

2025 Directors Report

A time to reflect, to revisit, to celebrate another year of education and care for our young children and their families in the local community, thank you for the opportunity to report on the year. As always children are at the centre of our decision-making and each year this brings opportunities, adjustments, reflections and collaborative partnerships. How fortunate our community is to have skilled, experienced and dedicated early childhood professionals who show up every day with a smile, connection, comfort and support. A big thank you to the staff team at THCK, your continued support is truly appreciated.

Each year I lead goal setting for the organisation based on our observations, practice, research, staff and parent input and in response to the community. These goals align with the 7 quality areas of the National Quality Framework (NQF). This year the focus was to develop a connected curriculum, focus on child safety policies and practice, promote health, wellbeing and education, engage with NSW Health for the 4 year old health and development checks, upgrades to the outdoor play space, respond to staff goals through professional development, increase parent engagement and community engagement, review of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data to influence our planning for transition to school and upgrade our software and website.

My vision of a *Connected Curriculum* had a strong focus on living and breathing our philosophy and our view of children as connected to their people, environments and themselves. We know that when this connection is strengthened, learning trajectories are endless. We invited the parents to share what connection means to them and in response throughout the year the team developed ways to highlight the ways we connect at preschool. Additions to our educational program and practice policy outlined how we execute our program and structure, which helps keep parents and educators connected to the 'why' of what we do. We branched out with professional development and explored inquiry-based learning and the planning cycle. We reflected on our role within a child-led program of inquiry and how this style supports children's confidence, strengthens their participation and 'voice' and how this makes them feel a sense of belonging to the class and preschool. Each team shared examples of this learning style with each other, to help build our understanding, capacity and strengthened our professional culture. Melissa Hudd has a strong passion for this learning style and delivered professional development to the team. We linked this learning style and our documentation practices back to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and we engaged with an Educational Consultant to support our critical thinking.

Individual planning stemmed from parent input via the All about me forms. In Term one we gathered information, observed and reflected on the children's engagement in the program and compiled this information based on the QI skills developed by Laura Jana in her book "The Toddler Brain". The parents shared information about the child in their home environment, and we were able to then return information within the same format to share with parents about their child amongst the relationships, environment and routines of preschool. This innovative approach was developed following my attendance at the Early Childhood Australia Conference in Western Australia. We also had 5 other staff engage with the conference virtually. I am committed to ongoing learning and providing opportunities that align with the goals of the organisation and the team. Many of us attended a local conference with Hills Community Preschools. I have been involved in the planning of this conference with other community preschool directors for the past two years and it was great that the keynote speakers complemented our individual and team goals and development.

We commenced the year with a brand-new children's bathroom, staff toilet and new laundry with an additional toilet and new storage spaces for the Garden and Rose Rooms. A renovation that had been in the planning stages for a couple of years, along with raising funds for the project and

consulting with staff, children, families and the committee to bring it to fruition. We also installed a new cantaloupe umbrella, which was required as the council removed one of our large trees in the playground. As a not-for-profit service it is crucial we invest funds to ensure a safe, comfortable and accessible environment for all children.

Our intentions and responsiveness to improve our practice is evident through our reflective practice and the changes that result. An example of this review and the outcomes we seek was how we conducted our parent information nights for each class in term one. We aimed to create a social gathering for parents to learn about our preschool and connect with us whilst they engaged in play and exploration. We wanted to build a relationship and enhance their knowledge and understanding about how children learn through play. Some children were actively involved in setting up the environment ready for their parents to play and some parents left a special surprise for their child the next day. A drawing, creation or photos were displayed of the parents at play, both of which the children delighted in! This helps support the link between home and preschool and our connection.

Throughout the year we hosted two parents/special friends stay and play sessions which provided an opportunity to see the environment in action, how children engage with each other and their peers and to connect with educators, who all love to play! In our second session Steph Campbell planned this in conjunction with Early Learning Matters Week. Messages were displayed at the entrance to the preschool and the surrounding fences sharing information about the importance of early education, highlighting that 90% of brain development happens in the first five years and learning through play is a key. She organised some community guests from the office of Mark Hodges MP including Maria Connolly and John Brazier.

Our Kindyarn newsletter is sent out each term and became a platform to promote play through links to a TedX talk, facts about play and brain development, and links to NSW government resources. We hosted Dr Catherine Kizana from abc parenting and 30 families attended. Following this session and to extend access for parents we paid for a recording of the parent talk on attachment and brain development. This was a great investment to support parents in their relationships with their children and to learn about the science behind some parenting challenges. We hosted Dr Lilijana Gorrige a local GP and educator at University of Sydney for a talk about screen time and social media use. We have worked closely with Crestwood Public School to support transition to school and hosted a parent talk about school readiness. We believe that investing in our parents and their engagement is crucial to children's developmental outcomes.

