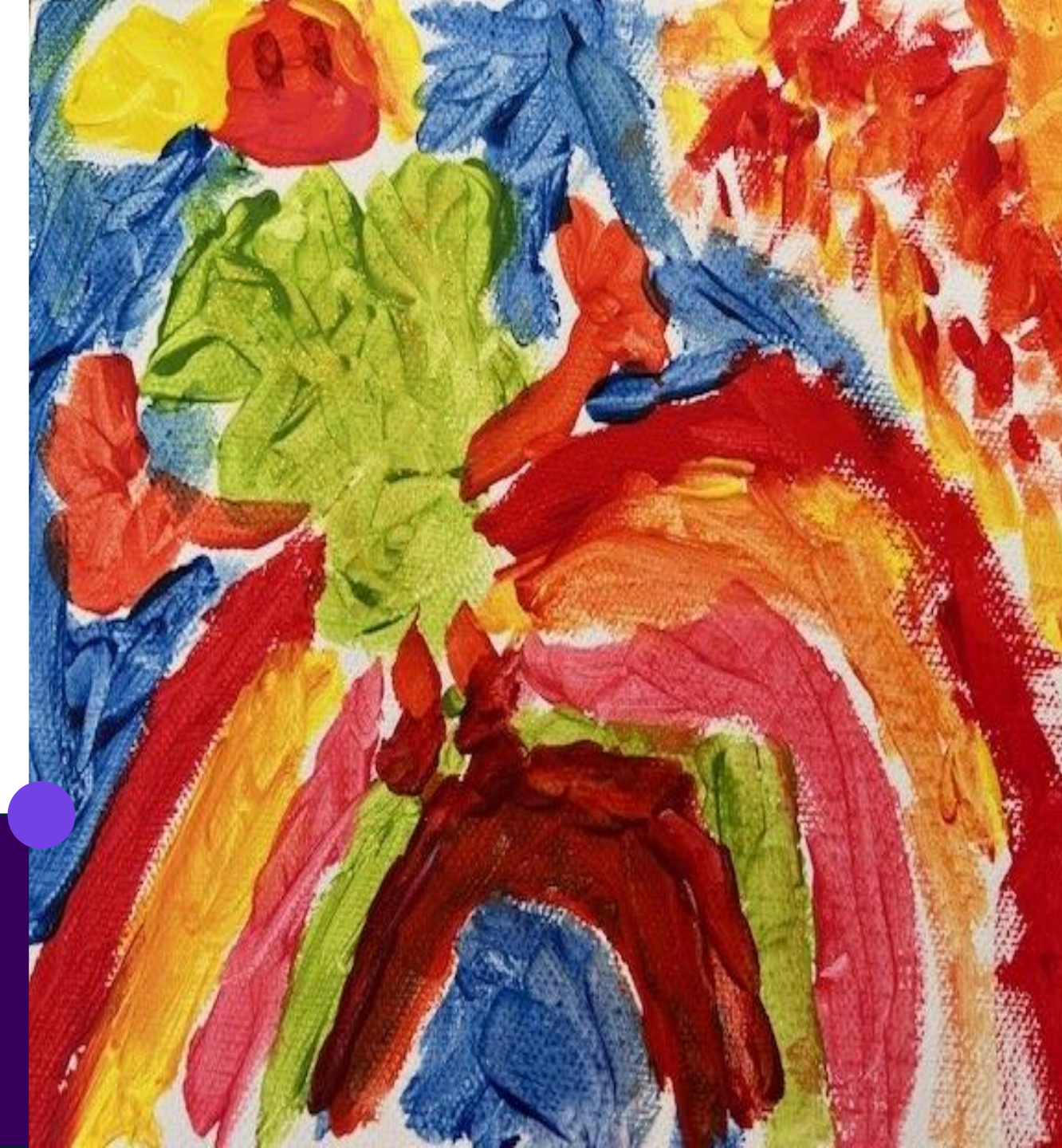




ACT
Government

ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Symposium 2026

Tuesday 23 June 2026



Kirinari Early Childhood Centre

Leane Townrow, Director

Garv Luthra, Early Childhood Teacher

Alice Hoefer, parent and volunteer



Relationships by design

How systems, culture and practice shape outcomes for children and families.

Leane Townrow, Garv Luthra, Alice Hoefer

Why do some services build strong relationships...



and others struggle?



Systems

+

Culture

+

Conditions

=

Relationships



The problem



 Time

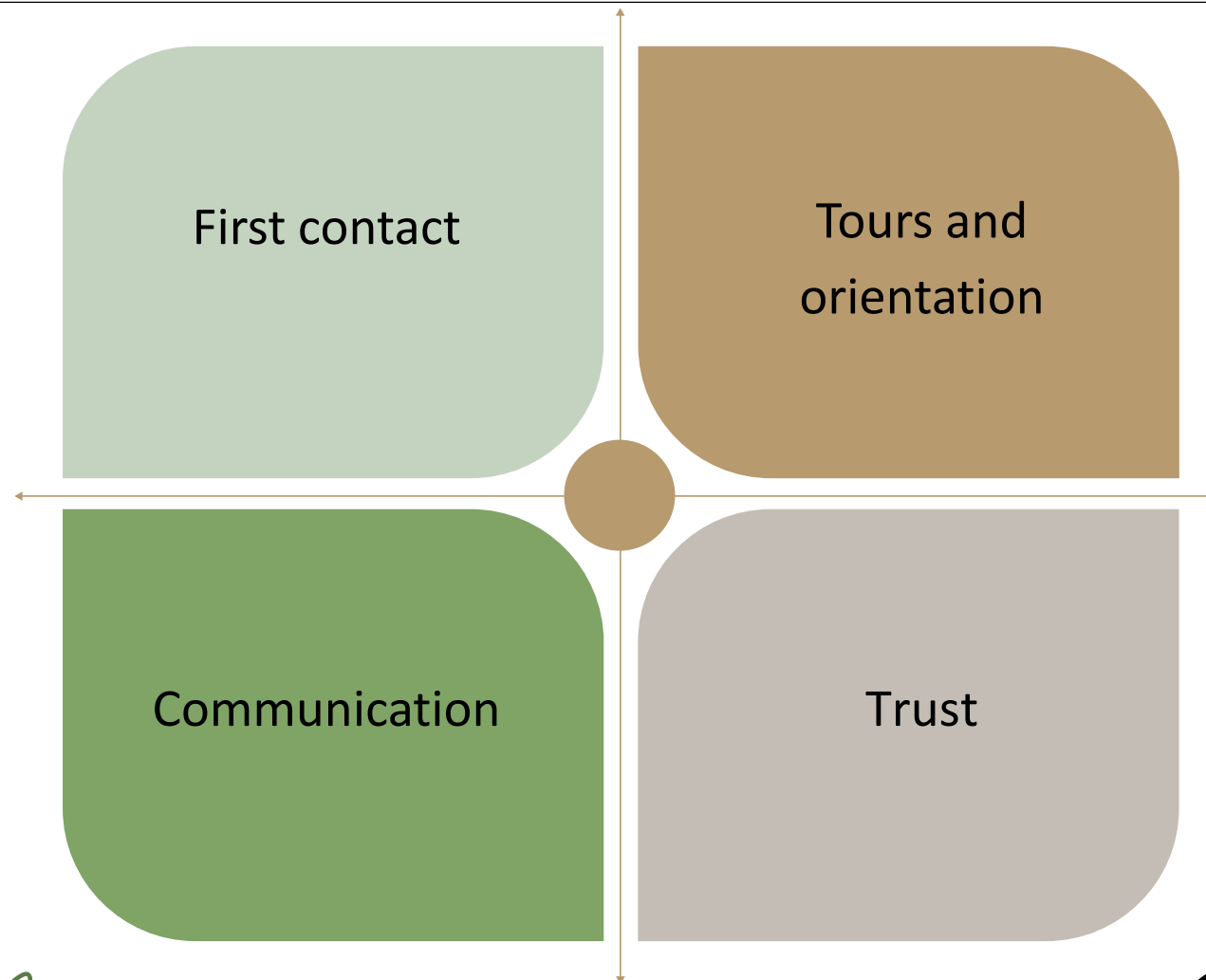
 Presence

 Capacity





Leadership lens



You can't expect strong relationships

from unsupported educators

- Above award conditions
- Programming time
- Pedagogical leadership team
- Reduced admin

"We couldn't do our jobs without the beautiful staff at Kirinari who take such wonderful care of our boys."

"O", Kirinari parent



Family perspective



P has settled in so well, and it's 100% because of how much care and attention the educators pay to her.

They've made every effort to understand what calms her and what makes her feel welcome, comfortable and engaged.

We really appreciate the ongoing and transparent communication and collaborative approach.





Educator lens - Time



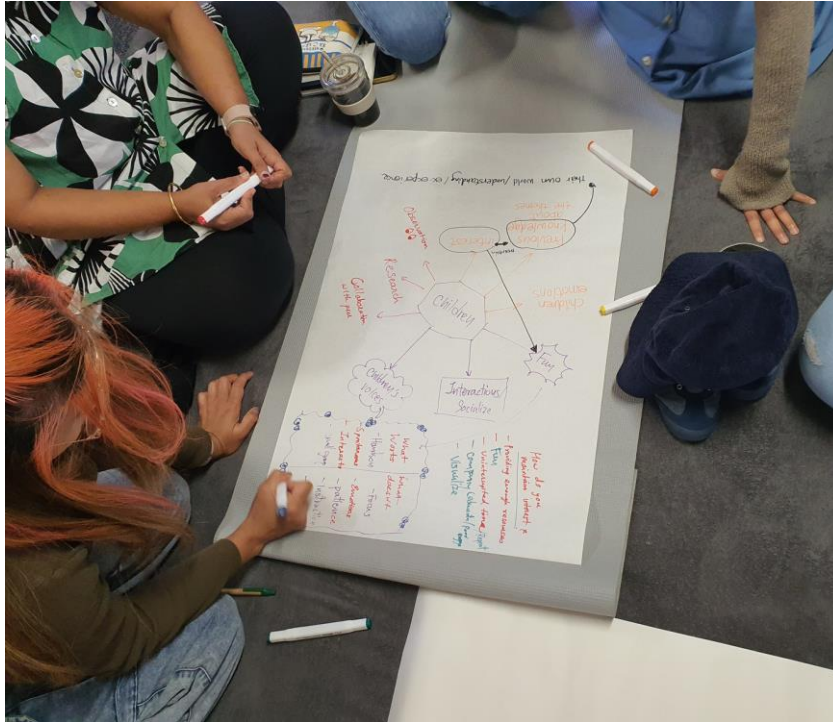
Less paperwork



More presence



Consultation and shared leadership



Strong relationships within teams matter too

- Open dialogue and reflective practice.
- Decisions made with educators, not just for them.
- Educator voices shaping change.
- Pedagogical Leadership Team supporting consultation and connection.

The chain

Leadership decisions



Educator conditions



Daily practice



Family trust



Child wellbeing

What this means

Design
for
relationships

Support
educators

Align systems
with
values



Strong relationships don't happen by accident.

They are built through intentional decisions, supportive conditions, and everyday interactions.

Children's Voices Centre, Charles Sturt University

Associate Professor Kathy Cologon, Associate Director, Children, Families and Communities,



Charles Sturt
University

Respecting children's perspectives: Inclusive approaches to listening and learning with and from children

Associate Professor Kathy Cologon

Associate Director Children, Families and Communities,
Children's Voices Centre







Charles Sturt
University

Respecting children's perspectives: Inclusive approaches to listening and learning with and from children

Associate Professor Kathy Cologon

Associate Director Children, Families and Communities,
Children's Voices Centre





Charles Sturt
University

Welcome to the Charles Sturt University Children's Voices Centre



Research with, for, and about children



Our vision

A world where all children's voices are valued and heard

Our mission

To conduct world-leading, transformative interdisciplinary research with, for and about children

Our work

Guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the CVC recognises children as active experts in their own lives and works to amplify the voices of ALL children, including those most at risk of remaining unheard.



Children's Voices Centre undertakes international interdisciplinary research

SDG 3

Good health

SDG 4

Quality education

SDG 8

Decent work

SDG10

Reduced inequalities

SDG 16

Peace, justice and strong institutions

SDG 17

Partnership for the goals

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Our global research fingerprint

bit.ly/cvc-global-research





Charles Sturt
University

Children Draw Health Video 2026

A Children's Advisory Group Project



Children's Voices Centre

www.csu.edu.au/research/childrens-voices-centre

"I just can say one sentence. Listen to the children, listen to children with disabilities... because it is a very, very important message and ...they are the future of our society, we have to be clear about that."

Professor Christoph Gutenbrunner (Chair, Head of Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, Hanover Medical School)

15 June 2026

Dear Finbar, Knox, Bijju, Greta, Jocelyn, Zac, Chloe and Nayantara,

My name is Dr Kaloyan Kamenov, and I am the Technical Lead of the Disability Programme in the World Health Organization. I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for the remarkable video that you prepared for the side event “*Rights to Results: Political Prioritization of Disability Health Equity 20 Years On*” of the Nineteenth Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 10 June 2026. This year, we marked the 20th anniversary of this important Convention. It was a historical moment to gather, reflect and plan what we should do to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are upheld.

Your contribution was truly extraordinary. Through your words, stories, and calls for action, you brought to life the real meaning of the Convention and reminded all of us why it matters so deeply. Your testimonies were powerful, sincere, and courageously delivered.

I want you to know that everyone in the room was deeply moved, including myself. Your voices resonated strongly, reaching beyond the screen and into the hearts of those present. Many participants commented on your impactful messages. Your perspectives brought renewed energy and purpose to our discussions and efforts to support good health care for children with disabilities. You inspired a room full of people who are working around the world towards the rights of persons with disabilities.

For me personally, your video was the highlight of this conference. It was touching to hear your calls for a more inclusive and accessible world. You reminded us that children and young people with disabilities are much more than the beneficiaries of the Convention, but powerful advocates and leaders in their own right.

Thank you for your courage, your honesty, and your commitment to making a difference for better health and health care for children with disabilities. Your voices matter, and they are helping to shape a better, more inclusive future for us all.

At the World Health Organization, our mission is to achieve health for all, and I am personally committed to ensure that children with disabilities are not left behind. Please keep speaking up, sharing your experiences, and standing up for your rights and the rights of others. The world needs your voices.

With my deepest appreciation and encouragement.



Dr Kaloyan Kamenov
Technical Lead of the Disability Programme
World Health Organization

منظمة الصحة العالمية • 世界卫生组织

Organisation mondiale de la Santé • Всемирная организация здравоохранения • Organización Mundial de la Salud



Charles Sturt
University

Free to register
and participate



Children's Voices Conference 2026

1-3 September

<https://childrensvoicesconference.csu.domains/>

© 2026 Charles Sturt University - TEQSA Provider Identification: PRV12018 (Australian University). CRICOS Provider: 00005F M3028.

Why should we gather children's perspectives?



