

Philosophy Statement

For

Garfield Street Children's Centre

Document History

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CONTENTS

1 – THE NQS, EYLF AND OUR PHILOSOPHY	3
1.1 – Overview.....	3
1.2 – How our Service Philosophy Relates to the NQS and EYLF.....	3
2 – OUR PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION	4
2.1 – Beliefs and values.....	4
2.2 – Learning and Education.....	4
2.3 – Individualised Learning.....	5
2.4 – The Learning Environment.....	5
3 – IMPLEMENTATION : COLLABORATIVE PARTNERING	6
3.1 – Family Collaborations.....	6
3.2 – Educational Community.....	6
3.3 – Local Community.....	7
4 – IMPLEMENTATION : PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES	7
RESOURCES AND REFERENCES:	9

1 – THE NQS, EYLF AND OUR PHILOSOPHY

1.1 – OVERVIEW

Through our engagement with the National Quality Standard (NQS) and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), we strive to:

- Contribute to positive outcomes for children.
- Provide high quality education and care.
- Implement best practices in all areas of our service delivery.
- Be informed by current research.

The seven quality areas in the National Quality Standard are:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children’s health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management.

The National Quality Standard is linked to the national learning framework (EYLF) that recognises that children learn from birth and outlines practices to support and promote children’s learning.

The EYLF is set out in the document ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia’ which mandates learning outcomes for children birth to 5 years as follows.

1. Children have a strong sense of identity
2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world
3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
4. Children are confident and involved learners
5. Children are effective communicators

1.2 – HOW OUR SERVICE PHILOSOPHY RELATES TO THE NQS AND EYLF

A fundamental part of the process of engagement with the NQS and EYLF is the involvement of families. The Garfield Street Children’s Centre Community has reflected on Our Beliefs, Values and what makes us Unique. We have articulated this in this document.

2 – Our Philosophy of Education

This section explains the principles and beliefs that we hold about young children’s learning and our role in the process.

2.1 – BELIEFS AND VALUES

At Garfield Street Children’s Centre, we recognise each individual’s personal strivings for Family, Work and Personal Fulfilment.

To us, the Centre is a place of belonging. It is a physical space as well as a network of supportive relationships. The centre has its own history which we contribute to and in turn the experiences and people here become part of our families and lives – past, present and future.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where we gather, the Wangal clan of the Darug language group of the Eora Nation. We pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and recognise they are the first people of Australia.

We value our natural environment, cultural diversity and the services and facilities of the local area.

Our team is committed to an Inclusive Philosophy. We believe in providing “all children with the opportunities to participate in activities that encourage learning and development within relationships with peers and adults and in a manner that reflects the interests and strengths of all children inclusive of physical, cultural and linguistic diversity.” (www.ku.com.au/inclusion-support).

2.2 – LEARNING AND EDUCATION

As an Educational Leader my role is to make professional judgments about how to plan and implement learning programs for each child. These decisions are informed by my professional skills and knowledge as well as by my experiences in many situations and in relationships with parents, children and the community.

On different levels, learning occurs at every minute of our lives. While opportunities for learning are certainly more apparent when we are awake, it has been long established that children are learning and gathering experiences while still in the womb and that our dreams may also influence or reflect our feelings and behaviour.

Opportunities to learn are all around us and come in all forms ... music, talking, listening, watching, playing ... in fact, within everything that belongs to the day-to-day buzz of our lives.

In the early childhood setting Curriculum means ‘All the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events planned and unplanned that occur in an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development’.¹

Educating happens when you read a story to your child, when you reassure them or guide them. It is happening when we talk to them about other people, when we make

¹ EYLF page 9.

judgements about what they have said or done ... even when we don't comment on situations, we may be sending messages about what we really believe or value.

2.3 – INDIVIDUALISED LEARNING

While we certainly can (and do) continue to grow and change throughout our lives, the core elements of our views about the world and ourselves are formed by our early relationships. This is acknowledged by the EYLF and approaches such as the Circle of Security which links children's Attachment and Learning. Young children's attachments within trusting relationships provide them with a secure base for exploration and learning.

Consequently, children learn to answer questions such as:

- How do I experience love and support?
- Whom can I trust when I need help?
- Can I do it myself?
- What if I don't succeed?

Each child is unique. Children have their own strengths, needs, rate of development and personality. This means that every child experiences learning in different ways.

The appropriate educational process for each child will also be unique to them.

2.4 – THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

It is a child's right to enjoy the early years of childhood – to play, explore, and learn within the secure knowledge that responsible adults will protect and care for them.

I subscribe to the view that *The hallmark of quality for non-parental care is not very different from quality of care by mothers or fathers; warm, responsive, consistent care giving geared to the needs of individual children.* – [Shore, 1997]

Children learn in the context of important relationships. This means that we better understand a child by knowing something of the family background. We work better for the child by working in partnership with the child's parents, and by sharing our knowledge, experiences and a mutual respect for each other.

There is plenty of research to support the view that educators do not replace parents and families as the primary influencers of a child's beliefs and behaviours. Educators work with, or complement, the family environment.