Mid-year we planned for parent teacher catch-ups. This is another way we promoted engagement and connection with parents. The parents that attended provided positive feedback and were active participants in setting goals for their child. It is a credit to the teaching team how well they know the children, can gather evidence and provide feedback. We received positive feedback from parents who valued the opportunity to learn about their child's engagement at preschool and think collectively about the goals and aspirations they have for their child. To further expand our goals to partner with parents we adapted our orientation sessions in November/December following discussion and reflection. We implemented these sessions in small groups for our new enrolments, offering parents and children time to explore the play space, speak to educators and feel a sense of belonging. This is where our transition to preschool begins.

A true community project emerged through the development of a team goal in the Gumnut Room Wed/Thu/Fri Class- to build a bush tucker garden. The project was researched and designed by the team and funds raised by our community through selling playdough, hosting a cake stall, sponsoring plants and financial donations. We had an official garden opening with Jie Pittman a local Indigenous leader, with a smoke ceremony and Welcome to Country at the end of Term three. It was a

wonderful experience to be a part of and my thanks to Molly Wells for her planning and passion for this project.

I meticulously plan for our staff development days each term and are very grateful to our families for their commitment to action these student free days which ensure we can work towards the goals of our Quality Improvement Plan and continue to grow in our profession. These days are the only time we are all together, with a team of 18 staff, who mostly work part time, these moments are vital to our growth, development and team culture. Embedded in our staff development days are team building experiences and a focus on wellbeing. This year we included an excursion to the Balcombe Heights community garden, mindfulness, meditation and yoga practice with Off the Mat Living and Dr Catherine Kizana delivered a presentation on educator burnout. We also engaged with Little Scientists to build our knowledge of STEM in the program and hands on learning tasks about the human body. A new resource was developed for families about health wellbeing, including sleep, food, dental hygiene, water consumption, screen time and movement.

Our educational leader Steph Campbell, worked on conducting a cultural audit of our preschool community, which was in response to parent feedback about cultural celebrations at preschool. We were able to research the practices and celebrations of our families and reflect through research-based evidence what our beliefs and values are on incorporating events into our calendar. We landed that we do acknowledge and support cultural practices in collaboration with families, however we will not take away the children's opportunities to play, be curious, imaginative, engaged with peers at the cost of adult directed experiences. This is not how children learn best. Our response was to ask for parent input and involvement by inviting parents in to show, share and work with the children so that we can have a deeper understanding of culture and practice. This also respected those families who preferred the celebrations be meaningful to them at home and not necessarily at preschool.

A big reaction from the NSW government in relation to child safety resulted in an extensive review of policies and procedures. We were already engaged with the child safe standards and ensured that any persons engaged whilst children are being educated and cared for have a verified working with children check and sign our child safety code of conduct. A new practice we introduced as part of enrolment was for parents sign our family code of conduct. We have annual policy review schedule in place but this resulted in regulatory changes and updates to 14 policies, the regulatory and administrative burnout that resulted for many of us working in early childhood was challenging! Child safety is everyone's business, and it is necessary we implement policy and practice to keep children safe. However, the truth is, we need to place children at the centre of government decision making to promote early childhood as a profession and children's development at the forefront. These are our future citizens. We need to address fair pay and conditions, reduce the operations of for-profit services and improve the registered education and training organisations; then we will see positive change.

The child safety review provided us an opportunity to reflect upon how we take, store and transmit images of children. The change to our electronic information sharing was very much aligned with our program and practice of inquiry-based learning. We moved much of our documentation to in the moment, with the children, for the children and parents and slowed down our approach by giving time back to deeper reflections, conversations planning and preparation and time with children. Floor books, program displays and most importantly strong communication practices resulted in a smooth process, and we reduced our digital footprint.

Steph Campbell and I attended a research symposium hosted by the NSW government in response to the collection of data of children in their first year of school, this happens every 3 years and we have followed the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) since the beginning. The research

has highlighted the need for us to be responsive to our community across the developmental domains of physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills and communication skills and general knowledge. The report demonstrates how our local community are tracking in relation to the National data and an opportunity for us to develop goals in the early childhood space to support children, parents and the transition to school. As a team we reflected on our own observations of children and the support available for families and identified what action we need to take as an organisation to improve outcomes for children.

