

## Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

# Case study: Beenleigh Family Centre Child Care Beenleigh

### Resources for Queensland early childhood education and care services

*We're constantly engaging in conversations like: are the children really interested in this? How can we support them and still focus on language? How can we support them and still focus on physical wellbeing and making sure that we're covering those developmental domains.*

Mellenie Mathieson is the Director of Beenleigh Family Centre Child Care. The long day care centre is part of a community services hub, offering programs that provide additional support for local people in need such as a young parents program, antenatal classes, and a peewees group (a supportive playgroup for children at risk). Various parenting programs and case worker support are available for families identified as needing additional assistance.

As an integrated early childhood service, it was natural for the service to form partnerships with local networks. Mellenie joined a response group which was formed to address the developmental vulnerabilities of children in the Beenleigh or Logan area.

While the group initially focused on transition it has now begun to consider the vulnerabilities which were showing in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data. Social competence, in particular was identified as an area of vulnerability in the community, as well as language and cognitive skills, communication skills and general knowledge.

The size of the response group fluctuates but it has representatives from diverse groups in the community including from the Queensland Department of Education and Training, local schools—including principals, community groups, and support groups—The Benevolent Society and Centrelink. Mellenie is the early childhood sector representative.



## Informing practice

Although the service's approach is only in the early stages, Mellenie says the educators are using AEDC data to inform practice and programs at the long day care centre.

'We're looking at how the domains from the AEDC relate back to the *Early Years Learning Framework*', said Mellenie.

The educators check back with the AEDC response group on links to National Quality Areas one and six, 'making sure that we're using the information that we get from that response group and bringing it back and sharing it with the educators and looking at how we can use that for our practice'.

The focus on language and literacy is beginning to shape the long day care centre's approach.

'We've set up a conversation corner which invites families to come along. We're supporting families to not only know more about how to start conversations or keep conversations flowing but also to encourage access to literacy and reading', said Mellenie.

The educators at the centre have also examined the different developmental AEDC sub-domains and matched resources and activities to these.

The Beenleigh Family Centre recently started a weekly 'read and feed' program to encourage family participation and a focus on physical wellbeing and transition activities. It offers a free breakfast and story time to boost language, literacy and speech.

Because the program is run in the hub, rather than in the long day care centre, families must stay with their child. To support less confident families, a few stations are set up away from the others, where families can read to their children. Mellenie runs story time from a big story mat, enabling families to sit and join in with their children.

They are hoping to build the numbers and Mellenie is working with the AEDC response group on how to market it outside of the service to gain wider family involvement in the 'read and feed' program.



## A whole of environment approach

Another strategy to address language vulnerability is to ensure that meaningful words are visible in as many places as possible in the learning environment, for families as well as children: on the walls, through books, in quiet areas for reading, and props.

'We set up our environment with lots of little play stations so we always make sure there's quality literature there', said Mellenie.

The aim is to help children 'see that print has a meaning' Mellenie says. '... We know that young children aren't reading at this stage but they're learning about the link between language and words. The words are also conversation props and starters for the educators as well.'

The children love to engage in dramatic play experiences in the centre's dramatic play area. This evolves constantly, based on the children's interests. At one time it was an ice cream stall with words and a menu for the children to read or identify pictorially as well. The children are engaging in the conversations and language experiences as well as the social aspects such as being competent in engaging with others and taking turns.





## Partnerships with schools

Local schools are a rich resource too. Mellenie uses that information and any AEDC resources exchanged and provides it to the educator team and families.

A Prep Expo with local schools gave parents the chance to talk to different schools and focus on enhancing the transition to school. 'So I've picked up some information and flyers for families. It's just about providing resources in the everyday environment. It's really important to make sure that the resources are out there in the environment all the time and they have access to them.'

## Pooling educator skills and knowledge

Mellenie says that while the centre has a small group of educators, they are highly experienced with a good understanding of developmental domains; the educators know how to program research and reflect on their own practice.

Taking some time to research online, as well as engaging in discussions, the educators expand their pool of ideas.

It was hard at first for the educators to reflect on developmental domains particularly 'knowing that what we were currently doing was really working and was really good'. 'So we needed to look at how does it match up and that's what led us on the journey of identifying how those developmental domains really do slot in with the learning outcomes in the *Early Years Learning Framework*,' Mellenie says.

Small solutions and combining information helped. The educators developed a poster to help easily identify how learning outcomes match developmental domains. Mellenie calls it a 'cheat sheet' so when educators are planning they are reminded of the developmental domains. Mellenie also provided educators with the community profile, using a snapshot of the developmental domains and highlighting the local area.

## Reflections

- Is there a response group established in your local area to discuss children's development and the AEDC data?
- How might you introduce and engage early childhood educators at your service with the AEDC, and use it to inform planning and programming?
- How can the AEDC be used to inform programming whilst still keeping the focus on children's interests and supporting them in the identified vulnerabilities?
- How might you connect with local schools and the community to help support transition to school?