In addition, the child, their family and centre staff all form part of a wider, diverse community. We honour this broader community as a source of ideas, social practices and the many different ways of learning about and making sense of the world.

My role as an educator is to balance the educational needs of the Group with those of the individual. Effective educators should not only be aware of the sensitivities, strengths and weaknesses of their students, but should be working differently with each individual to bring out the best in them.

3 – IMPLEMENTATION : COLLABORATIVE PARTNERING

This section and the following one cover the practical ways in which we implement the principles and beliefs expressed in Section 2.

3.1 – FAMILY COLLABORATIONS

Our centre promotes a working relationship with families which is based on mutual respect, openness and collaborative partnership.

Families regularly take opportunities to contribute to decision making about various aspects of the service that affect their children.

The operation of a regular parent committee is one of the many ways that we manage Garfield Street Children’s Centre. This committee has been in place since the business was established in 1994.

As a specific example, in 2012 parent and staff workshops were held to gauge the things that our community expected from the centre and what they valued most².

A summary of feedback from this process is that we value:

- The sense of community that the Centre promotes including the continuity of a child care service over many years that allows for siblings and relatives to share positive experiences many years apart.
- Relationships with Centre staff that are collaborative and honest.
- Happy children and an atmosphere that emphasises the importance of Family and provides a sound start for life (rather than merely an academic based preparation for school).
- A natural outdoor environment (grass, sand, dirt, trees, soil, herbs and vegetables) and the promotion of good health and physical activity.
- Quality resources and an actively managed educational program.

Once or twice every year, our Centre invests significant effort into creating “Special Events”. These are free events that are organised by parents, educators and children for our community to enjoy shared learning experiences. They are an ongoing part of our Service’s culture and have included:

- A “Vivid” light show and activities evening for all families and members of the broader community. (2015)
- Multimedia Art Exhibition featuring all of our children’s art explorations. (2016)
- A week-long Story Festival including story-telling, drama, music and a two day author visit by Mem Fox as well as parent reading sessions and a book fair. The program involved contributions by Rhythm Village, NIDA and Scholastics. (2017)

² The workshop asked parents and staff to brainstorm words and phrases in three categories. These were “memories” of their early childhood, “associations” that they had with our service and “expectations” that they had of a good service.

- My Day Evenings for families to experience their child's day, Taronga Dream Time incursion, African Drumming, Rhythm Village, Christmas Party, Preschool Concert, Graduation and Family Dinner.

3.2 – EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY

In addition to the prescribed resources of the NQS and EYLF, we promote numerous contacts with the broader educational community. Examples include links with,

- Kindergarten Union (KU) Inclusion support.
- Professional memberships – Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and Community Early Learning Australia (CELA).
- Professional development courses for all regular staff.
- In-house courses or presentations that are of interest to parents.
- Health professionals.
- Network with other ECEC services e.g. the 4LGA network, Canada Bay Council Sustainable Childcare Network and Yarning Circle.
- Registered Training Organisations and Universities to provide support to students.

3.3 – LOCAL COMMUNITY

We also promote relationships with our local community in a number of ways. Some of these are listed below,

- Long standing relationships with local providers of meat and vegetables who deliver in person.
- Neighbourhood excursions e.g. library, post office, cafe and visits to the local schools.
- Presentations and visits by local fire brigades and law enforcement.

4 – IMPLEMENTATION : PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

We aim to provide quality, reliable and affordable childcare.

Linking to the seven quality areas set out in the NQS, we do this by,

1. *Educational program and practice*: These are articulated in detail in separate Centre Policy and Practice documents as well as in individualised learning records.
2. *Children's health and safety*: Providing a safe, caring environment where those who enter feel welcomed and respected.
3. *Physical environment*: Providing physical resources, learning experiences and social interactions that nurture each child's growth and development and sense of worth.
4. *Staffing arrangements*: Having higher levels of staff education and specialized training, low staff turnover and higher levels of staff job satisfaction.
5. *Relationships with children*: We select educators who are “emotionally available” and in tune with the needs of our children.
6. *Collaborative partnerships with families and communities*: Having all parents, children and staff feel that they belong to the Garfield Street Children's Centre

Community, and that as much as possible, they are actively involved in building the service and sharing a sense of cooperation.

7. *Leadership and service management*: By providing administrative stability, supportive management and inspirational leadership.

In relation to the EYLF principles and learning outcomes for children, our educators:

1. Continuously reflect on our practices to ensure balance of our role to nurture children's freedom of self-expression with our responsibility to guide and protect children and facilitate individual learning in a social setting.
2. Adopt an Authoritative approach to behaviour guidance which means that children have the secure knowledge that there is a special person available who is always kind and stronger, older and wiser than themselves, who will follow their needs and wherever necessary will take charge. (Circle of Security).
3. Allow children time to enjoy moments of quiet, reflection and wonderment.
4. Nurture children's well-being, building resilience so they are able to deal with anxiety, grief, loss and other challenges.
5. Show children how to act with care and respect for themselves, others and the environment.

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