

2023 Directors Report

Our purpose and commitment have continued to be strong advocates of high-quality outcomes for children, staff and the community with relationships as the key to understanding who we are and what we need whilst creating time and space for inspiration, motivation, curiosity and growth.

The event of the year was our 50th Birthday celebrations at Alfred Henry Whaling Reserve. A representation of our past and present preschool community coming together to plan a birthday fete, which was fun, interactive, and entertaining. We welcomed local councillors and Member for Castle Hill Mark Hodges, who presented a community recognition statement in NSW Parliament for 50 years of service to the Hills Shire community.

2023 welcomed a cohort of children who were, in our opinion, the most affected from COVID19 lockdowns. We identified that some of this cohort of children had been impacted by limited opportunities for social interaction, language development and play based exploration at a crucial time in their lives. In response to this, as a team we focused on ***the art of slowing down***. This term was invented on our first day back of 2023, and the teams responded and planned for what this would look and feel like for a child, educator, and the environment, to take a moment to slow down and just be. As our program is developed in response to the child and group of children, we were intentional with increasing opportunities to explore, create, engage, interact, problem solve, imagine and to be curious. We took time to observe the types of play children were engaging in and responded to this particularly through our outdoor program, where intentional and purposeful play was facilitated through the setup of the environment and where educators were positioned and engaging. We reviewed the ways in which we document and share our program and planning, and how this builds connections with families. We looked closely at the layers of programming with the child at the centre and how the educators and environment are crucial to its success, as one cannot exist without the other.

We engaged in professional development with a consultant at KU Inclusion Support, which involved a thorough review of our inclusive practice policy, increasing our understanding of language development. We engaged with Janie Rogers, a local occupational therapist to understand and support children with their self-regulation. We were able to review the role that resources, interactions, and the environment have on the way children engage. Following our work with our KU consultant, she provided feedback *“Thank you for all the wonderful and inclusive work you are doing in your preschool. It has been an honour to witness early childhood inclusion in practice, and to critically reflect with you and the team on your inclusive philosophy and at the in-services.”*

As a team we learnt about Phoenix Cups and exploring the 5 cups of Mastery, Safety, Freedom, Connection and Fun and how we all have different sizes to be filled, because you can't pour from an empty cup. This aided staff personal development and supported professional team cohesion. Staff upgraded qualifications for child protection and mandatory reporting and adopted some clear policies and practices as we are committed to child safety and the child safe standards. We were able to translate our child safe code of conduct into Mandarin through a government funded program.

We continue our journey of Reconciliation and learning about Aboriginal ways of being and invited Wendy Lotter an Aboriginal educator to engage with some hands-on experiences with the children including mapping with symbols, bush plants, making damper, painting river stones and using ochre. We continued our relationship with Murray-Toola Damana, an Aboriginal preschool in Mt Druitt and supported their transition to school program. We invited some children to come and meet us, explore a new environment and connect to a new place prior to the big step to starting school.

We connected with the community and made improvements in a variety of ways:

- caring for country walks each term to collect rubbish at Alfred Henry Whaling Reserve
- volunteer Rhys Hudd who joined the outdoor play space to help children with woodwork and real tools
- held our first parenting workshop ***Beyond the preschool gate*** with myself, our Vice President Catherine Kizana, who is an emergency doctor and parent educator and Mrs Hudd, lead educator of the Rose Room. Our goal was to build capacity for our parents as we shared knowledge about how play nourishes children, behaviour as communication and practical strategies to help support the complex role of parenting
- parents donated towards purchasing a native stingless beehive and native plants to attract bees to our garden. We were also recipients of a Woolworths Landcare Grant which contributed to the hive, plants and resources
- parent financial donations were used to purchase handmade wooden outdoor seating
- continued our commitment to sustainability by conducting a sustainability audit and had LED lights installed via a government funded program
- new furniture was purchased for our staffroom to support meetings, comfort and collaboration. We also upgraded computer and projector equipment as we have moved to cloud-based software.
- received a government grant to purchase new iPads to support the implementation of new software in 2024.

The Management Committee were strong advocates for our professional development with two staff attending the Early Childhood Australia's National Conference and I was able to accept an invitation to engage in a Leadership and Ethics Colloquia- both such amazing and inspiring experiences that filtered back to our organisation as we had the opportunity to think with like-minded people.

Thank you to the 2023 Management Committee, we have had a strong group of people with skills and talents across all business domains which the preschool has truly benefited from now and will continue to into the future. I appreciate the management committee's time, commitment, and interest in high quality education and care for our community.

We continue to live and breathe the philosophy of preschool. I aim to continuously ensure we align with the values and beliefs to create a purposeful and intentional environment where children flourish in their early year's development through play-based learning. Thank you to the committed team at THCK who make this happen every day.



Allison McCartney

Director/Nominated Supervisor