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issue 1 | Vol 23 | 2018

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BEDROCK is published three
times a year and has
a circulation of 4000.

Intending subscribers and
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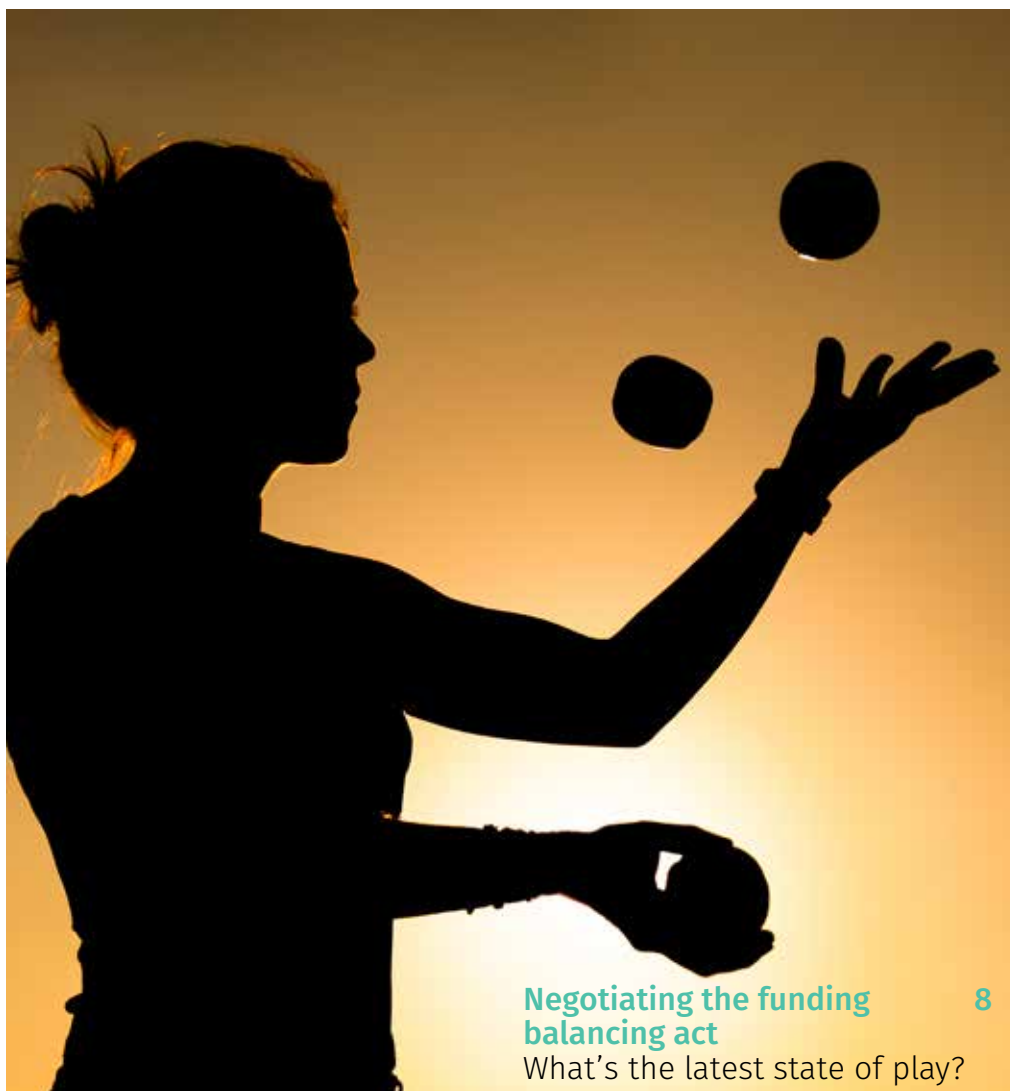
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This is a joint publication
of the IEUA.

Print Post number 100007356

ISSN 1326-7566



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The real technology in early childhood education

In the midst of the seemingly perpetual wave of new and improved devices, gadgets and applications, the essential role of teachers and kindergarten staff may be overlooked. These staff are critical to the use of technology in the classroom and strengthening the play-based nature of early childhood education.

The discussion of the impact of technology in the classroom, and particularly in a kindergarten context, often focuses on the use and incorporation of IT in the classroom; however, that is not the only technology present in an education setting.

Education professionals are constantly developing their strategies with improvements informed by their own real, lived experience working with children. Technology is finding new and more engaging ways for children to learn. Technology is identifying a special ability in a child and fostering success in that child with planned, intentional pedagogical approaches. Technology is observing how a child interacts in the play-based environment and making critical judgements based on these observations. Technology is not just introducing a child to an iPad – it's finding out what works, what doesn't, and doing what works.

This is not to say IT cannot complement the practice of teachers and staff – but we must be mindful of the way it can complicate, and distract from the valuable play-based nature of early childhood education.

Academics argue that IT use within a play-based learning environment is possible when used appropriately and with balance to enhance and extend the curriculum. Such an approach requires active and intentional use alongside the teacher's careful planning.

As a collective it is important for us to realise the extent of what we do and our contributions to the education of young Australians. Our profession is integral to forming and framing our society, and we must reclaim it from those attempting to diminish its significance.

Providing kindergartens with iPads might create some IT advancement, but it is the work of our teachers and kindergarten staff that propels valuable technological advancement in education.

Terry Burke **John Quessy**
QLD NT Secretary NSW/ACT Secretary

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UPFRONT



Time to lift our game

A new report, endorsed by all the states and territories, has called on the Federal Government to provide adequate and permanent funding for early childhood education.

Lifting Our Game, is the final report of a national education review on early childhood services – and backs continued investment in the early years to ensure Australian children do better at school and later in life.