“Children should be listened to because we are kind and loving and you can’t only listen to grown-ups because **maybe you will miss something.**”

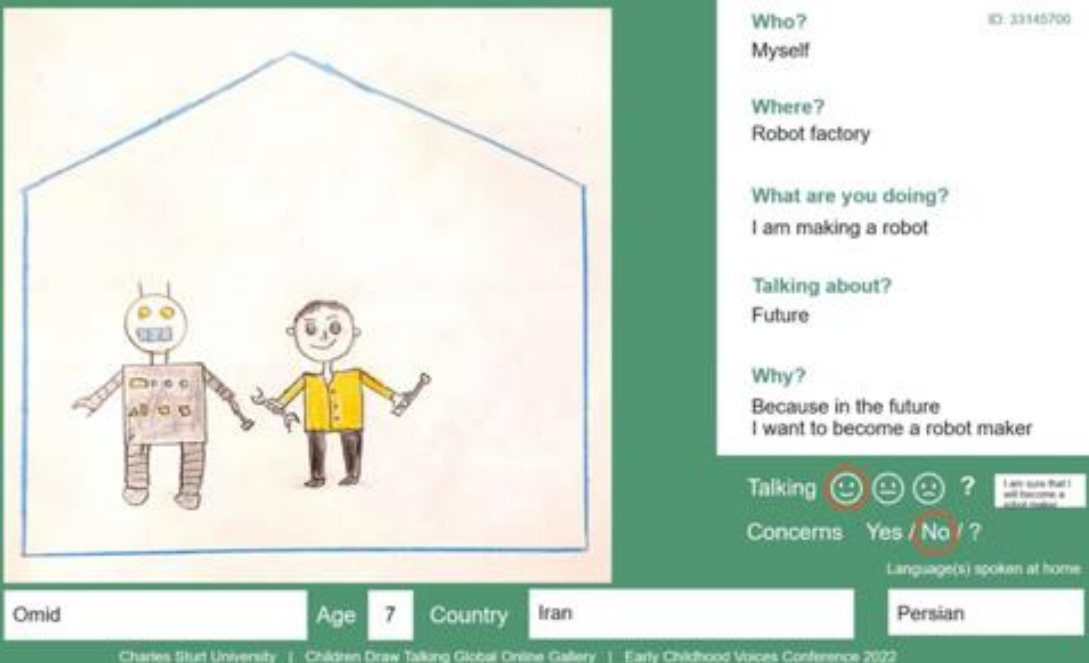
Charlotte, age 8, Australia

Why should we gather children's perspectives?

Stuff is accomplished because children have an imagination

“Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein were children once before they were adults and **that's how stuff is accomplished when they were children and had an imagination, that's how they come up with stuff,** like people who make movies, and sing and make inventions **all have an imagination from being children**”

Roarke, age 11, Australia



Who? ID: 23145700
Myself

Where?
Robot factory

What are you doing?
I am making a robot

Talking about?
Future

Why?
Because in the future
I want to become a robot maker

Talking 😊 😐 😞 ? I am sure that I will become a robot maker.

Concerns Yes No ?

Language(s) spoken at home:
Persian

Omid Age 7 Country Iran

Charles Sturt University | Children Draw Talking Global Online Gallery | Early Childhood Voices Conference 2022

Why should we gather children's perspectives?

Rights-Based Approach

- In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12, children have the right to express their views and have them acted upon (Lundy, 2007)

Experts in Their Own Lives

- Children bring unique insights into their lived experiences, which can challenge adult assumptions and inform more relevant outcomes for children (Cologon & Cologon, 2023; Cologon, 2024; Lomax & Smith, 2024)

Improved Relevance and Quality

- Involving children ensures that pedagogy, practice, and outcomes reflect children's priorities and realities, increasing validity and impact (Brooks, 2009; Cologon & Cologon, 2023; Cologon, 2024; Lomax & Smith, 2024)

Challenging Adult-Centric Assumptions

- Children's perspectives can disrupt dominant narratives and expose inequities that adults may overlook (Cologon, 2024; Griniuk, 2021)

Ethical Imperative

- Ethical, participatory engagement with children values their contributions and avoids tokenism, ensuring genuine inclusion (Cologon & Cologon, 2023; Cologon, 2024; Hart, 1992; Shier, 2019; Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013; Lomax & Smith, 2024)

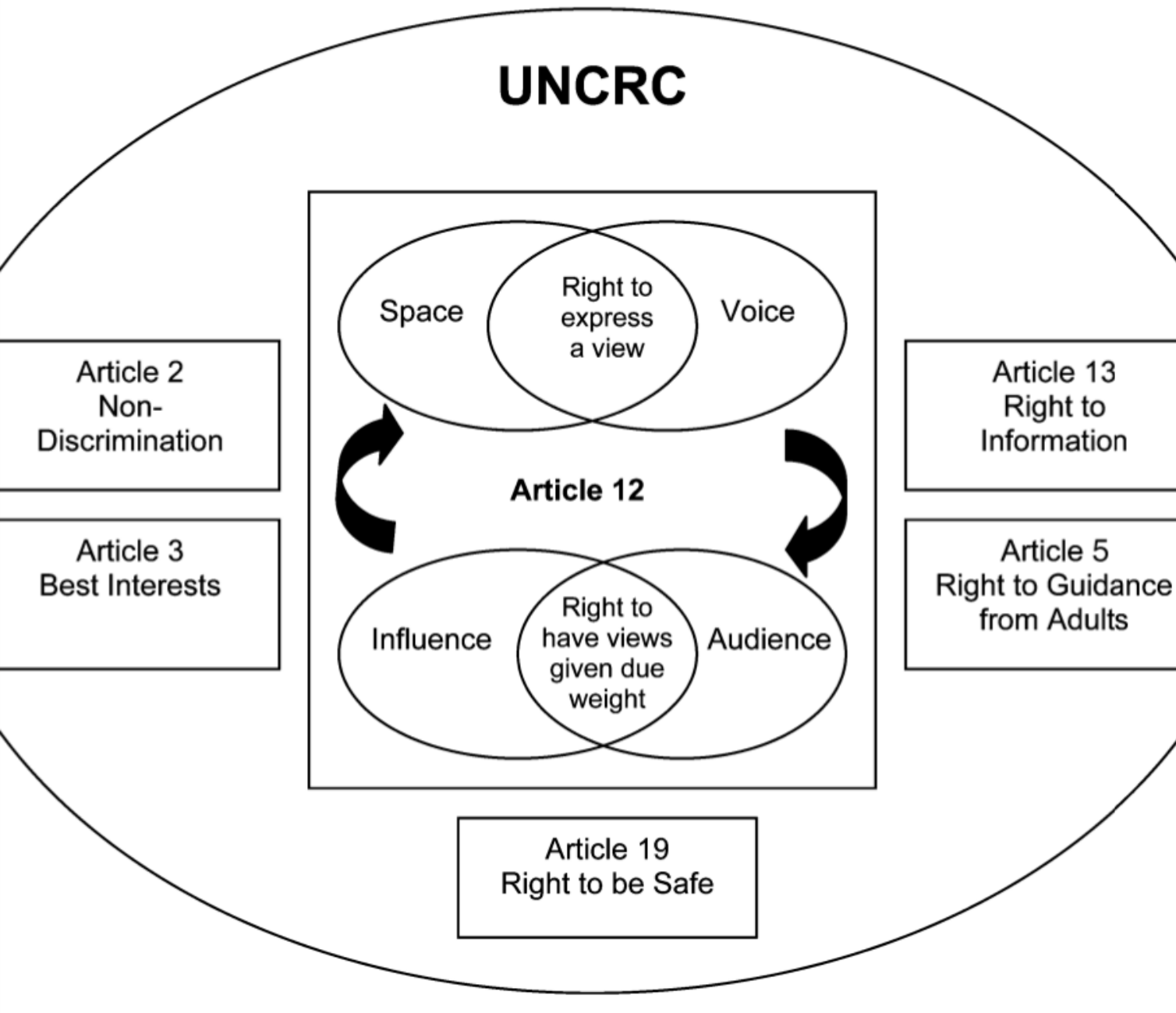
Children's participation and communication rights

Article 12: Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously

Article 13: The child shall have ... freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

United Nations (1989)





Lundy Model Space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy, 2007)

Conceptualising Article 12
[of the CRC] (Lundy, 2007).

Lundy's (2007) Model of Participation

Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view

Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views

Audience: The view must be listened to.

Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate

Child-friendly arts-based methods for listening to children



Child-Friendly, arts-based Methodologies

- Inclusive
- Strengths based
- Culturally safe, respectful and sustaining
- Multi-modal
- Place Based, Context Specific
- Participatory



Ways of listening to children can include

Drawing

Photography

Videos

Questionnaires

Emoji Likert scales

Interviews

Learning on Country

Augmentative and assistive strategies

Open ended materials

Puppets



Clay

Movement

Music

Moving our bodies

Storytelling

Painting

Sign language

Weaving

Cooking

Children's literature as provocation

Cologon, K., Cologon, T., Mevawalla, Z., & Niland, A. (2019). Generative listening: Using arts-based inquiry to investigate young children's perspectives of inclusion, exclusion and disability. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 17(1), 54-69.

Cologon, K., & Cologon, T. (2023). Children as changemakers. In *Inclusive education in the early years: Right from the start* (pp. 29-39). Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

Cologon, K. (2024). "But Marley can't play up here!" Children designing inclusive and sustainable playspaces through practitioner research. *Sustainability*, 16(15), 6626. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16156626>

Cologon, K. (2024). Seeing, feeling and creating 'future imaginaries' within and through the visual arts. In *Inclusive Education Through the Creative Arts in the Early Years* (pp.121-136). SAGE Publications Limited.

Arts-based research methods for including children's perspectives

“Arts-related experiences allow us to engage in different ways of being, doing and knowing. [They give] children multiple ways to express themselves, and to explore their strengths, thoughts and emotions...engaging in the arts allows us to value diverse ways of communicating...to accept diverse bodies...[and] **diverse modes of expression have the power to provide 'voices' for all, regardless of age or ability.**”

(Niland, Cologon & Huhtinen-Hildén, 2024, p. 15)

Arts-based methods for generative listening

Key Principles

- Work with, not on: children as co-constructors and experts in their own lives
- Use open, flexible, emergent approaches shaped by children's choices
- Apply a social justice lens: reject deficit views of human diversity and value lived experience

Changemakers



Once upon a time...

This is a story about what we learned from you!

Once upon a time Tim and Kathy came to visit you. We wanted to learn about you and your family and your life. We also went to visit lots of other children. We talked. We signed. We listened. We played. We made art together.

Lots of children told us about their family and friends. Children told us about things they like and don't like. Children told us about school and places that they go, like the park. Lots of children told us about things they do, and things they think, and things they feel.

There was so much for us to learn about! We would like to share what we learned with other grown-ups, especially people who want to learn how to be teachers.

This story is about what we learned from you and the other children in this research project. Thank you for being part of this story!





Wishes

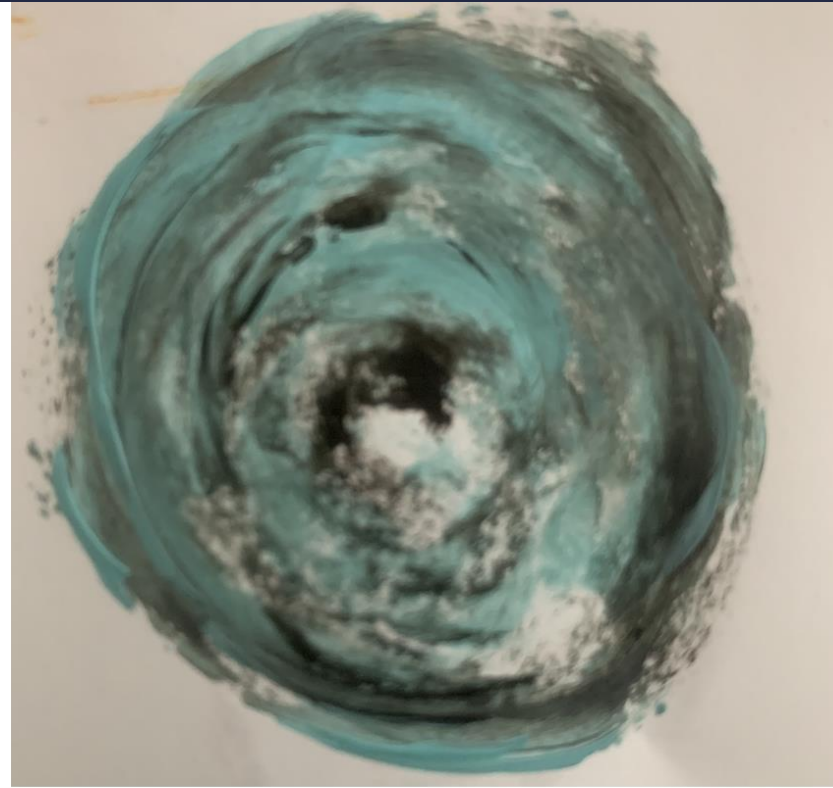
Some children wished for magical things, like to go to cloudland to see unicorns and butterflies. Some children wished for delicious things like cake (and some children told us they don't like cake at all!). Some children wished for more time to play. Some children wished to spend time with people that they love. Some people used their wish to cast a magic spell and turn us into frogs! (Thanks for turning us back into people before we went home!)

Left out

We learned that sometimes children feel left out. Children told us that this is not okay. Children told us that this is mean and sad. Children told us that no one should be left out.

Children told us that sometimes they were left out by friends. Some children told us they were left out by family. Sometimes children were left out at school.

Children told us that sometimes they had to go somewhere separate to their family and friends. Some children told us that this meant that they couldn't go to school with their brothers and sisters. Children told us that this made them feel left out.



Some children told us that they worried about the things they didn't get to do with their brothers and sisters.

Children told us that sometimes people thought they couldn't do things. They didn't ask or check, they just decided what children can and can't do. Children told us that they didn't like this.

Being different and disability

Some children talked about difference and sameness.

Some children told us about different things that they do. Some children did different things in their own way.

Some children told us people are different when they eat, they might eat different foods or eat their food in a different order, or eat in different ways. Some children noticed how their pets were different and the same, like different fur on cats.



We learned that difference is very ordinary. We learned that difference is just part of life. We learned that being different is a good thing.

Some children talked about disability. We learned that disability is a good thing. We learned that disability is part of life.

Helping other people understand

Children told us that sometimes other people don't know that disability is a good thing.

Children told us that sometimes teachers, or other children, or even people in their families think that disability is bad or sad. Children told us that sometimes this makes them feel strange or sad or angry or lonely or invisible.

Children told us that some people *need* help to understand that disability is a good thing. Children told us that sometimes *they* help people learn that disability is a good thing.



Being included

We learned that children want to belong.

Children told us that belonging means you feel happy. Children told us that belonging means other people want you to be there and you feel happy to be there too. Children told us that belonging means you are part of something. Children told us that being part of something is important.

Some children told us that it is important to be accepted. Some children told us that being accepted means that people like you as you are and don't try to change you.

Children told us that being together and doing things together is important.



Some children told us that this means being together at school, with brothers and sisters and friends and neighbours.

Some children told us that this is about spending time together. Some children told us that this is about finding things that you are interested in together.