The data shows that children are more at risk of not being developmentally on track when their parents are less engaged in their child's learning and wellbeing and if children are not being read to regularly. The research tells us that being developmentally on track in the early years is more likely an indicator that children remain on track in future formalised academic check points throughout the schooling life. We are developing a 3-year action plan to look at ways to increase children being developmentally on track and I met with our Mayor Michelle Byrne to discuss resources in the community and what possibilities can be provided to support children prior to school. To promote the reading of books to children we strongly encouraged children and parents to engage with our library program. A special thanks to our library parent volunteers who have helped the children with our library borrowing program throughout the year: Jack, Shanna, Gina, Debbie, Claudia, Kathryn & Willa.

To further promote reading and high quality children's literature, at the end of the year each child was gifted a favourite children's book as a memory of their class interests throughout the year. The following books were gifted at the end of the year:

- Gumnut Mon/Tue Class *The Koala who Could* was chosen because it was a favourite story throughout the year and aligns with our program focus of a growth mindset.
- Gumnut Wed/Thu/Fri class *Edward the Emu* because of their research project about an emu and in memory of their excursion to Koala Park.
- Garden Mon/Tue/Wed Class *The Smartest Giant in Town* because it was a favourite story shared throughout the year and a way to celebrate developing the garden room community and ways we can be kind and care for each other.
- Garden Thu/Fri Class *Tiddler: The story telling fish* because of their strong interest in sea creatures and how this supported their social engagement, storytelling and dramatic play development.
- Rose Mon/Tue/Wed Class *A bag and a bird* because it complimented explorations of drawing and construction and linked to an excursion to the Botanical Gardens.
- Rose Thu/Fri Class *Alexander's Outing* because it promoted learning to follow routines, staying safe and close together as well as going out on explorations and learning about the sequence of storytelling both through written and artistic forms.

We reflected on our practices for end of year celebrations. Our *Celebration day* is planned with and for the children, it is not about fulfilling adult expectations of what it should look like, it's not about putting children on show, but rather caring deeply about what they feel, think and listening to how they would like to celebrate their time with us. Our goals were for each class to plan and celebrate an amalgamation of the year that was; to celebrate the skills and interests and memories made. We have reflected on the pantomime show, which has been performed for the children for many years and will be looking at some alternatives for next year, as we feel this no longer fits with our values.

Each year we plan for ways to engage with our local community. Although we were unable to participate in the Hills Winter Sleepout this year the preschool donated \$200 to the cause. Melissa Hudd got behind this by organising a donation drive for beanies, blankets and bellies (non-perishable items). At Christmas we engaged with Hills Community Aid to put together food hampers for those

in need. The children were actively engaged with choosing the items from a poster displayed and decorating the boxes. It was great to co-ordinate this project and involve 4 other community preschools for this initiative and have a meaningful impact.

We are funded by the NSW government and with that can come uncertainty with funding guidelines. The Health and Development Grant to implement 4 year old health checks was one of those programs. Unfortunately, NSW Health did not have the resources for us to implement the program, but we were able to direct funds to purchase resources that promoted health, physical activity and wellbeing. When the government announced changes to our funding model and the way in which we operate, we had to actively respond. We were so grateful to our preschool community for supporting our participation in a rally against the NSW government and close for this day. We have had many parents write letters to our local member about the proposed changes to our high-quality model of community-based preschool. On the day there was a lot of talk both on the ground and in the media about pay and conditions, which have their place. However, our focus and voice was against changing a model that works, and that making changes must include consultation with families, educators and the community. We will continue to be strong advocates for community preschool as we know the quality, connection and investment is second to none.

We have aimed to strengthen our relationship with our lessor, The Hills Shire Council, as we addressed the roof issues, with leaks and structural problems. We had to implement systems for safety, section off areas and use dehumidifiers due to the ongoing moisture. There have been challenges to identify responsibilities, and much has gone on behind the scenes. I can confirm our annual maintenance schedule is thorough and regular, however a reduction in parent volunteers to help with maintenance or offer expertise has also increased our costs along with council requesting more maintenance work be covered by the Kindergarten.

It's been a huge year! I extend my thanks to all the 2025 management committee members; Mohammad Islam, Lan Huynh, Wendy Du, Zoe Zhao, Gemma O'Donoghue, Alicia Hammond and Stephanie Hani for volunteering their time and participating in the governance and management of the preschool and all that happens behind the scenes.



Allison McCartney

Director/Nominated Supervisor