The review, commissioned by state and territory governments, calls for a greater emphasis on education and to have the area better incorporated into education policy.

The Lifting Our Game report said the Commonwealth's significant investment in early childhood education is "predominantly directed to facilitate parental workforce participation".

"The review considers this to be a missed opportunity," the report said.

"It is possible to reap a double dividend from this investment, to support a child's learning and development as well as a parent's workforce participation."

The report also recognises the importance of a skilled and stable workforce in delivering a high quality early childhood education, and it points to the disparity of wages between early childhood teachers and their colleagues in school, and wages not reflecting the highly skilled and professional job performed by the early childhood workforce.

State governments should use the report to put a case for a long term agreement and commitment to funding from the Commonwealth, rather than short term packages.

This is an opportunity for the early childhood community to mount a campaign for ongoing funding.
education.vic.gov.au/about



Equal pay case progresses

The IEUA lodged evidence and submissions to support its equal remuneration claim for early childhood teachers just before Christmas. This is the latest step in the IEUA case that has been running before the Fair Work Commission since 2013. The evidence in the case will be heard by the Fair Work Commission in late July and early August this year, with final submissions in late September.

The case is quite separate from the case run by United Voice on behalf of child care educators who hold qualifications below university level. The IEUA claim is based on comparisons with university qualified male employees – male teachers in primary schools and male engineers.

The claim only affects a small proportion of the overall number of staff in preschools and child care services and the Union calculates the impact on costs would be relatively small. Many not for profit services are already paying rates close to the IEUA case. However, a large number of for profit services pay at or only slightly above modern award rates. The claim affects both stand alone services and those attached to schools.

Almost all early childhood services attached to schools pay the same rate as applies to teachers in those schools, but a small number of services pay early childhood teachers less than the rate received by teachers in the same schools.

The Union considers that parents would not necessarily bear the brunt of these increases. The sector is already funded by state and federal governments to the tune of billions of dollars. Governments should also fund fair pay rates for university qualified teachers as they are so important to children's development.



Drawing leads to writing

Most kids starting school in 2018 will come to learning to write with a solid foundation built through their preschool drawing.

In a new book, *Understanding and Supporting Young Writers from Birth to 8*, Associate Professor Noella Mackenzie explains how children start with talking and drawing and if we value these two modes of communication we can build on them.

"Learning about writing starts long before children start school," Associate Professor Mackenzie said. "The ways that kids make meaning and record their worlds through drawings is an important step in developing writing and therefore in developing literacy."

The key message of the book is that educators need to build on what children already know and can do when teaching them to write. "Teachers need to integrate children's prior experiences into the learning process," she said.

"One of the strategies I describe in the book is called 'Draw, Talk, Write'. Through this system, we value and utilise existing systems of communication that children possess, and writing becomes an extension of these existing forms rather than a replacement.

"Sometimes children get the message that writing with words on paper or a screen are more important than their other forms of communication, but this isn't the case. These are essential building blocks for writing in a conventional way."

All contributors to the book are Australian and the book covers a range of strategies that can be used to build children's writing skills from birth through to age 8. All strategies are informed by research and written for early years' teachers, early childhood educators and teacher education students.

"Writing is a key literacy skill for children to learn, and we need to ensure that teachers have the skills to develop that literacy in our children – they need to understand the importance of those foundations that children will be entering the classroom already possessing," Associate Professor Mackenzie said.

Mackenzie N & Scull J eds 2018 *Understanding and Supporting Young Writers from Birth to 8*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, UK.

<https://www.routledge.com/Understanding-and-Supporting-Young-Writers-from-Birth-to-8/Mackenzie-Scull/p/book/9781138674448>



KU agreement to provide fair salaries for early childhood teachers

In NSW, negotiations for a new KU agreement started in early February. As an indication of their commitment to ensuring that their early childhood teachers' salaries are close to parity with teachers in schools, KU have increased salaries and allowances by 3% from January 2018.

A four year trained teacher at the top of the scale in a KU service will now receive \$96,610 if working in a preschool and \$100,471 if working in a long day care centre.

KU teachers' salaries are some of the highest salaries in the sector in NSW. The Union does have a number of agreements where early childhood teachers' salaries are the same as teachers in schools.

While the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch welcomes the increase, KU teachers have raised a number of workload issues that they want addressed in the new agreement, including:

- increases in allowances, including director's allowance
- a limit on after hours meetings for preschool teachers
- non contact time to be timetabled and teachers replaced with relief staff
- professional development days for teachers
- limit on meetings and parents' nights, and
- domestic violence leave.

The Union looks forward to negotiating a fair and reasonable outcome for all teachers and directors.



Process issues with C&K directors' non contact time

In early 2017, members of IEUA-QNT were successful in securing a provision for 10 hours of non contact time for directors in C&K kindergartens as part of their collective agreement.

Late last year it had become clear to our Union, however, that this new provision – which members fought for and won – was not being implemented correctly by C&K employers, with members expressing difficulty regarding the application process.

IEUA-QNT Senior Industrial Officer John Spriggs said in a meeting with the employing authority, C&K accepted that the process to apply for the directors' non contact time was new, and had experienced some 'teething' issues, with proposals to change the process being identified.

"Following correspondence from our Union, C&K appear to be approaching the issues constructively and expressed regret in relation to some of the examples provided by our Union.

"However, our Union will continue to monitor this situation to ensure members are able to access this provision which they fought for and rightly deserve," Spriggs said.

Spriggs said directors should continue to apply for the non contact time where such time is justified, but should

monitor their applications and advise our Union of any issues which arise.

"Where any further issues are identified, these will be the subject of a further meeting with C&K," he said.

