher Accreditation website.

“If I could offer any advice it would be to start early and check out the information and PD available on the website. There are many training options that are directly relevant to early childhood teachers,” she said.
A range of experts and consultants provides advice on most topics.

A lot of work is at that pre-operational stage, including consultation on site plans, compliance queries, due diligence, and everything services need to begin operations.
Getting to know you

Community Child Care Co-operative is many things to many people: peak body, customised training provider, RTO, advocate. But do you know all there is to know about your favourite organisation? Rattler goes inside Community Child Care to find out more about the services it delivers to the early childhood sector.

As we all know, managers, directors and management committee members wear a number of hats and face many tasks outside their skill set. This is why Community Child Care Co-operative offers a consultancy service, providing research and expert advice on all aspects of setting up and running an early childhood education and care service.

“Consultancy is a fairly broad word, and it does cover an awful lot of topics or issues that services might have,” says Marie Deverill, consultancy leader. “A lot of the work that we do is in that pre-operational stage.” This includes consultation on site plans, compliance queries, due diligence, and everything services need to begin operations.

For existing services, advice is often sought regarding policy reviews, strategic plans, business plans or budgeting assistance. “The client may need to apply to the bank for finance, so would come to us for help with creating a budget to present to the bank as part of the business plan,” Deverill says.

Community based services run by a management committee, who may not have early education expertise, often seek out Community Child Care for assistance with understanding around regulations and compliance issues.

“Projects could also come from when the service is working its way through its Quality Improvement Plan,” Deverill adds. “If the director needs help with a particular Quality Area, for example, we have the knowledge and resources to support this process.”

Beyond expert assistance for management of early childhood services, Community Child Care also works with local, state and national government department clients. For example, Northern Beaches Council (formerly Warringah Council) uses Community Child Care’s services on a number of occasions, including putting together annual conferences and staff mentoring for the Children’s Services team leaders.

More recently, the Australian Government contracted Community Child Care to work with early education services on Norfolk Island when it was brought under Australian jurisdiction this year, ensuring its services understand what compliance means under the National Regulations.

“The government wanted us to go over and talk to services about the reality of the NQF and the regulations,”
Deverill explains, “and what it’s going to mean for them to become compliant and to come within the system.”

Not every job is a “cradle to grave” job, as Deverill puts it. “Sometimes we might only do a small part of a bigger piece of work,” she says. “For example, a committee might be wanting to expand their service but they need to know what’s going on in the local area. We can have a demographic study done, and that hard data may be used for further research.”

On the larger end, the work may involve a government tender, such as the Munch and Move work for NSW Health. “We have been embedded in the Munch and Move program since 2009, and writing a program for the Health Department, a pilot program, that linked the Munch and Move program with the QIP. We then created and delivered a training package that went alongside that.”

Community Child Care provides information and advice on most topics, unless it falls outside of its expertise. “We don’t give legal advice,” Marie says as an example, “but we work with a range of experts and consultants and can give people advice as to where to source that information.”

“A project can be quite quick to set up,” Deverill explains. “For example, if it’s somebody who is starting a centre and they want a site visit or they want plans reviewed, the paperwork to start the work could be done within 24 hours. As for the work itself, depending on the schedule, you would look at having that completed within a week or up to 10 days or so.”

Other services, however, such as a strategic plan, would take a few weeks. “We’re working with a client in the Hunter Valley, whom we spoke with on a Wednesday, and by Friday the consultant had a proposal back to the client, which was accepted. The three-part job will be completed in a few weeks.”

Costs vary for consulting services, depending on requirements, with discounts for Community Child Care members. Call 1800 157 818 or visit www.cccnsw.org.au/consultancy

CONSULTANCY IN ACTION

Melissa Messina, executive manager Children’s Services at Northern Beaches Council (formerly Warringah Council), has benefitted first-hand from Community Child Care’s consultancy services. And thanks to the Long Day Care Professional Development Program fund, she came up with some creative ways to use those services.

“With the long day care grant money we held our first Children’s Services Conference for Warringah Council in 2015, to spend our monies wisely and get good bang for buck,” she says.

“We gave Community Child Care a brief, told them the types of speakers that we wanted, the venue, what we wanted from the sessions,” she says. “That was really well accommodated and was a great success.”

Marie Deverill, leader, Consultancy at Community Child Care Co-operative, met with Messina and her team to run through what they wanted from the day, and how they wanted it put together, then delivered a conference for council staff that “exceeded” expectation.

“She went over with us what we wanted, what we expected out of the day and then they delivered,” Messina says. “The speakers exceeded our expectation and we had some really great positive feedback from staff. They all walked away very inspired.

“And it was a great opportunity for us, for our people, for connecting and building those relationships, because it involved staff across lots of different long day care centres, family day care, vacation care. So it’s bringing all our staff together and that opportunity doesn’t happen very often, so it’s a good impetus for that.”

After the success of the conference, Northern Beaches Council employed Community Child Care’s services for a mentoring program for council team leaders. “They tailored a mentoring program for our specific staff and ran a series of sessions and we found that format was really effective as well. Marie and her colleagues came and spoke to the group, gave them information, gave them tasks to work on, time to do it and followed up to find out how it went, what happened, what worked, what didn’t work. That ran over six months and that was a great way to increase the professionalism of our staff.”

Based on these two experiences, Northern Beaches Council decided to make the conference an annual event, scheduling another conference this year, as well as planning for 2017.

The key for Messina in getting help to organise such an event was in recognising the gaps of her skill set and networks. “We didn’t have the resources to organise such a large scale event. We had 100 people. It’s not enormous, but being able to fit something in that’s of that scale on top of the day-to-day … I didn’t have the time or the network for contacting the calibre of speakers we had. Community Child Care already had those connections.”

Arranging the speakers, planning the length of sessions, breakout discussion sessions and even managing the food for the event was taken care of. “It’s a logistical challenge and it’s not my area of expertise so it’s great to be able to hand it over to the experts to do,” Messina says.

Heading to Community Child Care for help was a no-brainer for Messina. “Community Child Care is a go-to point of contact,” she says. “I tell staff, if it’s not a regulatory matter and you can’t get the answer from DEC, ring Community Child Care because you’ll get the advice in some way, shape or form and they’ll divert you to the right person.”

With changes to NSW council structures and mergers between local government councils, Northern Beaches Council has grown considerably since the first conference event, and Messina recognises she will need more assistance for the growing children’s services team.

“We are considering another mentoring program because we are now a new, bigger council—we’ve taken on a number of new services—so we’ve got a lot of new people. It’s a great opportunity for looking at new people who are in room leader and team leader positions and being able to mentor and build those staff up to take up the next step. So we will use Community Child Care again.”
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