**“Inclusion is about
everyone ...
I am a someone in
everyone”**

Adrian, 5 years

Cologon & Cologon (2023)

Being included

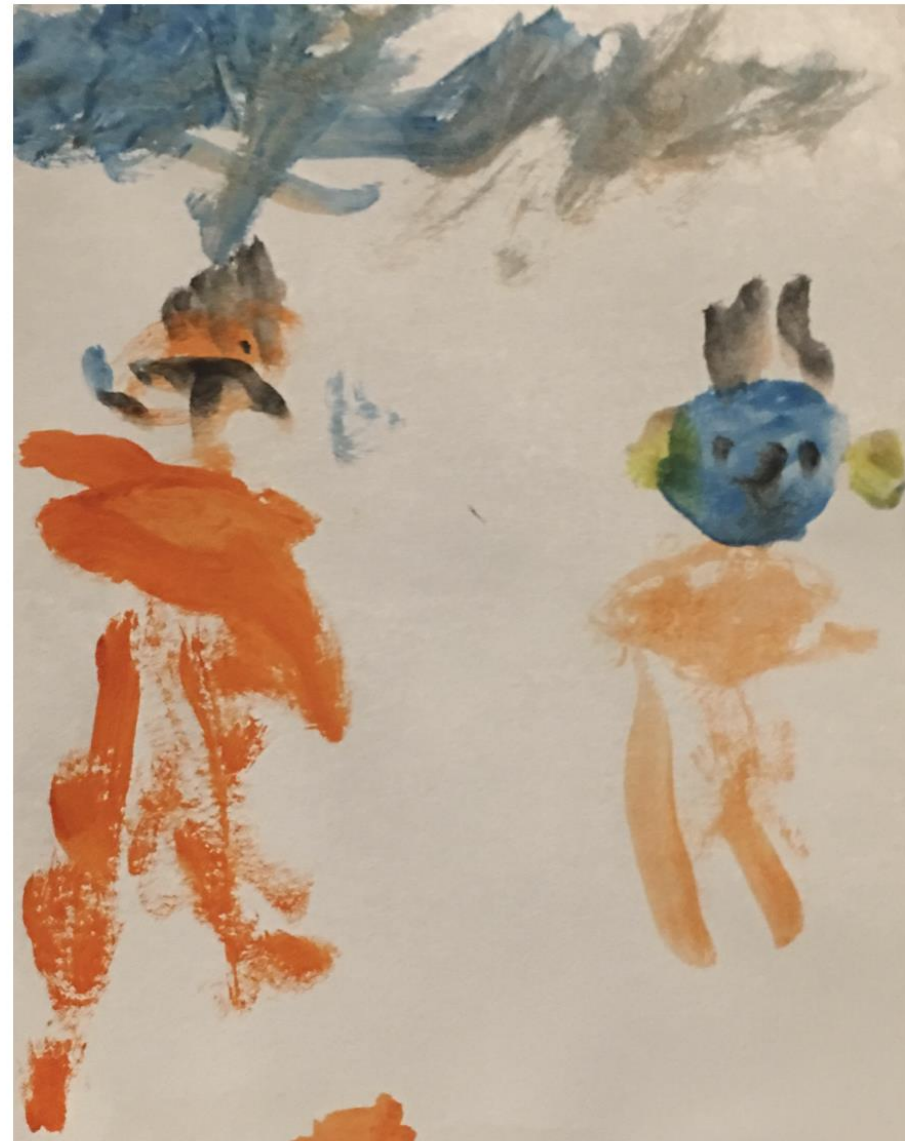
We learned that friendship is important.

Some children told us that friendship is about being together. Some children told us that friendship is about taking notice of each other. Some children told us that friendship is about having fun. Some children told us that friendship is also about being kind to each other. Some children told us that friendship means love.

Children told us that family is very important to them.

Children told us that sometimes they fight with sisters and brothers, or their parents, but mostly they love being together.

Children told us that they love their family and that they feel loved by their family.

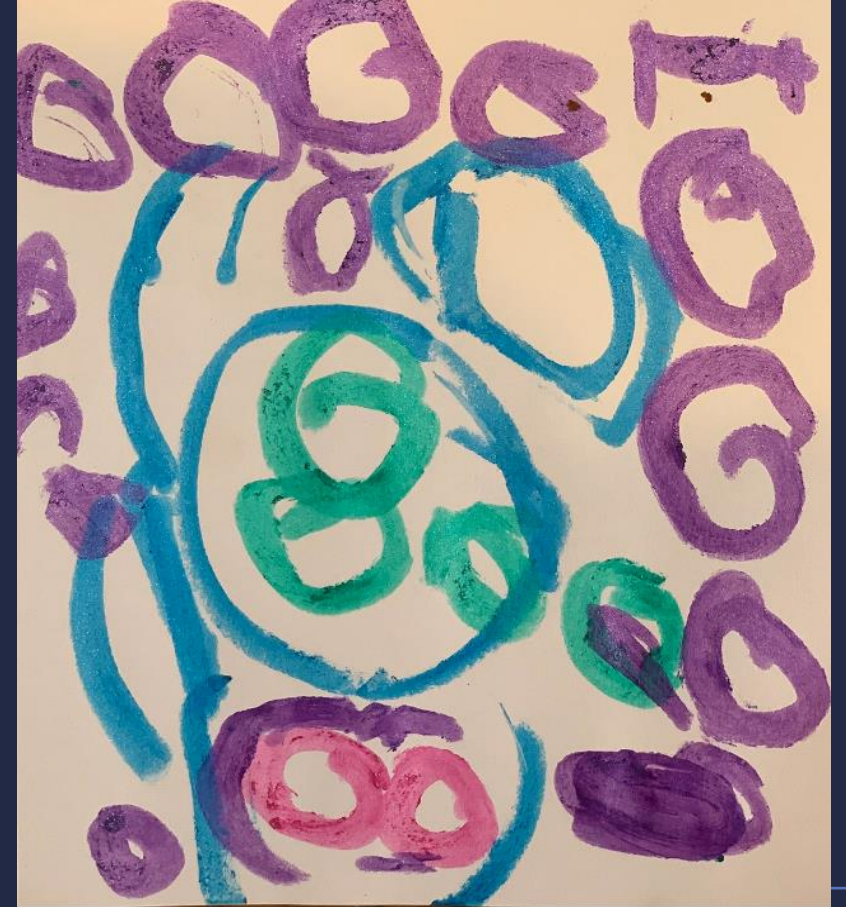


“I am not you.
You are not me.
I am me.
You are you.
We’re not the same.
We’re different,
But we’re best friends.”
Adrian

Audience and Influence: Children Together Against Loneliness, World Down Syndrome Day, March 2026



Audience and Influence: Children as Changemakers for Inclusion



The study

- Practitioner led research with 2 early childhood teachers and 4 educators and 26 children, aged 3-6 years, within a community-based early childhood setting in NSW.
- Participants used a diversity of languages and came from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal families.
- Participants included children who do and do not experience disability, one of whom uses mobility aids; and five neurodivergent children.
- In this project, the teachers and educators chose to engage with and respond to children's concerns about justice and equity in playground accessibility.

Audience and Influence:

Children as Changemakers for Inclusion



**“It’s not fair that Marley
can’t go on the fort
because there are stairs.”**

Min, age 4

**"Yeah. The park should
be for everyone”**

Marley, age 4

How did the project unfold?

- Critical pedagogy framework
- Reflective journals
- Inclusive Arts-Based Research Methods
- Focus group discussions

Learning with and from children as activists

"I think I was aware that the access issues were unfair to Marley, and to Kai, to Ari and Min too come to think of it, but I guess I'd stopped thinking about it. You know 'spose I'm kind of used to how things are."

(Educator 2, FGD1)

“Today, we went on another mini excursion back to the playground. During our time there, the children talked more about accessibility and fairness. Their conversations were thoughtful.”

Max who had not been at the playground last time, but had been in the group discussions asked Marley: “Why can’t you play on the fort?”

Marley: “I can’t get my walker up there.”

The children started to talk about how the playground could be improved.

Lewis: “It need ramps and paths that Marley can use,”

Dara: “And maybe stuff to feel for Kai.”

Emil: “Yep and stuff that makes sounds too. Like bells or crinkles. Oma can’t see good so them don’t come to the park. I think we need sounds.”

Marley: “Yeah. The park should be for everyone.”

(Teacher 2, reflective journal)

‘Liberty swing’





Harlow's drawing of the playground with the liberty swing enclosure on the right and the main playground on the left

The children wanted to make sure all their friends could play at the playground. Noticing animals needed places to rest and drink water was also beautiful, reflecting their growing awareness and empathy for all living creatures. (Educator 3, FGD3)

These moments remind me of the valuable lessons we learn during our regular activities. Whether we're playing soccer, pruning the garden, or exploring the playground, the children are always discovering, learning, and growing. Their ability to observe, question, and seek solutions is truly inspiring. (Educator 4, FGD3)

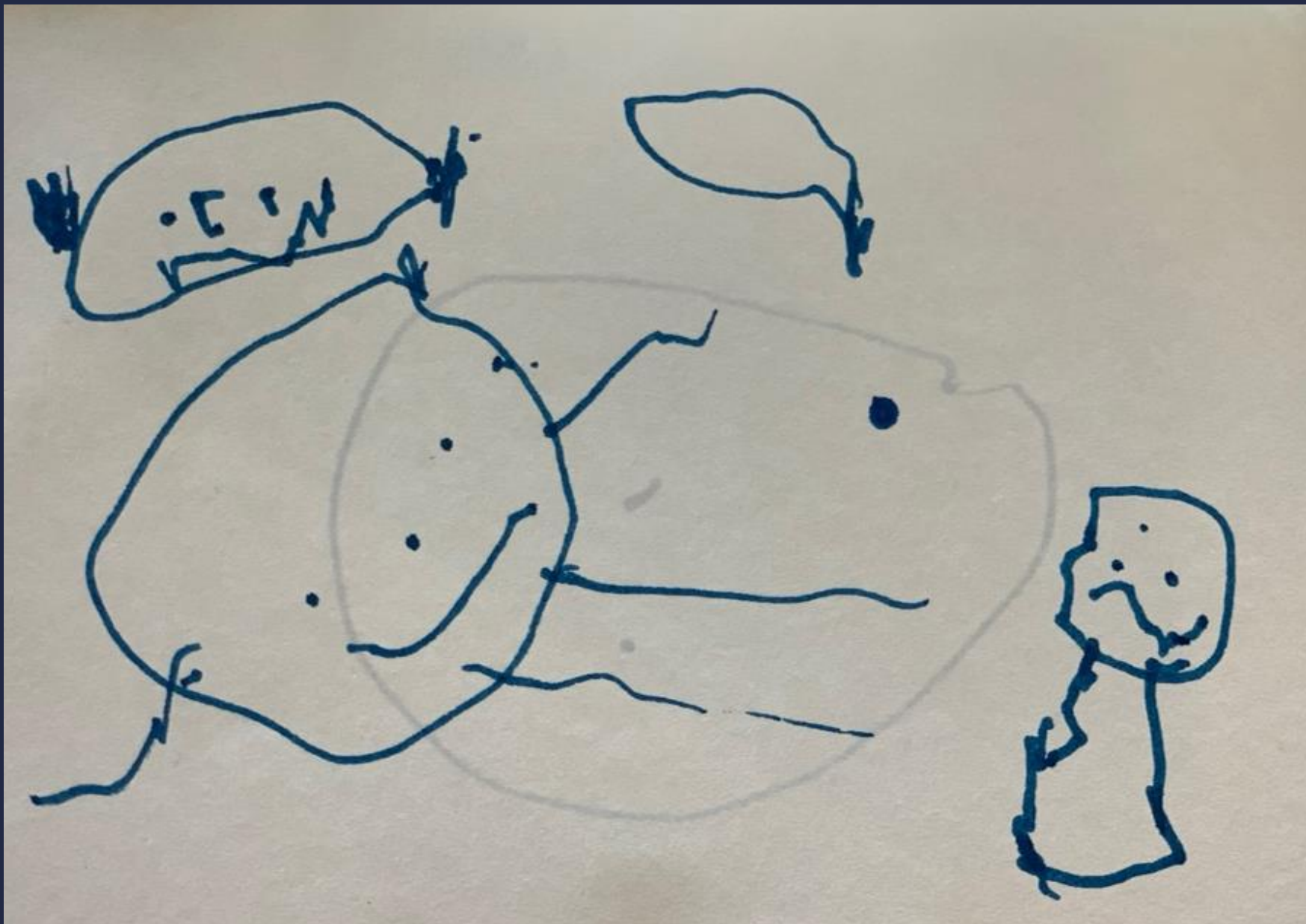
Being part of this reminded me the importance of listening to children's perspectives and supporting their efforts to create a more inclusive environment. (Teacher 2, FGD3)

Deci's painting of a playground with "places for everyone".





Min's drawing of a playground with many ramps including a ramp "up to the sky".



Noah's drawing,
depicting people of
different sizes.

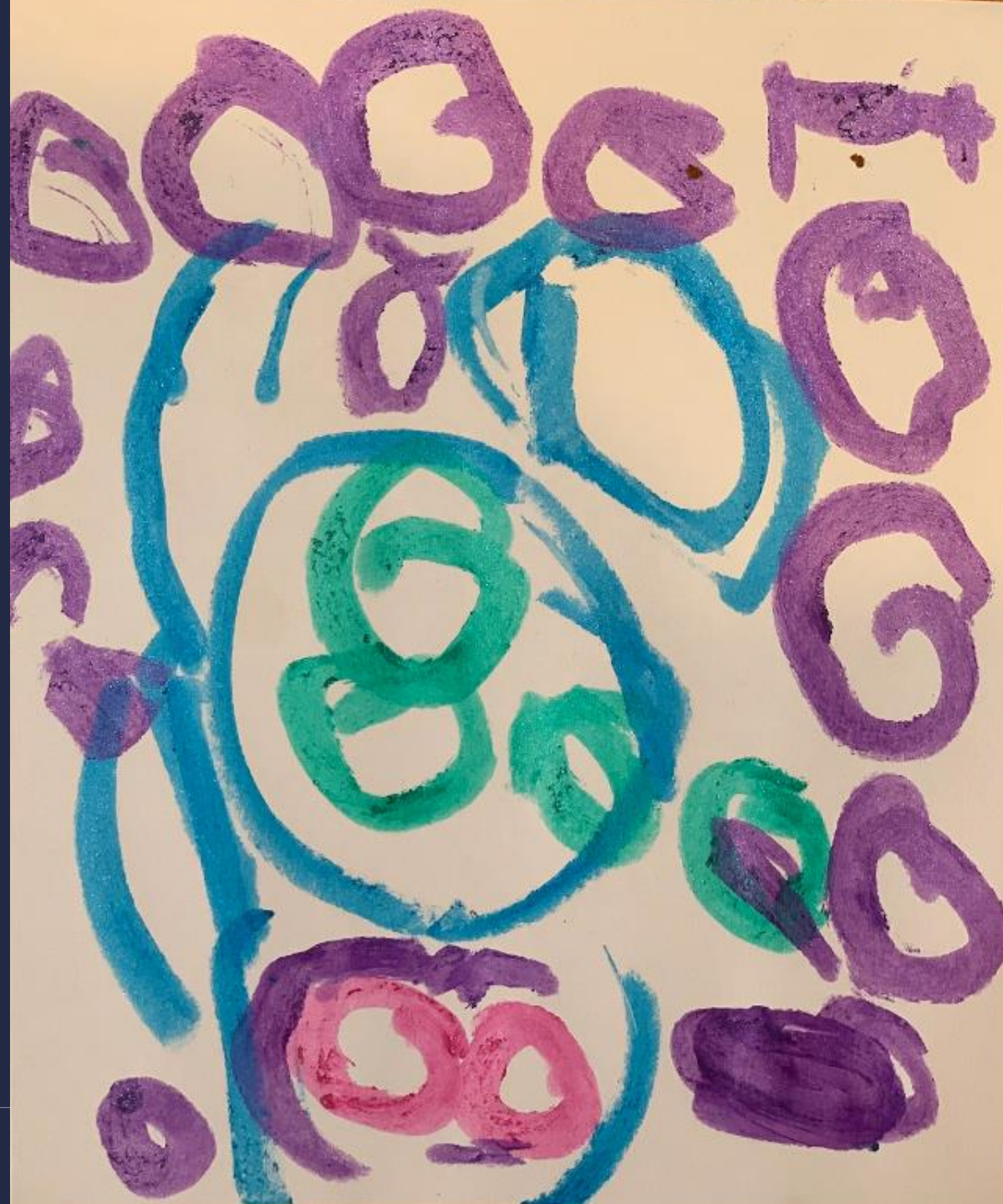
Harper's drawing of a music wall in the playground.

