

## Lessons in How to Make a Connection

It is time to celebrate the importance of early childhood education, writes Mat Rowell.

From July 24 to July 28, early childhood education and care services around the country will take the opportunity to celebrate why early learning matters. It is the sixth year Early Learning Matters Week that has been run, and this year's theme is Learning Through Connection. This theme invites educators and the wider community to consider the many facets of connection in early learning spaces and how access to early childhood education and care develops dispositions of agency and sense of self.

Being connected to family, community, culture and place is an integral tenant of the Early Years Learning Framework, the pedagogy documents that guide education and care across Australia; and essential to the development of "successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens" (Melbourne Declaration, MCEETYA, 2008). In early learning services across the country, educators work tirelessly to build strong relationships with children and families, providing relevant, exciting educational programs and becoming an extension of the family and of home life, with the knowledge that children who feel a sense of belonging within their service and community have the best opportunity for a successful, happy future.

This year's theme also provides an opportunity for early learning services to acknowledge Australia's First Nations people who, for many thousands of years, have been educators, passing on knowledge through their communities and embracing the interconnectedness of people, place and country. We acknowledge and embrace the multicultural diversity of modern Australia and value connection with our past as we look to strengthen our relationships with the traditional custodians of the lands where our services are.

Early Learning Matters Week highlights the growing acknowledgment around the country that early childhood education and care is not just about providing care options for working families, but that the most important period of human development is from birth to eight years old, with the most rapid and significant brain development happening in the first three years of a child's life. The work of early learning services and their dedicated, highly skilled workforce is essential to not only great outcomes for children now, but to the future of our country.

In Tasmania, Lady Gowrie Tasmania is part of a broad network of more than 200 early learning services around the state who deliver quality education and care to children 0-5 in centres from George Town to Swansea. Around the state, children attend excursions to locations in their local communities, visit other programs, learn about the history of our local Aboriginal communities, and use art, storytelling, music and play to connect with the world around them. We value our educators and the support staff who work tirelessly to ensure every child has access to high-quality education and care, in an environment that celebrates and understands the incredible opportunity to help give children a great start to life.

Lady Gowrie Tasmania values each and every one of our staff teams who work in this spirit of 'children first', every day, and in Early Learning Matters Week we take the opportunity to thank them for their commitment and enthusiasm to helping little minds learn and grow.

Mat Rowell is the chief executive of Lady Gowrie Tasmania.

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