Queensland members experiencing difficulty with the process of applying for non contact time are encouraged to contact our Union on freecall 1800 177 937.



National kindergarten starting age to be considered

A recommendation to move to a national standard age for entry into kindergarten has been proposed by the Australian Primary Principals' Association (APPA).

The proposal would see entry to kindergarten at the start of the school year if children turn five on or before April 30 of that year.

Currently, the starting age of kindergarten students differs between states and territories:

- Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia require children to have turned four by 30 June to start kindergarten
- Victorian and Australian Capital Territory require children to have turned four by 30 April
- New South Wales requires children to have turned five by 31 July
- South Australia requires children to have turned four (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are required to have turned three), and
- Tasmania requires children to have turned four by 1 January.

The APPA noted the proposal takes into account the fact that families are already choosing to delay their children's start due to lack of social and emotional skills.

The change is said to reduce the age disparity among kindergarten children in a classroom.

It is understood that state and territory ministers have been provided with evidence to consider making the change.

Our Union would welcome the opportunity to provide input into discussions surrounding this issue and the impacts it may have for members working in kindergartens and primary schools.

Early childhood education continues to be undervalued

The uncertainty remains for early childhood education teachers, assistants and their students with the Federal Government again failing to provide ongoing funding to the sector beyond 2019.

In early February, Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham yet again announced a single additional year of Universal Access funding for kindergartens and preschools for 2019 – further perpetuating the government's piecemeal approach to supporting the sector.

Universal Access funding provides vital support to the early childhood education sector as part of the National Partnership arrangements. Unfortunately this funding has been subject to year by year consideration by the Federal Government as they fail to commit to a permanent funding arrangement.

IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Industrial Officer Verena Heron said underfunding in the early childhood sector persists even though research has shown time and again that the education a child receives at ages two, three, and four is equally important to that which she receives at ages eight, 12 or 14.

"Successive governments have treated early childhood education as no more than 'babysitting' and failed to provide adequate long term funding," Verena said.

Our Union is taking a stand against the continued undervaluing of early childhood education professionals.

Fund our future

With the Federal Government position falling short of the ongoing funding required for the future of the sector and its children, IEUA QNT members will be continuing the Fund our Future campaign.

The campaign, launched in 2017, calls for the Federal Government to get serious about funding the education of some of Australia's youngest and most vulnerable learners.

IEUA-QNT member and Director of Borilla Community Kindergarten, Jenny Finlay, said the current federal funding arrangement is a clear indication that early childhood education is not a priority of the Federal Government.

"The piecemeal approach that is being taken doesn't allow for long-term planning in kindergartens.

"Each year we are left guessing whether or not we will be receiving funding for our centres.

"What the Federal Government is doing in terms of funding does not align with its repeated rhetoric about the importance of early childhood education," Jenny said.

IEUA-QNT Senior Industrial Officer John Spriggs said for the last six

years a climate of uncertainty has surrounded the sector, leaving parents and staff unsure whether kindergartens will receive the funding that is so vital to the provision of early childhood education.

"Pushing our kindergarten staff and the children in their care into a perpetual funding limbo is not how you sustain quality education.

"The lack of commitment to Universal Access Funding by the Federal Government is simply shameful in the face of the quality education our children deserve.

"Kindergarten staff deserve to be supported in the work they do to provide quality education.

"Ultimately the Federal Government's current funding approach is just not good enough for the future of our nation as a whole."

John said the IEUA-QNT will work with stakeholders in the sector to further push for permanent funding arrangements.

Sign the online petition at www.megaphone.org.au/petition/fundourfuture to send a clear message to the Federal Government that they must Fund our Future.

To find out more visit www.fundourfuture.net.au

Exemplary educators study

Has your centre received an exceeding rating in every possible National Quality Standard Assessment and sub-standard? Are you interested in why your work as an early childhood teacher is undervalued?

If so, you are invited to participate in a research project being undertaken by a research consortium from Charles Stuart University, Queensland University of Technology and Rutgers University which will be exploring the complexity of your work and how your status as an early childhood professional can be strengthened and maintained.

For more information, see <https://www.ieu.asn.au/news-publications/news/2018/01/exemplary-educators-study>

Please contact Kim Crisp at kim.crisp@qut.edu.au if you would like to participate. The IEUA has committed significant funding to this research.





Negotiating the funding balancing act

Pay rises. Government funding. Every *Bedrock* reader should know the two are interlinked. So it seems an appropriate time as the equal pay case moves ahead to look at what is happening with government funding of early education and care services, Early Childhood Consultant Lisa Bryant writes.

Did you know that in most OECD countries, government pays the majority of costs for early education? In over 50% of OECD countries, governments pay over 90% of the cost, with families coughing up the other 10%. In Australia, however, governments cover just 65%, with families covering a massive 35%. Because families already pay such a large share, pay rises are directly dependent on our governments increasing how much of the cost they fund.


Isn't that what is going to happen with the new badly named Child Care Package starting on 1 July? Isn't that supposed to tip another \$3 billion or \$1.5 billion or some number of billion (it changes depending upon who is giving the speech) into the cost of early education and care?

Maybe. But maybe not. Early in January the Labor Party received, after a Freedom of Information request, departmental calculations that show that 279,000 families will receive lower subsidies under the new package than they currently do.

Lower subsidies

This sounds bad, right? It sounds even worse when you realise that there are only 869,750 families in total with children in Australian Government subsidised early education and care. So almost a third of families will receive lower subsidies than they currently do. And when government subsidies go down, the percentage of fees paid by parents goes up. Is that pay rise now looking a bit unlikely?