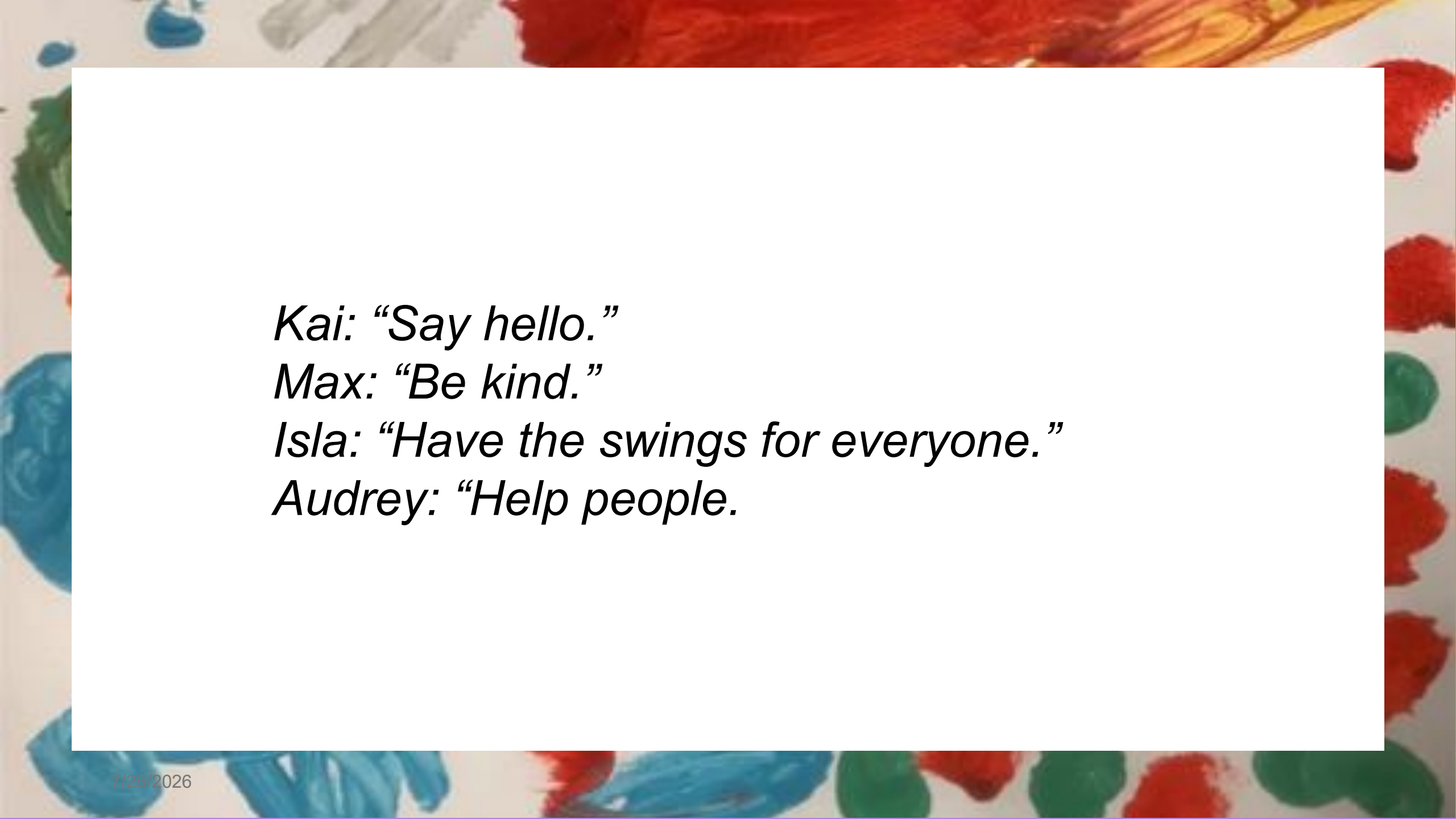




“lots of trees and flowers to make it feel like a forest” (Ashley, age 4).

Quinn's painting of "Our space. All the places for everyone".





Kai: "Say hello."

Max: "Be kind."

Isla: "Have the swings for everyone."

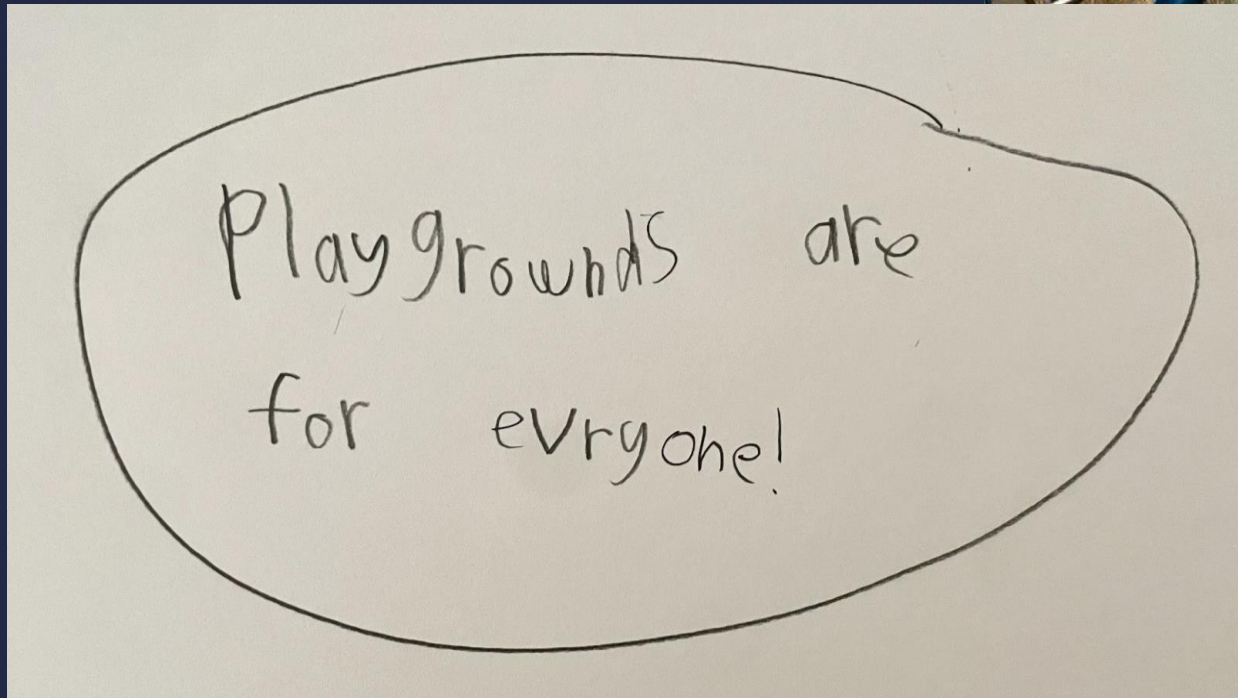
Audrey: "Help people."

Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence!

"The children had wonderful ideas for adding cosy spaces outdoors. We now have a comfy, shady rest area. We can still supervise, but [the children] can also have a sense of space and quiet when they want to. The children also wanted to add sounds to different places. Emil talked lots about his Oma in our playground discussions and the children really latched onto the idea that sounds can help people know where they are." (Teacher 2, FGD4)

"It was really fun. We found all sorts of stuff that makes sounds. The favourite was the beautiful [wind] chimes, but we also have lots of bells now and a wooden frog that croaks." (Educator 3, FGD4)

Audience and Influence: Children as Changemakers for Inclusion



Audience and Influence: **Children** influencing the review of the **Disability** **Discrimination Act**



Cologon, K. et al., (2025). *Children's perspectives on the Disability Discrimination Act: Barriers, fairness and belonging*. Submission to the Review of the Australian Disability Discrimination Act. https://cdn.csu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/4535673/CVC-Australian-Disability-Discrimination-Act-review-



“the big idea of this is you don’t have to change who you are to join in. Instead, we need to change the places, we need to change the rules, and we also have to change some of our attitudes.”

Finbar, age 11

**“A lot of parks don't
have things for kids
who have
wheelchairs.”**
Knox, age 11





"Disability is not a problem but the problem is the world's not currently made for all of us. Australia isn't made for everyone yet. This needs to change."
Zac, age 9



Charles Sturt
University

Making Visual Art 'Visible' Beyond Sight: Inclusive Art Making with Children and Families



Ableism means:

Ableism is the assumptions, attitudes, structures and practices that position non-disabled ways of being, learning and participating as 'normal' or superior, thereby devaluing or excluding disabled children and families.

Ableism is a term increasingly used to describe the process by which people are excluded and viewed and treated as 'not one of us'. Ableism is used in the same way as 'racism' and 'sexism' to describe the process of negatively stereotyping individuals or groups on the basis of a perceived 'difference' and, often, discriminating based on such stereotypes at individual and systemic levels.

(Cologon, Mevawalla and Karaolis, 2026; Karaolis and Cologon, 2026).



Anti-ableism :

From an anti-ableist perspective, inclusion requires more than access, accommodation, or adjustments after barriers have already been encountered. It requires educators and leaders to examine the ableist assumptions embedded in everyday routines, environments, communication norms and pedagogical expectations, and to reimagine provision from the outset so that diverse ways of being, knowing, communicating and participating are recognised as valid

(Cologon, Mevawalla and Karaolis, 2026; Karaolis and Cologon, 2026).

Why anti-ableism matters

Anti-ableist pedagogy doesn't just lead us to adapting activities, it enables us to reimagine what art can be. Anti-ableist pedagogies challenge us to move beyond default practices that centre vision and verbal language and instead design environments where all children—in all of the diverse ways of doing, being, communicating and participating—can engage, express, and connect

Ponderings:

What happens when we centre inclusion, not as a goal to work toward, but as the foundation we begin from?

Why anti-ableism matters

Anti-ableist pedagogy challenges dominant views of participation that stem from the myth of the 'normal person'.



Charles Sturt
University

Methodology

RESEARCH APPROACH

Portraiture is:

“as close as possible to painting with words”

(Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2016, p.6)









Deep Sea Dive, Samantha Ogilvie 2019



Deep Sea Dive, Samantha Ogilvie 2019





Throughout, relationships are at the core. The bonds between children and adults, friendships amongst peers, the trust between educators, parents and caregivers, and children.

This relationality creates a foundation for flourishing. The adults are listening with attention and empathy. Whether it's listening to a child's play-by-play description, or listening through touch to what a child creates.

This trust encourages children to take risks: to touch that unfamiliar sticky glue-paint, or to engage wholeheartedly with a pair of gloves on.



As educators, and advocates, our role is not just to include but to reimagine. To listen beyond words. To respond with care. And to honour every child's way of being in the world.

Ponderings:

- What are the ways that you currently create space, voice, audience and influence inclusively for children in your settings?
- What might it look like to reimagine experiences in your settings through a multi-sensory lens?
- How do you create space for children to influence the direction of your curriculum?
- Where are the places and practices in your environments that could be reshaped to welcome different ways of seeing, being, and expressing?
- What happens when we centre inclusion, not as a goal to work toward, but as the foundation we begin from?

Charles Sturt University Children's Voices centre

We'd love to keep in touch!

Email us to become a friend of CVC cvc@csu.edu.au
(newsletters, invitations to seminars, research opportunities etc.)



Find out more
csu.edu.au/research/childrens-voices-centre





Charles Sturt
University

Thank you

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR KATHY COLOGON

CHILDREN'S VOICES CENTRE

CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

<https://www.csu.edu.au/research/childrens-voices-centre>

Explore & Develop Annandale and Conder

Su Garrett

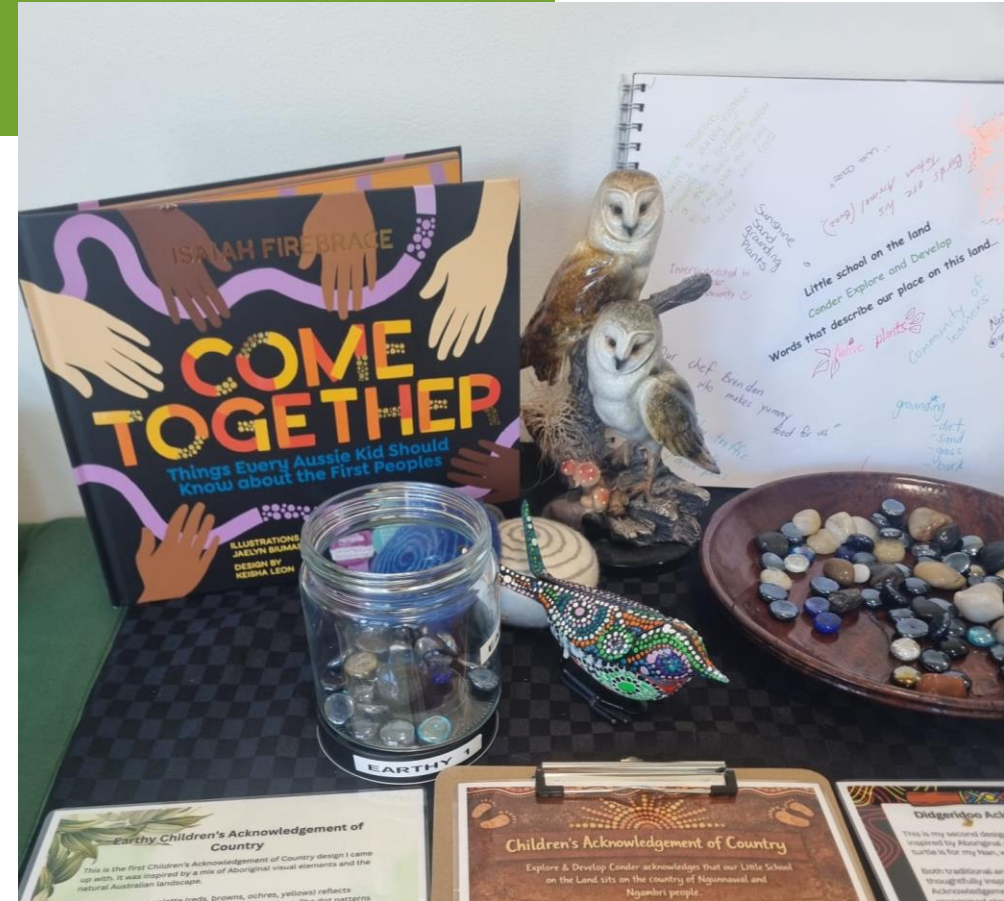
Building collaborative relationships with families (and community)

Su Garrett

Acknowledgement of Country

I'd like to acknowledge and pay respects to the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today.

I recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been nurturing and teaching children on their Land for many centuries, and I honour and respect that role.



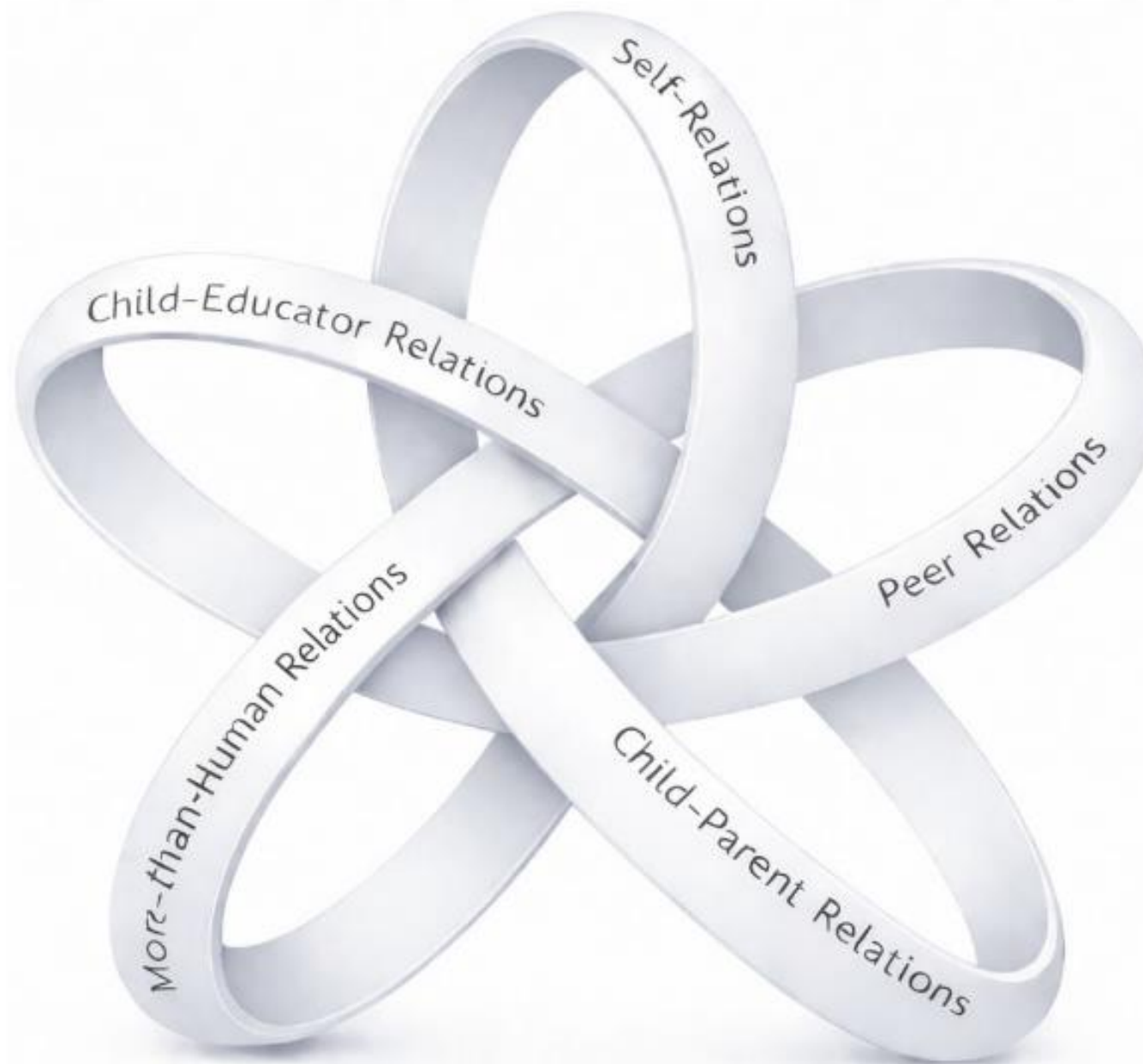
About us



Explore & Develop is a collaborative group of **independently owned and operated** early childhood education and care services in NSW and ACT.



Explore & Develop Conder, rated Exceeding
Explore & Develop Annandale rated Excellent



The emotional labour of relationships

“Thus ideally, emotional labour and wellbeing enter a reinforcing cycle where they each support and sustain the other over time.”

Dickerson et al 2026

Mattering matters

Mattering has two essential ingredients:

- feelings valued and
- adding value



Leadership

Leaders Prioritise Educators'
Professional Growth

Leaders Position Themselves to Enable
Educators' Practice

Leaders Hold the Vision for the Service
Relationships Build a Cohesive Team



Case studies

- Community Day
- Working with Allied Health
- Where do parents go?
- Banish



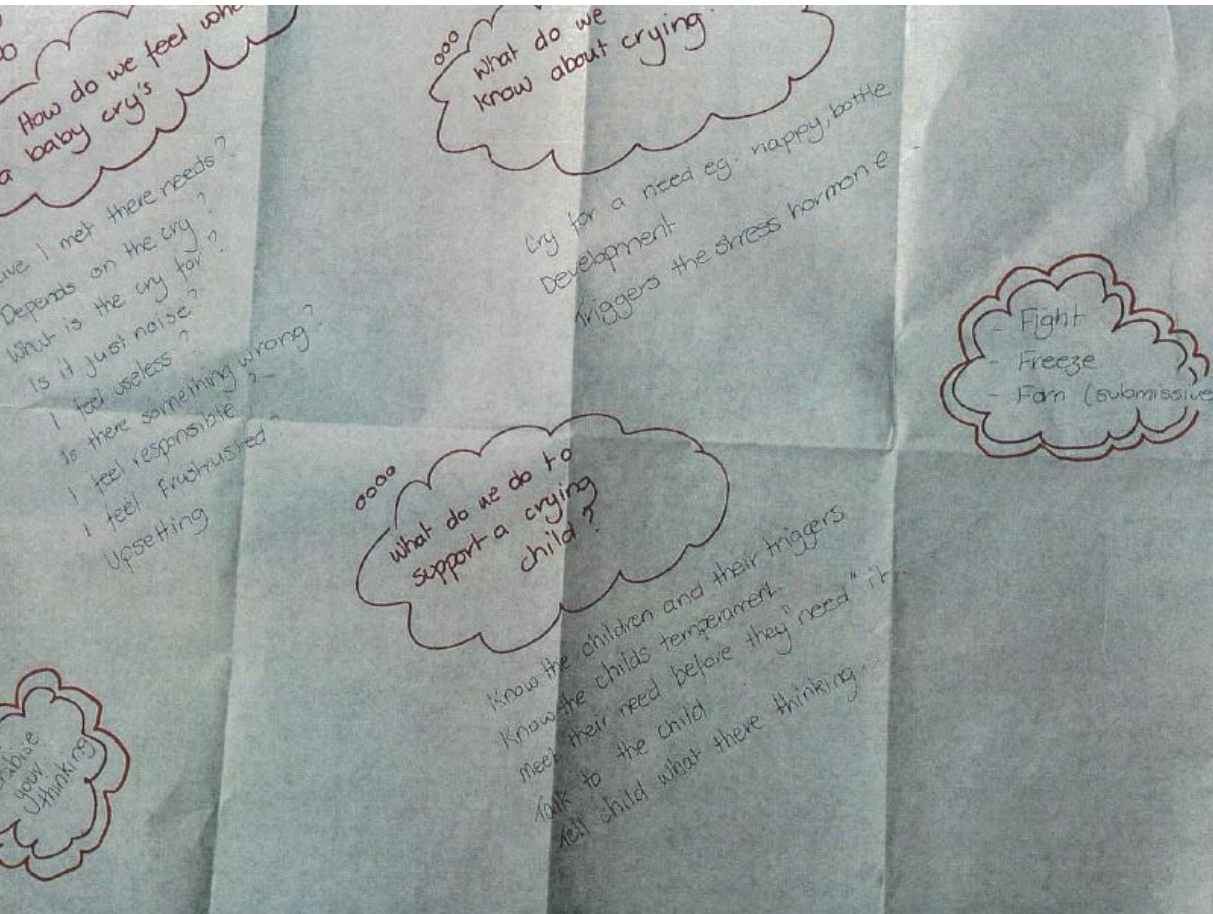
ty Day August 2024





- EACH Resources
- Pharmacy
- YWCA Donations drive
- Playgroup ACT
- Woollies Food Donation
- Fire Brigade
- Ing Ledlie – Author

Allied health professionals



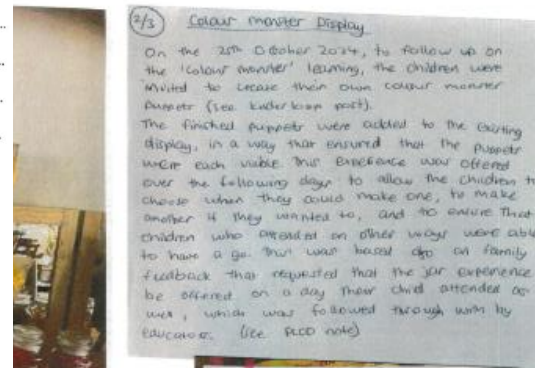
Attended by: Nisha, Jyoti, Anshu, Disha

Behaviour Support:

- * Seeing uptick in incidents, including injury
- * Responder - to frustration, - not sharing,
 - not having words to say stop/help
 - mostly retaliating physically

WHAT HAVE WE TRIED?

- offer as support and withdrawal space
 - ↳ not always available (meetings)
 - ↳ hard to get children to leave
- sending home after critical events/incidents
 - ↳ not a sustainable action
 - ↳ should be able to attend in the centre



Explore & Develop

Where curiosity leads to learning

I enjoy doing...

- Drawing, painting and anything else artistic and hands on.
- Playing with my sister, Aliyah, and making new friends.
- Reading and writing, as well as stories on the iPad.

I need help with...

Feeling safe in the toilet. I am uncomfortable with going to the toilet with other people around, especially adults. I limit my toilet usage at school. I have been getting better at taking myself, but I am having accidents and use this as an opportunity to change into spare clothes, even with clothes in my bag.

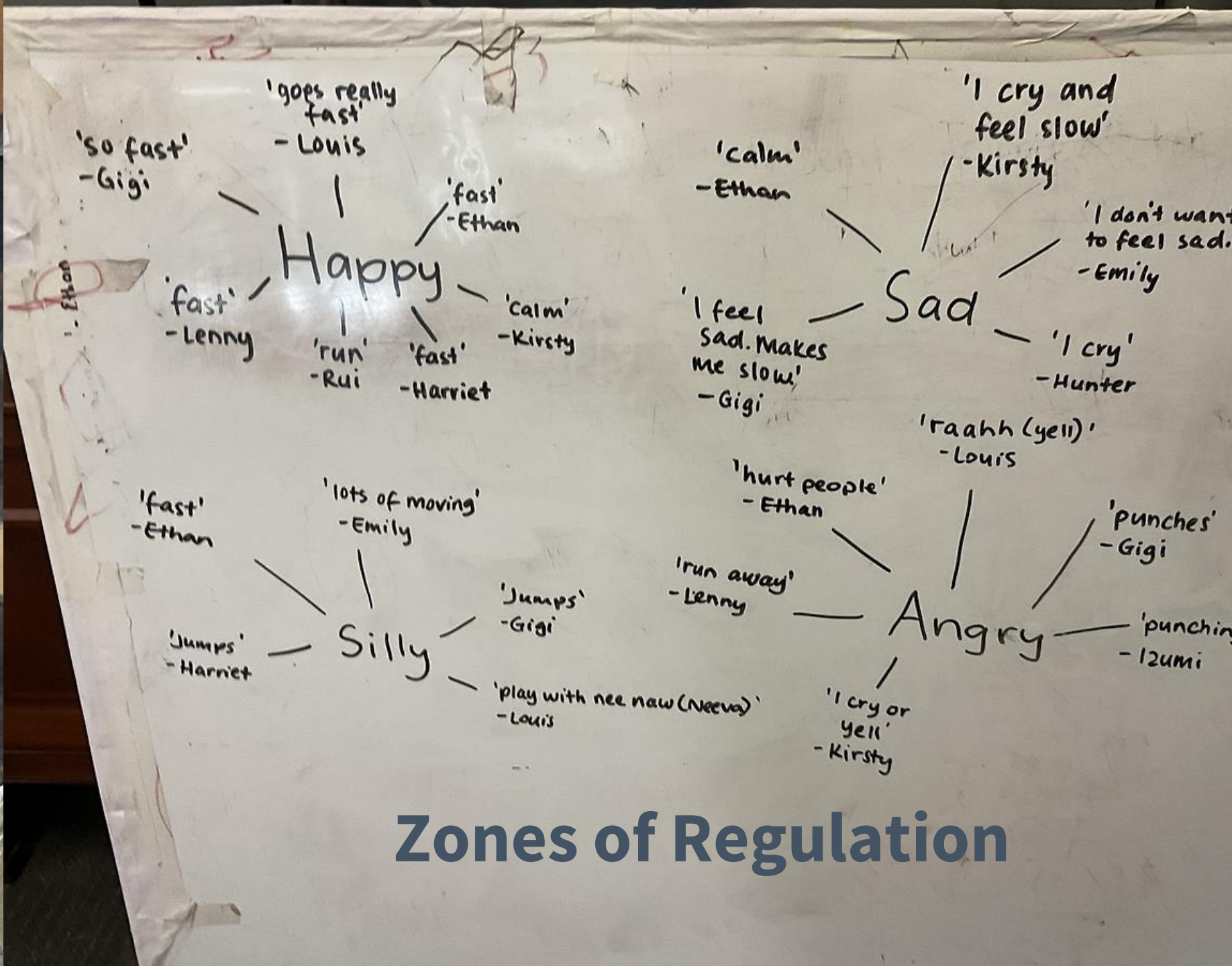
My favourite things are...

- a
- b
- c

When I am upset/angry, I need..

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.

If you find out something new about me, note it here!



Zones of Regulation

Our Zones

Blue

slow brain



Green

calm brain



Loving

Yellow

fast brain



Crying

Excited

Nervous

Lots of energy

Rushing

Annoyed

Red

brain switch



Angry

Grumpy

Too silly /

Too much energy

Pushing

Anxious

Interrupting

Overwhelmed

Getting to the green zone:



Move something heavy



Read a book



Wall push-ups



Calming tools



Have a drink



Starfish breathing



Stretch



Have a snuggle



Draw



Yoga

Volcano breathing



Write

Our Zones

Blue

- slow brain

Sad

Sick

Tired

Bored

Green

- calm brain

Happy

Loving

I'm okay

Ready to work

Calm

Yellow

- fast brain

Fun silly

Crying

Excited

Nervous

Lots of energy

Confused

Silly

Rushing

Red

- brain switches off

Angry

Grumpy

Too silly

Too much energy

Pushing

Yelling

Anxious

Hitting

Interrupting

Overwhelmed





A child is lying on a wooden floor, wearing a grey t-shirt with a heart patch. They are playing with a yellow hourglass and a string of colorful beads. The hourglass has yellow sand and is sitting on a yellow base. The child's hands are visible, holding the beads. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Here is the collection we have created so far of ways we can get to the green zone