Of course some of the families who have lost out are very rich. The ones that could probably afford to tip in a bit more to ensure the people educating their children are paid a reasonable wage. These are the families earning



“Any fee increases mean the chance of services being able to pay for any pay increases is lowered.”

more than \$350,000 a year. (To save you doing the maths that's around \$6700 a week!) In the Prime Minister's own electorate for example, 47% of families will receive lower or no subsidies, with large numbers also in Warringah and North Sydney. But some of the electorates where families will lose a lot are not high income. Werriwa (a western Sydney electorate containing suburbs like Macquarie Fields) will also have 32% of families worse off.

Relief needed

So what we have about to hit us is a new government funding system for the majority of education and care services in NSW that we already know will reduce the amount of subsidy for a third of families. The other two thirds however will be getting either the same, or more money. Given that these families (primarily middle income earners) have been crying for relief from crippling education and care fees for a while, they may not be too keen to have fees increase again to cover pay rises for

teachers and educators.

Fees have increased around 6.8% a year over the last decade. The new subsidy is going to be pegged to inflation (currently running at around 2% per year). Fees grow more rapidly than inflation.

One of the scarier parts of the new Child Care Package may indirectly have even more impact on educators' and teachers' wages in the long term. Under the Jobs for Families legislation (yes, that is the name of the legislation that now covers the cost of children's early education) long day care services and occasional care services have been abolished. We now have instead 'centre based day care'. Just a change of name you say? No real difference? Actually a big difference. Previously, all long day care services had to be open for a minimum of 10 hours a day. No more. Centre based day care centres can now open for as few hours each day as they want to.

Impact on wages

So how will this impact wages? To understand this, you need to understand the impact of the Activity Test on families' eligibility for subsidies – especially the part that reduces low income families (those earning less than \$65,000 a year) to 12 hours a week. Families who are using a preschool program are eligible for 18 hours a week. Still not two full days at most services.

Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham is on the record as saying that he believes services will respond to the demand from families for shorter days.

So what will happen? Quite possibly some providers will establish preschool programs or more general sessions where children attend six hours a day. Preschool programs must be run by early childhood teachers. Will early childhood teachers be increasingly casualised, just brought in to run short days?

The likelihood of this may be increased by services now having to report children's actual hours of attendance. The minister is asking questions about why families are paying for a whole 'session' of care when they do not use it. Are we being pushed towards hourly billing? Will this mean a much more casualised workforce who can be sent home when numbers of children drop? What will this do to actual take home wages?

In NSW?

What about NSW? Is the NSW Government funding under Start Strong any better? Given that 75% of all increased funding under Start Strong must be passed on to families as reduced fees, it could be seen as contrary to the intent of the funding increase if services then increased fees to pay increased wages bills. But on the other hand, the reduced fees could mean families could afford to face wage related fee increases.

In the end, what this analysis shows more than anything is that when we advocate for wage increases we also need to be aware of the need to simultaneously advocate for funding increases. And we need to advocate against any funding changes that increase fees for families, not just because some children will lose access to care affordable to their families, but also because any fee increases mean the chance of services being able to pay for any pay increases that are won, is lowered.

And given how badly early childhood teachers and educators need and deserve pay increases, we desperately need services to be able to fund them when they are achieved. (That will be in 2018 by the way!)



Classroom aesthetics count

Executing effective design and aesthetics of a kindergarten classroom takes targeted planning and informed critical judgement. Journalist Sara El Sayed explores the professional considerations made when designing a kindergarten classroom.

Kindergarten teachers and staff take a pedagogical approach to the design and aesthetics of their classrooms.

Teacher Deborah Mintern-Lane of Bald Hills Community Kindergarten in Queensland said her classroom environment reflects her teaching and service philosophies, theories of learning that align with those philosophies, and everyday practice.

"I take time to meet with my team and reflect on how children,

families, educators and therapists interact with and participate in the environment.

"We also seek input from children and their families.

"We make very considered and intentional decisions to ensure the environment supports teaching and learning, including children's sense of agency and inclusion.

Aesthetics send a message

Deborah said the aesthetics of the environment send signals to others about who is welcome.

"Each child, family member, educator, and visitor needs to feel a sense of welcome and belonging in order to feel comfortable, safe and secure in the space.

"Promoting a sense of safety and security is reflected in our service philosophy and theories such as attachment theory.

"We also think about learning theories relating to play, relationships, power, equity, environment as the third teacher, and loose parts.

"The learning space at our kindergarten reflects the diversity, play interests, and learning occurring within the program.

"Specific resources and spaces have been planned to support inclusion and access with individual children's support needs in mind.

"Relationships and supporting social interactions are a key focus.

"Observing how children interact



“Observing how children interact and engage with particular items in the classroom or outdoor learning space helps us as professionals to research and understand the child’s experience and learning.”

and engage with particular items in the classroom or outdoor learning space helps us as professionals to research and understand the child’s experience and learning.

“Including multiple perspectives when observing can gain greater insights.

“For example, I shared video recorded observations with a child’s parents and our educators in order to gain greater understanding of the child’s emotional response to an area of the environment.

“Through collaboration, and use of technology, we were able to reflect and plan further to support the child’s learning and participation in the environment.”

More recently, Bald Hills Kindergarten has increased the variety of sensory input resources and provisions within the learning environment.

“We have found resources such as the hanging pod and pea pod chairs to offer a very calming sensory input experience for individual children, and in the past we have established vertical sensory gardens,” Deborah said.

Don’t be left out of pocket

While the aesthetics and design of a classroom are clearly of great importance and integral to holistic learning in the early childhood education setting, resourcing classrooms often comes at a personal cost to teachers and centre staff.

While many kindergarten staff are resourceful in their efforts to design and maintain their centres, ultimately there is a cost to be paid – both in monetary terms and in time spent organising, planning and preparing the environment for the children’s use.

IEUA-QNT Organiser Nicole Carlill said staff who are feeling in need

of support to properly resource their kindergarten environments should not hesitate in contacting their Union for advice about how to word communication to the relevant personnel.

“This is a benefit of union membership that can sometimes be overlooked.

“We are here to support our members in communicating to their employers what is needed for the operation of their early childhood education service,” Nicole said.

Contact your Union

Queensland and Northern Territory members can contact their organiser on freecall 1800 177 937 and NSW/ ACT members can contact their organiser on freecall 1800 467 943 for further advice on gaining support for kindergarten, preschool and long day care resources.



with

Kate Washington

Shadow NSW Early Childhood Minister Kate Washington responds to some questions sent directly to her by IEUA NSW/ACT Branch members.

1. Remuneration and workforce retention

The pay gap between early childhood teachers and other teachers is an underlying cause of many systemic issues within the sector, including high turnover of staff, difficulty recruiting experienced staff, lack of mentors and the disproportionate number of women in the sector.

Early childhood education and care has been historically undervalued in NSW, which is why we have the highest fees, lowest levels of participation and fewer government run services than other states.

While this issue is not isolated to NSW, I am acutely aware of the impact of the pay gap in the sector.

I do not see this as a fees versus wages issue. While bringing down NSW's high fees is important, parents consistently state that they want quality preschool for their children and bridging this pay gap is an important part of ensuring high quality preschool services continue into the future. There is no success in bringing down fees if quality suffers.

In 2013, the Gillard Labor Government established the Early Years Quality Fund (EYQF) which sought to subsidise a wage increase for early childhood staff. Investing in quality teachers is one of the best investments governments can make, which made it all the more

galling when the Federal Government under Tony Abbott's leadership, cut this scheme.

It is clear that any future scheme, in whatever form that investment takes, will need the support of both state and federal governments. I will continue to work with my Labor colleagues on developing policies which champion the quality education children receive at preschool while also recognising the professionalism of early childhood teachers and educators.

2. Appropriate funding of the early years sector

In 2015, the Labor Opposition exposed the ongoing underspending of the NSW Government's preschool budget. The NSW Auditor General later confirmed Labor's finding that over \$350 million of budgeted funds meant for early childhood education had been left unspent.

Thankfully, since then, the NSW Government has finally increased funding for the early childhood sector in the form of Start Strong.

Whilst additional investment in early childhood education is welcome, I continue to hold concerns about the structure of the Start Strong funding model and its impact on services.

My biggest concern is that Start Strong is designed to meet national criteria. So instead of being shaped by what is in the best interests of children, it's a 'tick-a-box' exercise where the focus is on meeting criteria in order for the NSW Government to attract federal funding.



Kate Washington meets IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Organiser Tina Smith to receive members' questions.

I've visited many services since Start Strong was implemented and I hear frequent complaints about its complexity and lack of flexibility. It fails to recognise one of the many strengths of early childhood services, which is their ability to adapt to meet the unique needs of the communities in which they operate.

If given the opportunity to become the Minister for Early Childhood Education in a future NSW Labor Government, I will revisit the funding model to ensure we are maximising the benefit for all children. Saying that, I'm mindful of the ever changing funding landscape in early childhood education and the administrative burden this places on every service. So any changes to the funding model would be undertaken carefully and in full consultation with the sector.

3. Consultation with the sector

It would be immensely foolish not to listen to the people who know what works best – the amazing people who work in the sector every day.

From my visits to many services, what is very clear, is the enormous expertise and capacity within the sector. Every service I visit, the teachers and educators share with me new ideas and insights.

An advisory council, or other form of consultative group, would be a useful means of ensuring links with the entire sector, including the IEUA, and I welcome further discussion about the form that a consultative group would take.

In addition to any consultative group, I will always continue to visit services and speak to staff, especially in regional areas, to see and hear first hand, how policy changes are impacting services.

To all of the early education and care teachers and educators, I thank you for all that you do. Your work is critical to the wellbeing of our children, our communities and our nation.

I hope to work with you all in the future, to see more children accessing your services and to have the important work you do, properly valued.

GREEN GRANTS

grow nurturing communities

Since 2016 the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch has been offering environment grants for sustainability projects in schools, preschools and long day care centres. Three of those grants have been won by early education providers. The successful applicants talk about their projects here.



Cultivating a sustainable community

Phillipa Maher

Valla Community Preschool, Valla Beach

Our preschool is situated within a very small and dynamic beach community and has some well developing links and partnerships. We have always had a small vegetable garden and kept a compost and worm farm for preschool use, but this year that expanded a bit when the café across the road started to sell our excess produce

and we were able to collect their ground coffee for our gardens and composting.

When the opportunity to apply for an IEU Environment Grant arose, we decided to go for it because we had a strategic plan to expand on ways we can contribute to sustainability practice in our community. We also wanted to further develop our partnerships with community.

So this project was born!

It is still in early stages, but we have started to



transform an unused parcel of land adjacent to the preschool by turning it into productive land for community composting, preschool food gardens and a chicken run.

Our composting and worm farm systems have been expanded and are now a site for the preschool, our local café and community to drop off and process food and green waste. In time, the composting and worm farm site will become an income stream as we intend to sell worm juice and compost to our local community.

Our expansion of the kitchen gardens has opened up more regular opportunities for garden to table experiences within preschool, and we also now sell produce (and soon eggs too) to the café, which they use in their menu, or sell via the grocery section of their store. The children also sell produce to preschool families which provides an opportunity for them to learn about money, budgeting and customer service.