Drink of water

Calming tool

Snuggle with a teacher

Drawing

Writing

Moving something heavy

Starfish breathing

Stretching

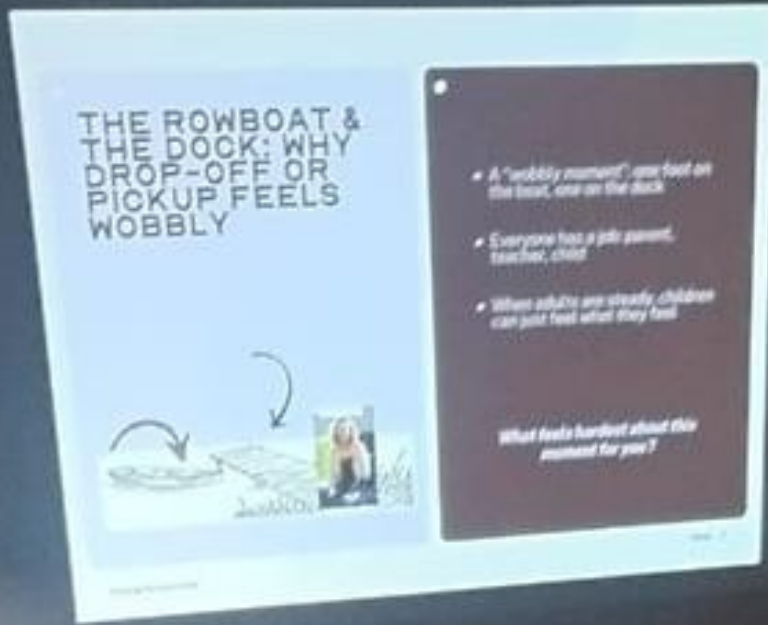
Yoga

Read a book

Wall push ups

Volcano breathing



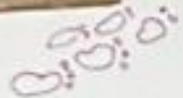


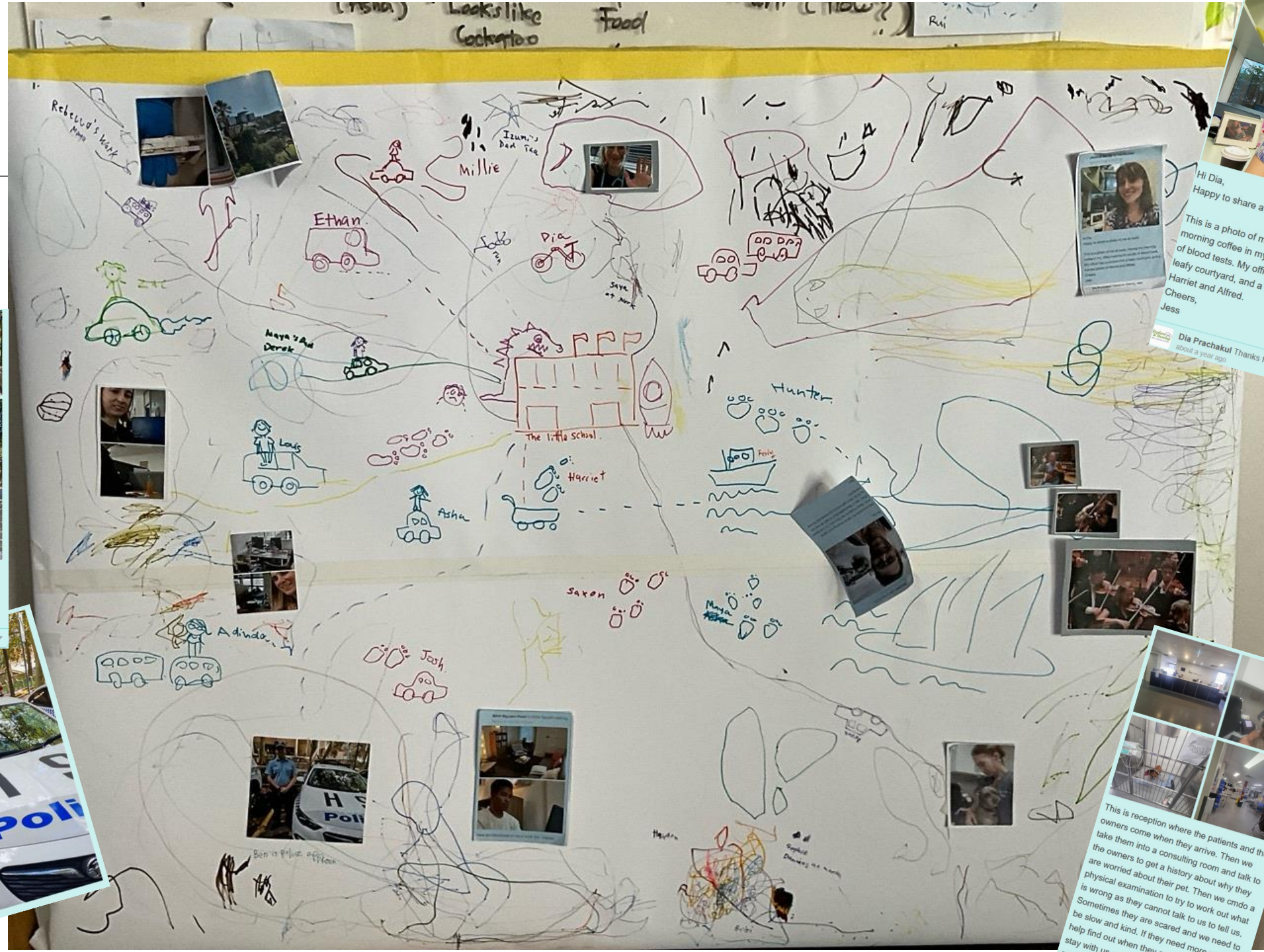
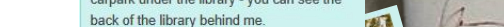
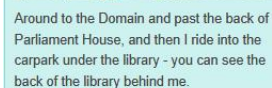
Circle of security

- Training for educators
- Family information sessions
- Scripts for “Good goodbyes”
- Reflection with the team and creation of a practice statement

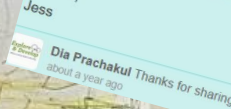
Where do families go?

Explore & Develop

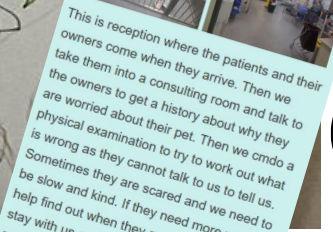




This is a photo of me at work!
 This is a photo of me at work, having my
 morning coffee in my office looking at results
 of blood tests. My office has a window into a
 leafy courtyard, and a framed photo of
 Harriet and Alfred.
 Cheers,
 Jess

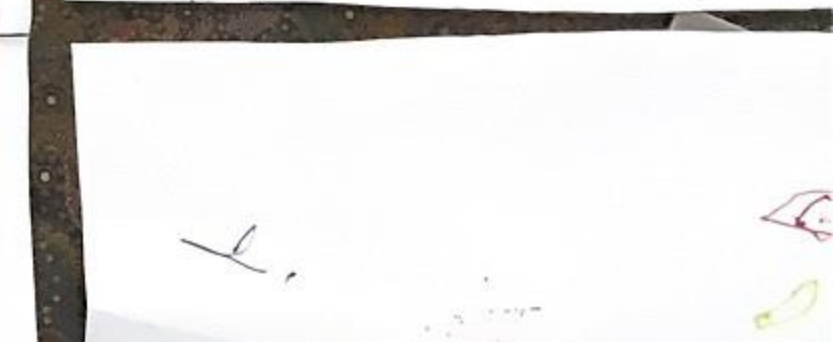
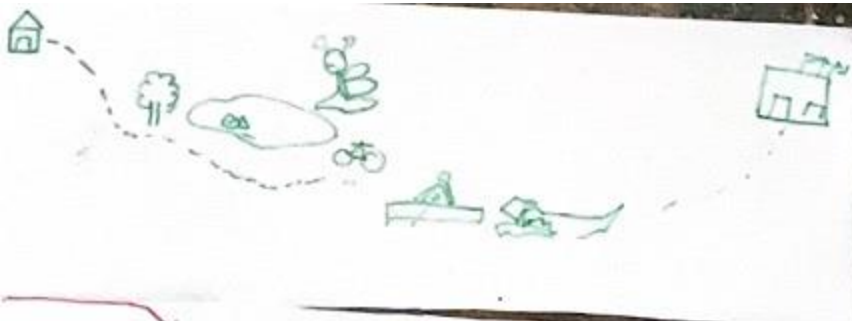


Hi Dia,
Here are some pictures of me at work, one of me at a rehearsal - and the other 2 of me at concerts 😊
Hope this helps in the "work" project!!



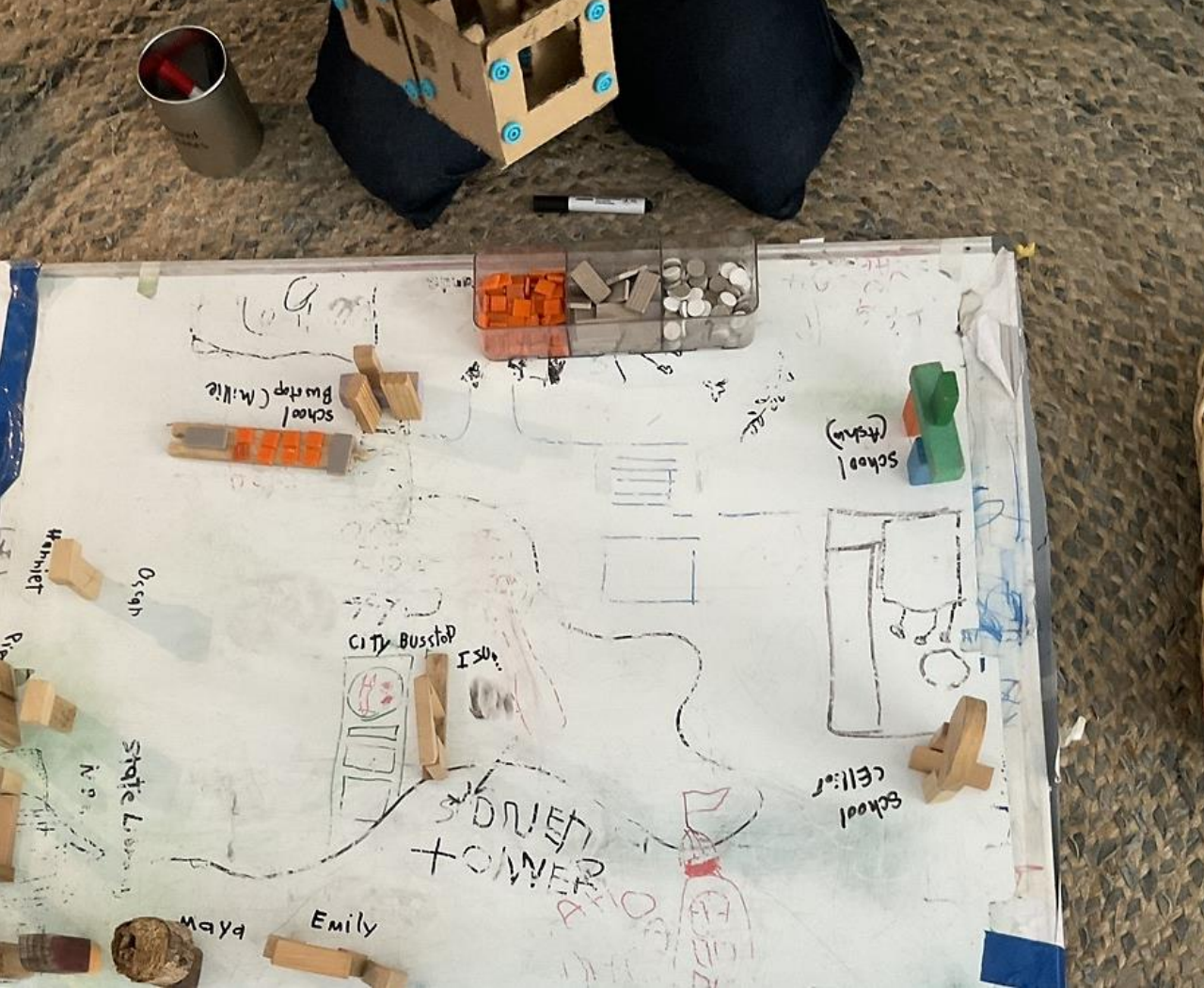
Here is a photo for Harriet showing how I get to work. About to get on the Ferry now. Oh, and guess what I saw in Blackwattle Bay? A seal! He was too quick for me to get a photo but looked like he was having fun!

Alex









“The city map provides the Binit with a platform for pretend play. Having the drawing map as a basis, even though it was quite faint from all the play and building with the board. The children still chose to build the landmarks in the same spot as in the drawing and often reminded each other of the building's location.

Magnetic tile was chosen as a material again, something the Binit are familiar with.”



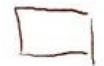
IFA 
Victoria Park

 Hyde Park
(Millicent)




UTS Building



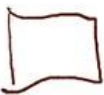
Martin Place





Clock



Banish





I was lucky I got to ride in today! But when I catch the bus I get off at Martin Place at the same stop you're getting off. If you look east up Martin Place you can see Sydney Hospital. Look west down Martin Place and you can see the big Christmas tree!

SLNSW



os from my ride this morning!
ane, past the big tree, along the
and past the new fish markets.

I was lucky I got to ride in today! But when I catch the bus I get off at Martin Place at the same stop you're getting off. If you look east up Martin Place you can see Sydney Hospital. Look west down Martin Place and you can see the big Christmas tree!











348 bottle tops saved from landfill

- Sorted and counted:



pumps = 6



coffee cups = 44



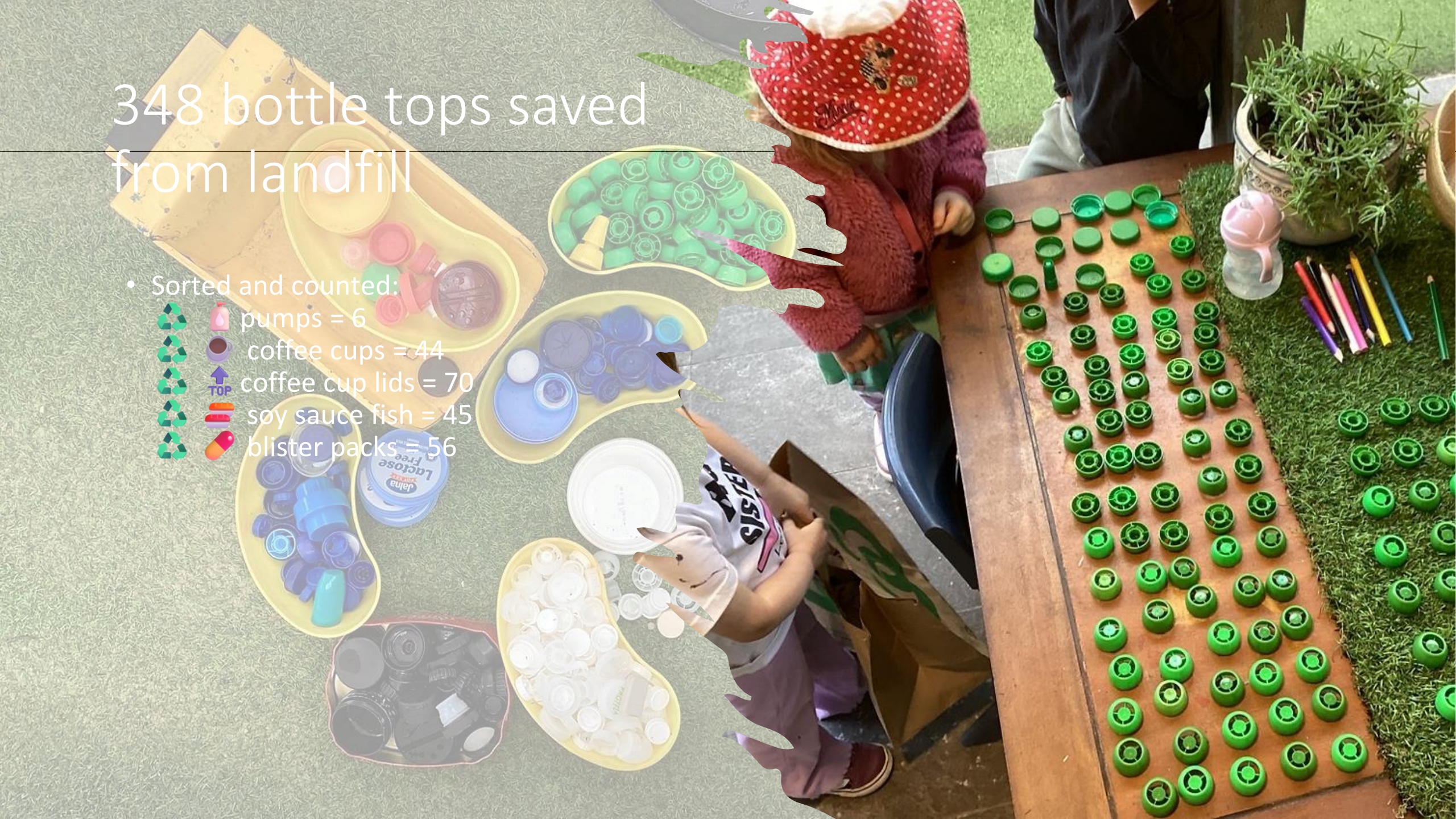
coffee cup lids = 70



soy sauce fish = 45



blister packs = 56









“Joy was experienced “By having fulfilling relationships and knowing my efforts to build secure attachments have been achieved””.

Little & Karaolis 2023



Ask a question, stay in touch

Su Garrett
sug@exploreanddevelop.com.au

Flynn Early Childhood Education Centre

Jocelyn Cronin, Executive Director, North Belconnen Community Association (NBCA),

Natasha Bunter, Director, Flynn Early Childhood Education Centre,

Annaliese Fennis, Annaliese Fennis, Senior Service Educational Leader

Sarah Fogarty, Assistant Director and Early Childhood Teacher

For Children, Together: Aligning Strategy, Strengths, People and Practice for Impact.

North Belconnen Community Association — A Multi-Disciplinary
Approach

NBCA has been walking alongside families for half a century, and today we are building for the next fifty years.



~50 YEARS AGO

Founded as a Mothers Co-op

Early childhood education and care rooted in community — built by families, for families.



INCORPORATED

North Belconnen Community Association

Formalised as an Incorporated Association — two ECEC centres: **Flynn ECEC** and **Cooinda Cottage**.



TODAY & BEYOND

Future-Proofing for the Next 50 Years

My mission: strengthen governance and strategy so NBCA thrives for another fifty years of service.