The project has connected us so well with our community already and we are only in the beginning stages. The unused parcel of land is now becoming a thriving garden space and we have interested community members who have started to contribute. A couple of the new garden beds were built by community members and families. For the children it is a wonderful project with so many opportunities to connect with community and gain new knowledge and skills about sustainability and the environment.

Our project has a number of environmental, economic and social benefits – from the reduction of landfill through organic waste diversion; to the education of children, parents and community members in sustainable living practices, kitchen garden principles and sustainable food systems; to creating community engagement and cohesion opportunities. We believe that cultivating an identity for being responsible community citizens should be central to our program, and this project offers just that!

Our Garden

Claudia Quintanilla

Goodstart Early Learning, Goulburn

Our Garden was the name given to our project by one of our preschoolers in 2016 when I discussed our grant application with the class. The children were excited, they imagined a huge watermelon patch that covered the whole area and lots of flowers, with a few pineapples thrown in.

If there was any doubt that we would apply, it just melted away with their enthusiasm.

Our plan was simple. We had an unused area that we wanted to turn into a garden. My vision was for a shared space that all educators, children and families could be part of. We wanted garden beds for all our rooms, from nursery to preschool, as well as ways to compost and reduce our waste. Winning the grant and being able to set up the garden space, chicken run, worm farms and composting was an amazing opportunity. We would not have been able to complete the whole transformation without it.

That was over a year ago now and our garden is established. Unfortunately, there are no watermelons: we did try but they don't grow in our region. We have however, harvested a variety of vegetables and herbs over the year and created a home for our chickens, who provide us with eggs to use in our kitchen. We have had successes and some hiccups. Our chickens like our vegetables just as much as we do. So it has been a balancing act trying to let them roam in the garden and also protecting our produce.

The benefits for our centre have been far reaching. Initially it was about the set up of the area. We educators, along with the children, incubated and hatched our own chickens. We experimented with germinating seeds in different ways. We explored composting and ways of reusing our kitchen waste. Our garden provided us with a focal point for exploring sustainability and what that could look like in our service. It was exciting and I had such a sense of satisfaction watching it all come together. I was able to work with some dedicated educators and families in establishing the area and observing how our children respond to this ever changing learning environment.

In 2017 I was no longer in the preschool room, instead, I became the ECT in the nursery room. How was I going to continue my involvement in the garden? How was I going to garden with one year olds? I shouldn't have worried. They shared my love for the space. They helped me plant, water, mulch and harvest. While some of the older children and educators were unsettled by the chickens, our nursery children were fearless and our chickens now have a great respect for them. The children enjoyed checking for eggs in the nesting box and would carry them so carefully to our kitchen.



“We believe that cultivating an identity for being responsible community citizens should be central to our program.”

The chickens and the role they play in our garden has been the source of many conversations with the children. One of our chickens became broody so we provided her with fertilised eggs to sit on. She did not prove to be a very good foster mum and the role was handed over to our toddler children and their teachers who hand reared the chicks – much to the delight of all our children, who would take their families in at the end of the day to show them the growing chicks.

It started with Our Garden but now the challenge we face as a service is how we continue to explore and embed a widening range of sustainable practices. As with many centres we have our restrictions but I am determined not to let these become blocks to our progress. We have sustainability on our agenda and try to share this with all our educators, children and families.

The 2017 preschoolers and their teachers tried to solve the dilemma of what to do with our waste paper. We have a lot of it and we do not have a recycling service. They came up with a creative solution and they created paper

bricks. They researched how to do this before creating paper pulp and moulding it using old tin cans. These bricks not only became part of their construction area but they heightened the children’s awareness of the waste they produced and what could be done with it.

I am returning to the preschool room this year and I’m excited about sharing my passion for our garden with a new class. I had been wondering what we could focus on this year and what else we could do with this area? Then I attended the IEU Environment Conference and came away with so many ideas of how we could continue to develop and extend our garden. I was so inspired. Recycled scarecrows, worm towers, herb spirals and an insect hotel are just the start. There are so many learning opportunities waiting for us this year in this space. As a learning community we have created a wonderful space but we are nowhere near finished. I don’t believe Our Garden will ever be complete. I want it to be an ever changing space that truly reflects the interests of the children and educators that make up our community.



"I want it to be an ever changing space that truly reflects the interests of the children and educators that make up our community."

Getting back on track

Lynette Funnell
Lismore Preschool

Lismore Preschool was one of the early childhood centres directly impacted by the flood event in March 2017. While the damage and resulting mess (both inside and outside) appeared overwhelming, an incredible amount of hard work and commitment from staff, families and the community saw us able to re-open our doors in early May.

However, while most of the inside of the preschool was dealt with relatively swiftly (minor works continue), the outside of our service was left sadly lacking. We had always been very proud of our outdoor spaces, our interesting garden areas, mud pit, 'rocky creek', logs and bogs – as well as our rich connection with the beautiful community garden that sits directly beside our service and is an integral component of our learning and teaching with children.

All of these spaces had been left decimated by the flood waters and the resultant thick layers of contaminated mud, dead plants and waste that was left behind when the water receded. While we had ensured the cleaning, removal and replacement of core resources such as sandpit content and softfall before re-opening, we very much now wanted to prioritise the genuine nurturing of our outdoor environment, something that would give both the children and staff the opportunity to once again engage in some much needed and valued nature 'wellness' time.

Around this time, we received notification of the upcoming IEU Environment Grant. With nothing to lose (literally) and potentially a lot to gain, we put forward a proposal for the grant and were delighted to receive notification of our success in August 2017. In the long term, the grant has been able to form an important

part of a larger and very necessary 'master plan' for re-development and revitalisation of our outdoor spaces.

However, in the immediate term it has provided funding to replace and refill several raised garden beds, allow for the re-establishment and maintenance of our lost native beehive, re-plant several decimated garden spaces, repair our valuable solar hot water system and replace damaged water saving hardware on children's outdoor handwashing sinks.

Further funds have been allocated towards the cleaning, testing and plumbing of the rainwater tank attached to the sandpit play space. While work continues, you only need to glance around our yard now to see how our garden spaces are thriving, and recognise how appreciated they are. Children are back to picking vegetables, flowers and herbs, investigating insect activity and noticing the seasonal changes that are occurring naturally – all of these experiences highly enjoyable ones that enrich both children's and adult's days.

Lismore Preschool is very grateful to all the emotional and physical community support, including that from the IEU Environment Grant which has helped us to re-build our beautiful service and make our place once again one that is very special for both children and adults.

Keep an eye out in *Newsmonth* and TRT, and on the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Facebook page and website for details of how to enter this year's competition. The grants are sponsored by Teachers Mutual Bank. Sorry, NSW and ACT members only.

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Children as playful users of digital resources for literacy development

Play is an integral part of children's lives, writes Lisa Kervin, Associate Professor in Language and Literacy in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong.

Through play children make sense of their world and their relationships with others around them. Playful activities are essential to children's development of communication, language and collaborative skills. Vygotsky (1978) helped us understand that children learn through socially meaningful interactions and that language is an important facilitator of learning. Language learning is social and children need to be literate to enable them to use their knowledge of language to learn and communicate in family, educational and community contexts.

So, what does play look like when technology enters the mix? Over the past decade, there has been an increasing body of research into digital interactions (mostly games) and play across a range of age groups. However, research focused on technology use with younger children is still emerging. This is significant when we consider the developmental importance of play in the lives of young children and the opportunities that exist for literacy development within digital environments. What it is that children can do with digital

resources to enhance their literacy development demands our attention.

Play has assumed new guises, structures and contexts with the expansion of technology. The distinctions among forms of technology, and what these mean for the content and the user, have been blurred by multi touch screens and movement activated technologies. While I agree that we need to be aware of the time children spend on passive, non interactive technologies and screen media, I would also like to propose that parents and early childhood educators need to be open to a reconceptualisation of screen time when we consider the affordances of technology and digital resources and the playful opportunities they offer to young children. In what follows, I'm going to discuss digital resources as potentially powerful tools for children's literacy learning when four key areas are taken into consideration.

1. Digital play as an extension of 'real life'

Through play, children experience and make connections with their environment. Children naturally want to explore what is around them and through their play assume different roles which may represent

important people in their lives (a parent or grandparent or sibling), in the community (for example, a firefighter or train driver), a character from a book or from popular culture. Regardless of the role, children who are putting themselves in someone else's place are developing feelings of empathy and learning to consider others.

Children's imagination is enhanced when they engage with situations of make believe, acting and interacting in an 'as if' situation. Digital resources have the potential to expand children's opportunities to explore and manipulate a range of 'real life' scenarios. Digital resources enable additional dimensions and affordances to familiar objects and activities. For example, children can learn about familiar trades (such as train driver or hairdresser) in game-like apps; they can practice specific skills (such as games that simulate sports), and communicate with significant others from a distance (through Skype or FaceTime), to name but a few.

The introduction of any digital resource to a child should expand their access to new information, experiences and areas of interest to them. It is essential that apps, games and websites provide opportunities for children to be creative, to explore

and be playful. The content of the digital play should have some real world application where the child can recognise and incorporate elements into their imaginative play. It should be discovery oriented and include opportunities for problem solving.

2. Digital play as a spontaneous, self initiated and self motivated activity

Children should have time to play and ultimately want to play. When play is self initiated they are able to move between play scenarios and resources. The portability of many technologies (such as tablets and iPad) has dramatically changed the nature of technology use. For example, children and adults can capture photographs and video snippets of their experiences with mobile technologies that can be revisited later for multiple purposes (for conversation, sharing, editing into a slideshow, movie or book).

Play is not necessarily goal oriented and should be risk free. Play that allows children to take control of the scenario as they make choices is powerful. As children set up play contexts, negotiate roles and interact (with others and artifacts) in those roles, they use and develop language skills.

3. Digital play as an opportunity for collaboration

Play can also enhance children's social development as they learn about their social world. Playful social interchange begins from birth, and provides opportunities to explore different contexts, rehearse social skills and learn about acceptable peer behaviour firsthand. With age and experience, children's awareness of peers playing around them increases. This leads to more opportunities for interactions between and among children and collaborative play.

It is through communication and collaboration with others that children become confident and competent language users as they develop their understanding of text, image and symbols in a range of real world contexts.

Digital play therefore, should not happen in isolation. There is power in authentic and truly engaging interactions with significant others (both adults and peers). Children should not be passive consumers. Rather, digital resources should encourage interactivity with opportunities to include others in the play, stimulate dialogue and even create new content.

4. 'Quality' in the digital experience

The range of digital resources (apps and games) increases daily. However there are varying degrees of 'quality' in what is available for young children. In making any decision about a digital resource the age, developmental level, needs, interests and abilities of the child need to be carefully considered. The opportunity for digital play should provide the child with a valuable and worthwhile experience, something more than they could get without the technology.

There are also some screen design features which ensure the quality of digital experiences. These include an uncluttered screen design with simple background, attractive colouring, and graphics which allow for manipulation of visual images that children produce rather than consume.