North Belconnen Community Association — a community-rooted early childhood organisation guided by a clear purpose, vision, and values.

01

OUR PURPOSE

**For Children,
Together**

02

OUR VISION

**Lifelong learning,
lasting impact**

03

OUR VALUES

We Welcome

diversity in cultures, abilities and perspectives.

We Care

about each other and what we do.

We Collaborate

to achieve outcomes.

The Burger Analogy — Four Perspectives

 Joss · The Bread / Bun

Today you will hear four voices, each representing a layer of the burger — together they form the whole.



 The Bread/Bun

Joss

Governance and Strategic Lens

 The Special Sauce

Natasha

Centre Management and Community Engagement

 The Cheese

Sarah (for Sam)

Champion Model and Reconciliation

 The Protein

Anna

Pedagogical Approach and Active Citizenship

Governance — Where We Are At

Strong governance is the bread that holds everything together — without it, the whole burger falls apart.



Constitution Review

Reviewed our constitution so governance framework is current and provides meaningful oversight.



Company Structure

Moving from an Incorporated Association to a Company Limited by Guarantee.



Board Model

Moved from a parent-led volunteer committee to a strengths-based matrix model.



Sub-Committees

Established Finance, Audit and Investment Sub-Committee; Quality and Risk Sub-Committee.



Director Delegations

Clear Director Delegations to manage risk and liabilities of the Approved Provider.



Critical Reflection

Passionate Directors engaging in vital critical reflection as part of the Approved Provider role.

Structure That Enables Strengths-Based Delivery

Governance is not separate from practice — it is the vital bridge that enables us to excel.

CliftonStrengths

CliftonStrengths is a strengths-based development tool for learning, leadership and professional growth.



Clifton Strengths — Four Domains



Executing

When teams need to implement a solution, they look to people with Executing themes who will work tirelessly to accomplish the goal.



Strategic Thinking

When teams need to focus on what could be, they turn to people with Strategic Thinking themes to stretch the team's thinking for the future.



Relationship Building

When teams need to be greater than the sum of their parts, they turn to people with Relationship Building themes to strengthen their bonds.



Influencing

When teams need to sell their ideas inside and outside the organisation, they turn to people with Influencing themes to convince others.

Our Strategy at a Glance

Our strategy formalises what we have always done — it reflects half a century of practice, not a new direction.

Excel

In our centres

- Our people
- Our expertise
- Our resources

Engage

Meaningfully with
our community

- Communication
- Outreach

Elevate

Our sector

- Innovation

To read more about our strategic plan, go to: <https://www.nbca.org.au/about>

Our Strategy at a Glance

Excel In our centres

- Strong focus on valuing and investing in staff
→ supports retention
- Consistent teams build strong family relationships and program knowledge
- Invest in safe and high-quality resources to support positive educational outcomes for children
- External partnerships to support children, families and staff
- Above-ratio staffing enables breaks, admin time, additional programming time and high staff capability

7.9 years
average staff
tenure at Flynn

451.3
combined
years of service

Staffing ratios
exceed minimum
requirements

Our Strategy at a Glance

Engage Meaningfully with our community

- Focus on meaningful support for vulnerable families and strong partnerships (e.g. Karinya House, government initiatives)
- Community-centred approach: welcome, care, collaborate
- Reviewed and strengthened communication (internal & external) Technology improving communication with families, staff, community



Who is considered a vulnerable person?

- Vulnerable person = child or individual unable to protect themselves
- Increased risk due to illness, trauma, disability, or circumstances
- Vulnerability influenced by social, economic, cultural factors
- Examples: children, trauma, disability, poor health, disadvantage
- Includes diverse backgrounds (CALD, Aboriginal, refugee, aged)



Natasha - The Special Sauce

Centre Leadership and Community Engagement

The sauce is what gives the burger its flavour — community engagement and family support is what makes our centres come alive.

- 25 years with NBCA — Centre Director and Community Engagement Officer
- My role is the living expression of the Engage pillar — what supporting families looks like day to day
- We already have the skills: observe, listen, notice change, build trust
- Using those skills intentionally creates opportunities for support, connection, and early intervention
- Supporting families means noticing, responding calmly, and connecting them to the right support at the right time



Recognising and Responding to Family Vulnerability

Vulnerability does not always look obvious — it takes presence, empathy, and trust to see it and respond well.



Notice

Observe subtle changes in demeanour and wellbeing



Approach

Engage with empathy from a strengths-based, non-judgemental place



Refer

Confidential conversation & practical referrals to support services



Support

Wrap around support — the whole family, not only the child

Case Study: Notice, Approach, Refer & Support in Practice

Vulnerability does not always look obvious — it takes presence, empathy, and trust to see it and respond well.

Mother of infant twins — recently returned to work, primary support network overseas, partner working interstate.

Appeared organised and capable; beneath the surface was overwhelming stress. Our Be You Champion and Early Childhood Teacher in the infants space noticed subtle changes in demeanour.

She described feelings of isolation, exhaustion, and the constant pressure to appear as though she was coping when, in reality, she was crumbling under the weight of responsibility

Together, we explored practical supports available to her, including referrals to community-based family support services, mental health resources, and opportunities for ongoing check-ins with the service.

What is Vulnerability?

Vulnerability is broader than hardship — it shows up in many forms and can be invisible from the outside.

- Outside our sector, vulnerability is often seen as those experiencing hardship or disadvantage
- In practice, it can include: financial stress, trauma, mental health challenges, social isolation, housing instability, or a season of deep overwhelm
- It does not always look obvious — it can be hidden beneath composure and capability



What supporting our families looks like in action.

- Greeting families warmly
- Checking in early
- Being flexible
- Helping families navigate support systems and pathways
- Child centred and child focused



Child and Family Centres

Most services are for families with children up to 8 years. Some services are for children up to 12 years.

Families can get help before and after the birth of a child.



Tuggeranong
159 Anketell
Street,
Greenway



West Belconnen
6 Luke Street,
Holt



Gungahlin
51 Ernest
Cavanagh Street,
Gungahlin

Families and carers can get free:

- parenting support and advice
- child development assessments with the Child Development Service
- referrals to other health, wellbeing and support services
- help from a qualified social worker
- playgroups and parenting groups.

Cheese binds the layers together — the Champion Model gives educators permission to lead what they care about, and the impact sticks.

- Early Childhood Teacher and Assistant Director at Flynn; presenting on behalf of Sam (Reconciliation Action Plan Leader/Early Childhood Teacher)
- The Champion Model: educators lead areas they are passionate about — passion drives momentum
- Each champion receives dedicated fortnightly time off the floor, collaboration across rooms, and an allocated budget
- Impact is visible: in how children play, the questions they ask, the values they develop, and what families see





Champion Model in Practice

When educators lead what they love, change is practical, visible, and sustained.



Be You Champion

- Connects regularly with a Be You Consultant — a free service
- Visits each room to check in with children and staff
- Brings mental health and wellbeing into everyday practice



<https://beyou.edu.au/>



Sustainability & Loose parts Champions

- Educators visit each room to encourage sustainable practices
- Lead clothing swaps and a recycling station
- Embed sustainability as lived experience for children
- Works alongside teams; plans with educators based on children's interests
- Sources materials through op shop visits, community donations and by walking on Country with children.
- Encourages open-ended, imaginative play



“Flynn Clothing Swap” sign



Reconciliation Champion

- Role created in 2022 to develop and deliver the Reconciliation Action Plan
- Sam stepped into the RAP Leader role in early 2025; now also supporting Cooida
- Drives cultural learning across both NBCA centres



Pre-school room
Acknowledgment of Country

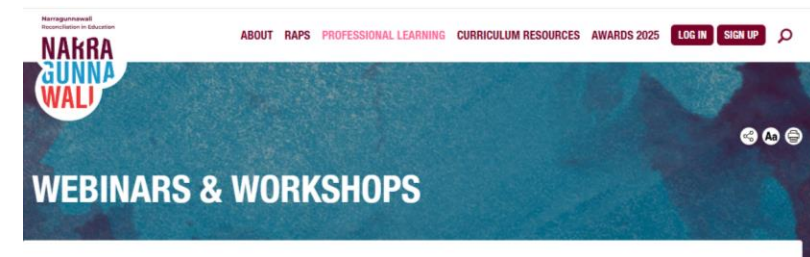
Reconciliation in Action

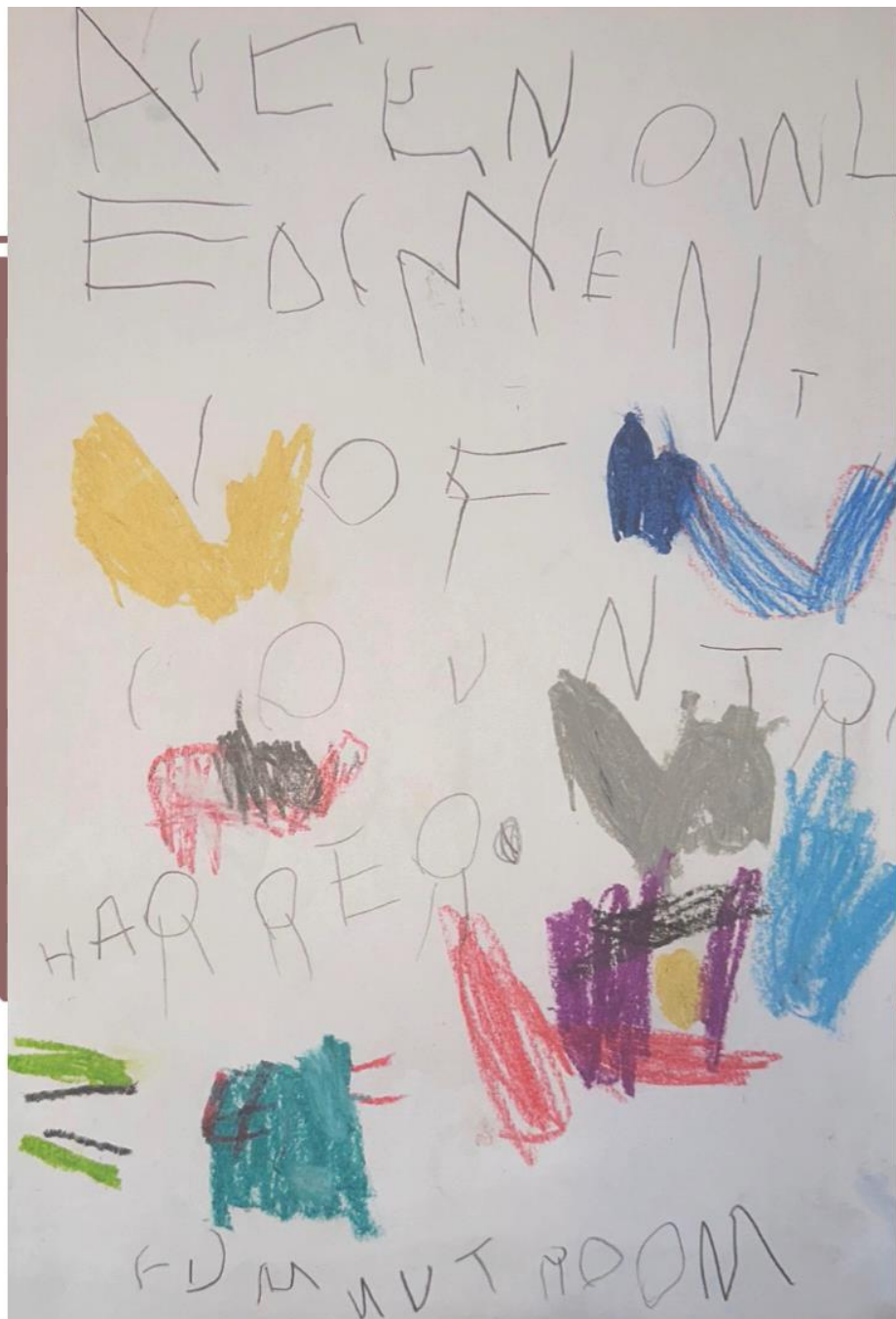
When Reconciliation is done well, the impact lasts — for children, for staff, and for families.

★ Strategic Pillar: Excel

Reconciliation Champion Responsibilities

- ✓ Reviews curriculum planning and developed a cultural calendar
- ✓ Works with the kitchen team on cultural menus
- ✓ Oversees RAP implementation and attends Narragunnawali webinars
- ✓ Supports rooms to update the Reconciliation wall and book across both centres
- ✓ Supports each room with Acknowledgement of Country





Acknowledgment of Country Gumnut Room'

ARTIST: HARPER



Acknowledgment of Country

We care about the Ngunnawal People

Reconciliation in Action

When Reconciliation is done well, the impact lasts — for children, for staff, and for families.

★ Strategic Pillar: Excel



Impact Story

🌱 A Child's Journey — From Disconnection to Pride

A three-year-old whose family had been impacted by the Stolen Generations arrived saying firmly she was not Aboriginal. Through gentle, consistent learning and an incursion with an Aboriginal singer and dancer, something shifted.

"I love all Aboriginal people! I'm Aboriginal like him!"

💡 Key Takeaway

Give people permission and time to lead what they care about — early childhood education has the power to interrupt stigma and replace it with pride, belonging, and respect.



Anna - The Protein

The protein is the heart of the burger — active citizenship is the substance of what we do with children every day.

- Building on Sarah's champion model — from educator-led change to the incredible capacity of children themselves
- Preschool program focus: what does it mean to be an active citizen in the early years?
- When children are empowered to have a voice, show empathy, and take action, they become powerful contributors to their communities
- Children are citizens of today, not just future citizens — active citizenship begins in the early years

Active Citizenship

- As educators, we have an opportunity to support children to recognise that they are capable, valued members of society right now.
- Create opportunities for children to participate, contribute, care for others, and take action on issues that matter to them
- Strongly aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework
- Ensure that every child and family feels seen, heard, valued, and connected within their community.



Active Citizenship in Practice

When we embed active citizenship, children learn to connect, contribute, and care within their community.

Documentation

- Transition to School Process
- Capacity and Participation Plan (CAP)
- Curriculums, observations and Summative Assessments

For the second section of this document, the child is invited to draw a picture of themselves at school, or alternatively a picture of their choice. The child was asked the following questions while they were drawing their picture.

Have you ever been to your new school/room?	
Yeah, a little. It's called Evelyn Scott School.	
How do you feel about going to your new school/room?	
Good, because they are very kind and we played together.	
What do you think your favourite things at your new school/room will be?	
Playing with Aaron and my big friend.	
What do you think will make you happy at your new school/room?	
I have a green fidget and a unicorn fidget, so maybe fidgets?	
What would you like me to tell your new teacher about you?	
Pokemon! My favourites are Bulbasaur, and Pikachu, and Charmander, and Eevee.	

Transition Statement - Flynn Early Childhood Education Centre



Active Citizenship in Practice

When we embed active citizenship, children learn to connect, contribute, and care within their community.

Caring for Country

Rather than providing answers, we encouraged the children to investigate

The children's responses were immediate and practical.

They wanted to do something.



“I pick up rubbish to look after the land.”



“I'm picking up a piece of paper and putting it in the recycling bin. That's where it should go”

The Flynn Hearts Project

Children do not need to wait to make a difference — small acts of empathy are active citizenship in practice.

🕒 Children's Committee

Volunteer preschool representatives meet monthly with Natasha (Flynn Director) — ensuring children's voices shape centre decisions.

💖 Flynn Hearts Project

A child's story of receiving a love heart in their lunchbox inspired children to create hearts for the Karinya House community for Mother's Day — empathy made visible.





Flynn Early Childhood Education Centre

The Flynn Hearts Project 2026

Bringing It All Together — The Whole Burger

Every layer matters — aligned strategy, governance, and day-to-day practice strengthens outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

The Bread / Bun — Joss

- Governance and strategy that holds everything together

The Special Sauce — Natasha

- Relational, responsive, and compassionate centre management

The Cheese — Sarah

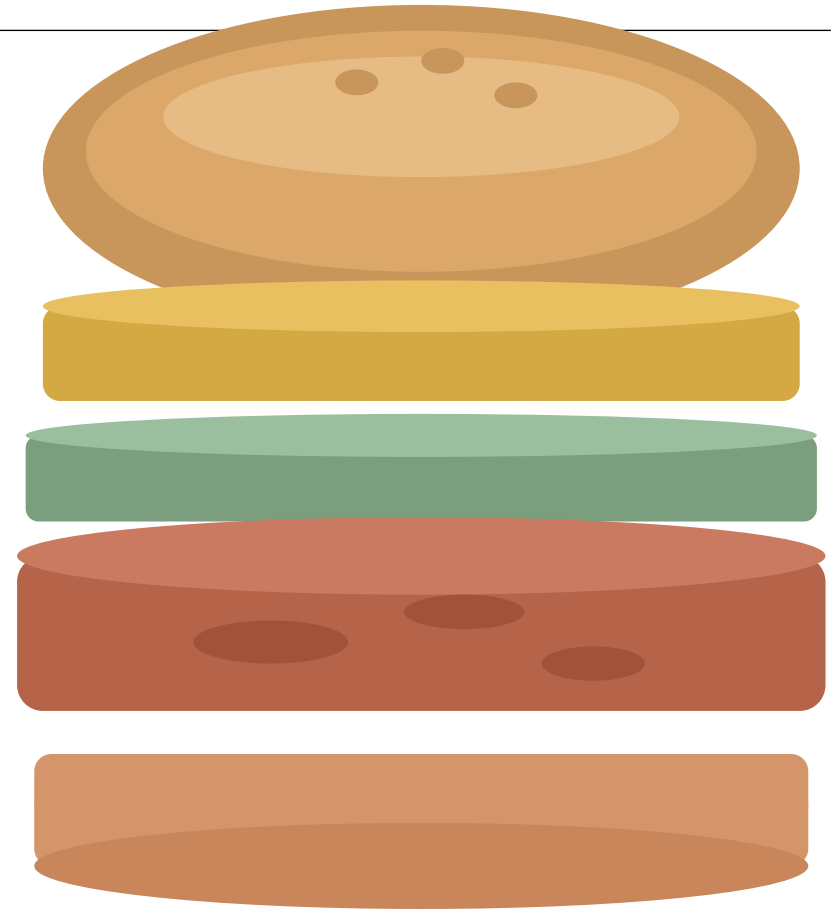
- Champion Model giving educators permission to lead — visible, sustained change

The Protein — Anna

- Pedagogical practice empowering children as active citizens today



Not four separate things — one whole, nourishing, intentional organisation.



We Welcome, We Care & We Collaborate

**Get to know us
We would love to connect**



OR email us:

jocelyn.cronin@nbca.org.au

References:

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). (2022). Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (V2.0). <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf>

Be You. <https://beyou.edu.au/>

CliftonStrengths. Gallup. <https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/home.aspx>

Karinya House. <https://karinyahouse.asn.au/>

Narragunnawali. <https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/webinars-and-workshops>

North Belconnen Community Association (NBCA). <https://www.nbca.org.au/>

ACT Government – Child and Family Centres. <https://www.act.gov.au/community/families/child-and-family-centres>

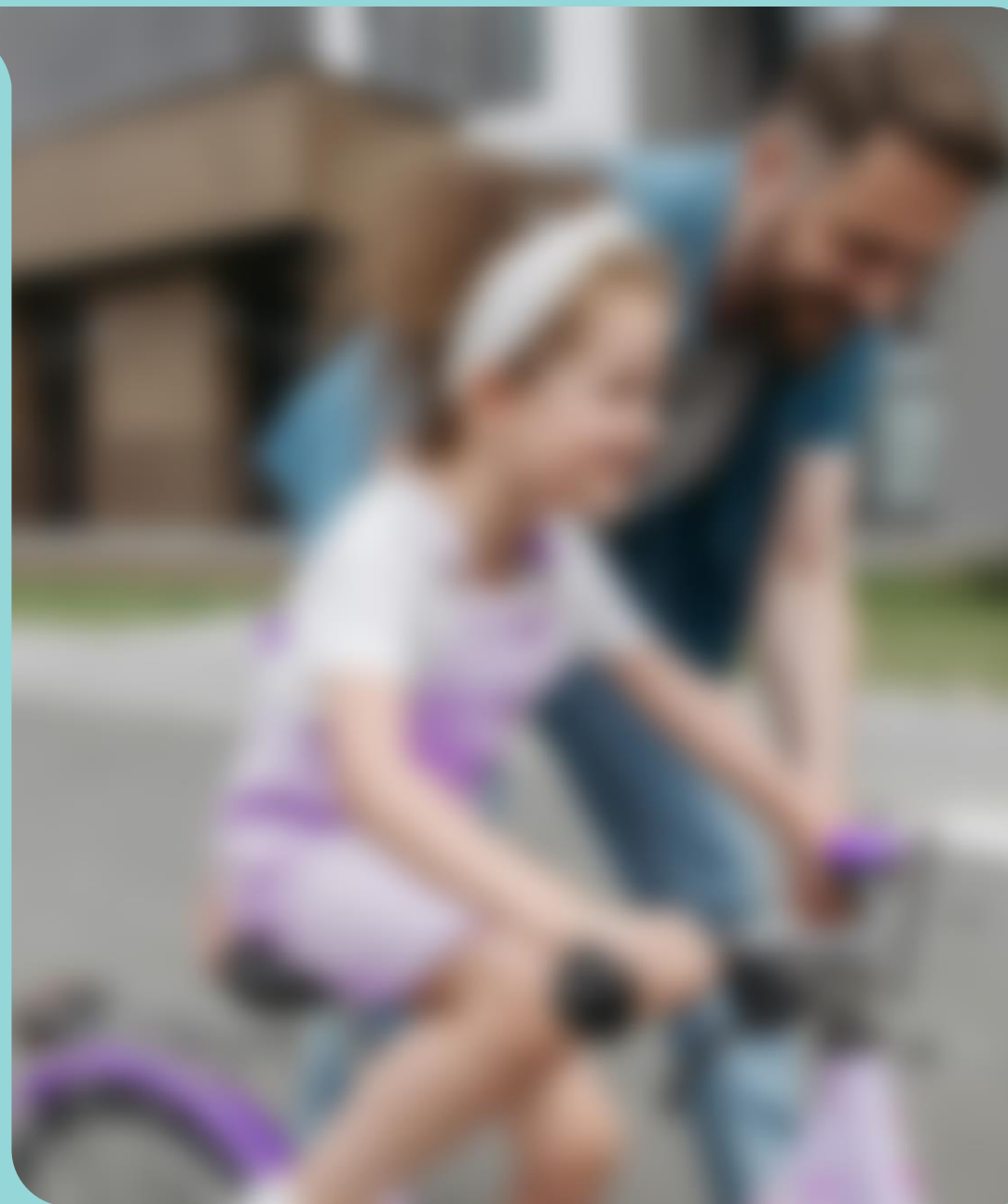
ACT Parents

Veronica Elliott, Executive Officer



Parent perspectives on engagement

23 June 2026



Acknowledgement of Country



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land we live on in the Australian Capital Territory. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the nation.

Respect and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures develops an enriched appreciation of Australia's cultural heritage and can lead to reconciliation.

This is essential to the maturity of Australia as a nation and is fundamental to the development of an Australian identity.



Roadmap



 What ACT Parents does

 What we've learnt from families

 What helps when conversations are hard

Shaping Public
Education Together





ACT Parents

Shaping Public Education Together

Since 1975

What we do



Supporting P&Cs



Practical advice for P&Cs on governance, operations, volunteering, OHSC and how to work constructively with school leaders

Shaping public education



Bringing the lived experience of public school parents and carers into government decision-making.

Parent advocacy service



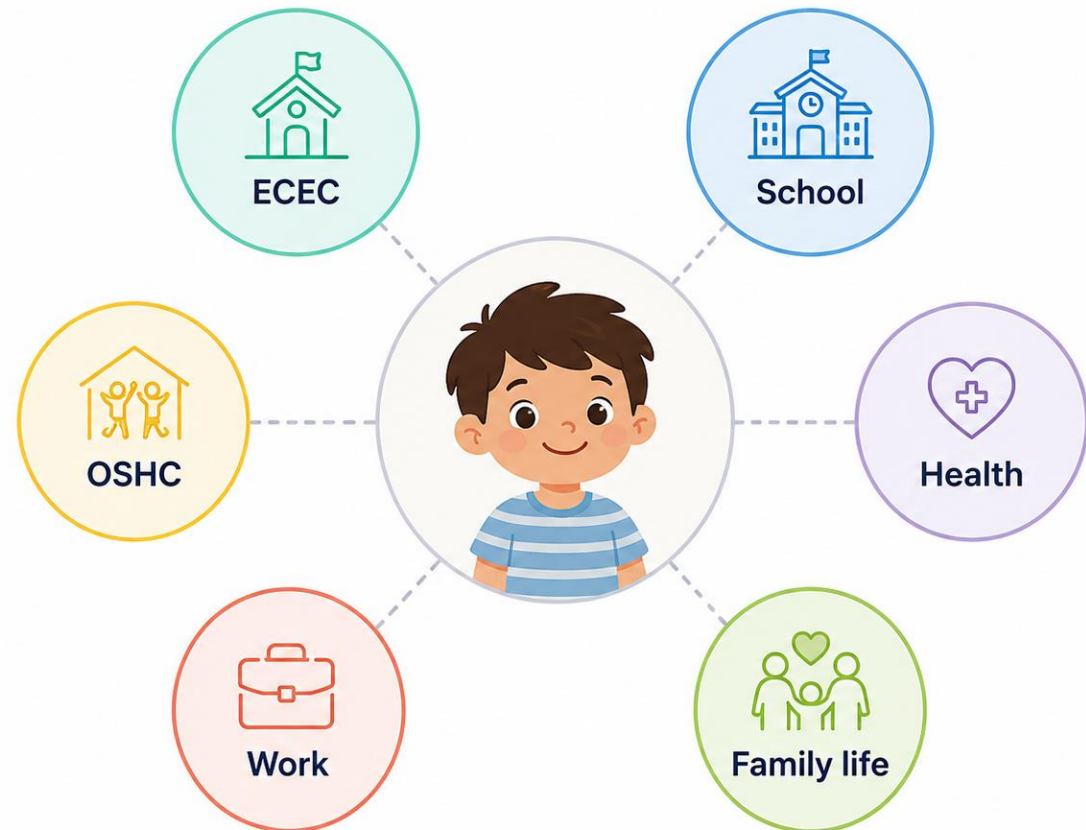
Helping families navigate public education when things are complex, emotional or hard to resolve.

One child

One family life



Families don't experience systems separately



Shaping Public
Education Together

Engagement



One parent at a time

“I don’t even know what I’m asking, I just need help.”

The parent perspective

Looking for
reassurance

Shaping Public
Education Together





Two questions

1 Do you know my child?

2 Do you have my child's best interests at heart?

Small things matter



Drop-off & pick-up

The engagement at drop-off and pick-up

Noticing changes

Whether you notice changes in their child



Follow-through

Whether you follow through on what has been committed

Communications vs lived experience

Whether documentation matches the lived experience

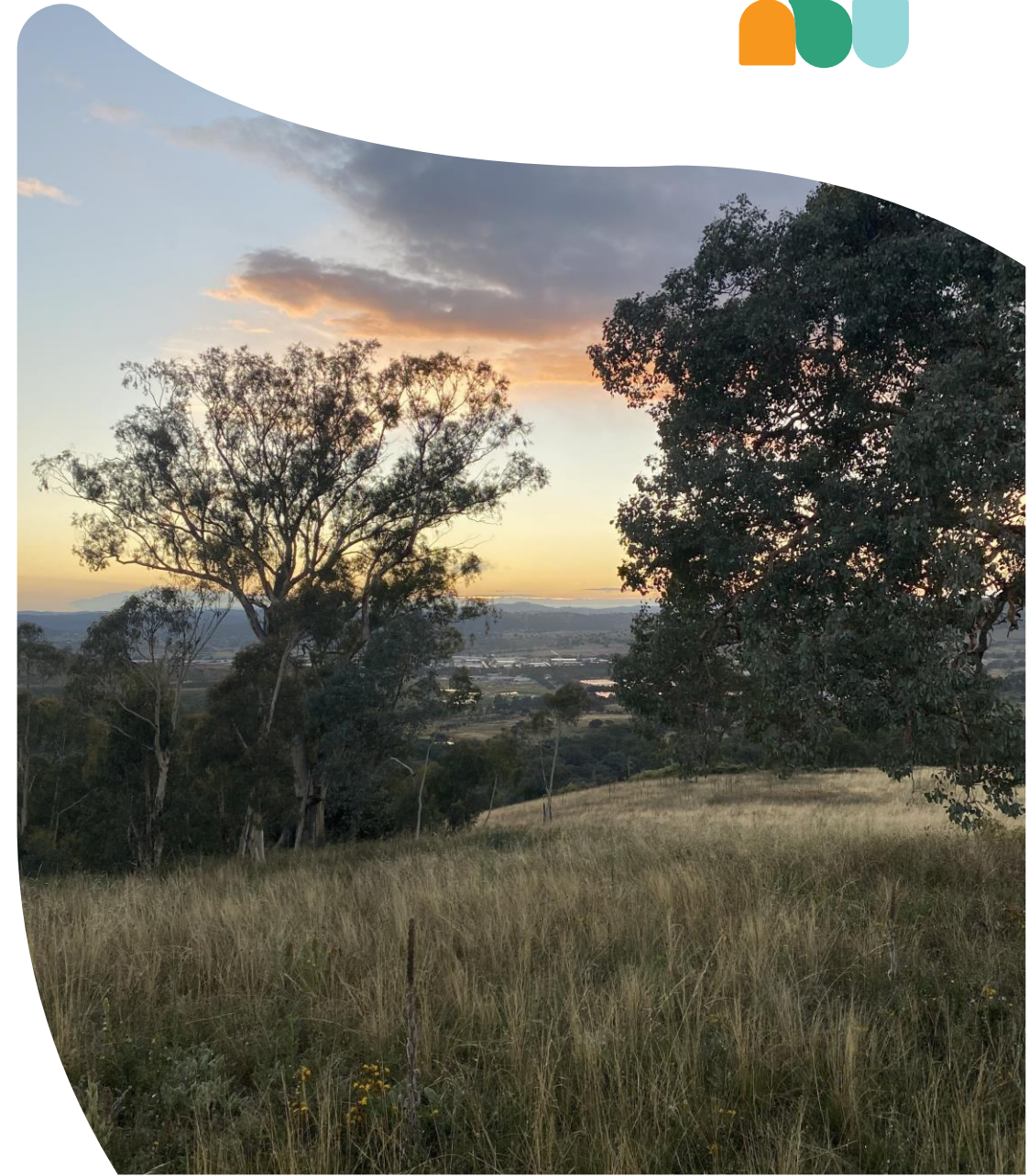


Curiosity

Keeps the
conversation open

Honesty

Keeps the
partnership intact





What helps in the moment



Keep the conversation open



Acknowledge the concern



Be clear about what happens next



How

“Thank you for telling me”

“I want to understand what happened”

“I don’t have the answer, but I’m taking this seriously”

“Here’s what I’m going to do next”





Safe services
are responsive services



Acknowledgement of Country



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land we live on in the Australian Capital Territory. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the Territory.

Respect and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures develops an enriched appreciation of Australia's cultural heritage and can lead to reconciliation.

This is essential to the maturity of Australia as a nation and is fundamental to the development of an Australian identity.



Follow us on Instagram @actparents

Follow ACT Parents



Shaping Public
Education Together

Panel discussion

Thank you.

Please provide feedback about this event
by scanning the QR code.