Towards a criteria on digital resources as tools for literacy development

This is the first time in a very long time that children have had such a different kind of play to engage with. Participation in digital play provides the opportunity for children to communicate and develop their ideas and understandings in new, interesting and different ways. As children negotiate digital play, they negotiate a range of technological literacies (for example, the device and how to interact with it, what application or software program) and a range of content and activities (for example, specific applications and games).

In helping to make decisions about a digital resource for a child, I encourage reflection on the following:

- What literacy activities are promoted? Consider whether there are opportunities for talking, listening, reading/viewing, writing/ composing.
- Does the resource reflect and build on what the child already knows?
- Are there opportunities for the child to explore, imagine and solve problems?
- Will it maintain the child's interest? How?
- Does the resource involve many senses and include sound, music and voice?
- Is the resource open ended, with the child in control of the pace and the path?
- What opportunities for interaction does the resource promote? How do you imagine the child using it?
- What opportunities are there for them to engage with others?

“Participation in digital play provides the opportunity for children to communicate and develop their ideas and understandings in new, interesting and different ways. “

Through careful selection of digital resources we are able to see what the learning potential may be for children. The ways children are motivated to use digital technologies to investigate, create and communicate within the context of real world application and collaboration guides the selection of quality digital resources. When we understand the learning opportunities that assist children's development in connection with digital resources, we are in a position to support, inform, reform – and perhaps even transform – the digital play experiences offered to children.

Reference

Vygotsky LS1978 *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes* Cambridge MA, London: Harvard University Press.

Lisa Kervin

Lisa Kervin is an Associate Professor in Language and Literacy in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Wollongong, where she is an active member of Early Start Research. Lisa's current research interests are focused on young children and how they engage with literate practices and she is currently involved in research projects funded by the Australian Research Council focused on young children and writing, digital play and transition.

This article is informed by research funded by the Australian Research Council *Conceptualising digital play: The role of tablet technologies in the development of imaginative play of young children* (DP140100328) and recognises Irina Verenikina and Clara Rivera as research collaborators.



South Australian MP Amanda Rishworth was recently announced as Federal Labor's Early Childhood Education Minister. Here she introduces herself to Bedrock readers.

It was a great honour to recently be elevated to Labor's Shadow Cabinet with the Early Childhood Education and Development portfolio. Together with my responsibilities as Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel, it now means I spend my days thinking how to improve the lives of some of the youngest and oldest members of our community.

As the mother of a young son who attends care, I'm already immersed in the early education system.

The evidence is clear about the positive social and educational benefits from quality early education – it's a key building block in our children's development.

I know how complex the current system is – just like any other family does.

The number one question on my mind is: how do we ensure quality early years' education and care that is accessible, affordable, and that meets the needs of Australian families?

And how do we do all this and create a system that is supportive and rewarding for the hard working and dedicated educators and support staff who make it all happen?

That, in essence, is what parents and educators want.

And it is not what we are getting from the Turnbull Government, who seem to view early years education as merely a babysitting service for families where both parents work.

This year I will be working hard to shine a spotlight on those low and middle income families who fall through the cracks as a result of the government's child care changes which take effect from July.

We know 279,000 families will be worse off from the changes. In addition there are concerns around the new red tape that will affect both providers and families as a result of the government's changes.

As I travel around the country, talking to parents, carers, educators and centre operators, I want to hear from everyone on how we can ensure we have a world class early education system that delivers for educators, providers, parents and most importantly, children.

As shadow minister, my priorities will be on working to ensure early childhood education is accessible to as many children as possible – where access and affordability are not barriers.

I want to build on the success of the Universal Access to preschool for four year olds program that Labor introduced when last in government, and which has been such a success in boosting preschool participation.

I want to ensure the National Quality Framework, another success story, keeps being rolled out and is based on the latest evidence and data.

And, of course, I will fight to ensure all the teachers and educators are supported to deliver the best possible educational experience for our kids.

That includes the compelling equal wage case before the Fair Work Commission, which I have been briefed on.

If you see me doing the rounds, please come and say hello and share your thoughts.

Early childhood education and development is such a vital policy area – it is about setting up our children for the best possible start in life.

I look forward to working with you to help make this happen.
<http://www.rishworth.com.au/contact-amanda.html>

“The evidence is clear about the positive social and educational benefits from quality early education – it's a key building block in our children's development.”



Rosanne Pugh, Director at KU Ourimbah Preschool and Children's Centre, will use her NSW Premier's Scholarship to study how reconciliation and sustainability go hand in hand.

The 2017 Premier's Early Childhood Education Scholarship provides \$10,000, which will allow Rosanne to undertake a month-long study tour in Australia and New Zealand, visiting schools, universities and centres which practice excellence in sustainability and reconciliation. Rosanne also won the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL) Leadership Award for 2017.

Rosanne said she hoped the scholarship will allow her to gain new perspectives on both reconciliation and sustainability. She operates a 'Bush Preschool' at KU Ourimbah on the Central Coast, where children are immersed in nature.

"The natural world is a place of awe, fragility and resilience which the children experience and seek to understand first hand," Rosanne said.

"To be hands on and delight in nature gives children the opportunity to wonder about it, to care for it and to take responsibility to look after it."

Rosanne has been at KU Ourimbah for three years. She began her career at a KU centre in the 1980s in western Sydney, at a time of "huge growth" in early childhood education, affording opportunities for creative work.

She loves early childhood education because young children have the capacity to "view the world

differently", and they can "research and learn and provide something new for teachers every day".

But having met and married a Welsh man, Rosanne has spent 25 years of her career working in the UK and has been heavily influenced by that.

"To be hands on and delight in nature gives children the opportunity to wonder about it, to care for it and to take responsibility to look after it."

"When I arrived, it was a time of professionalism of early childhood in the UK with lots of opportunities for best practice to be celebrated and resourced," Rosanne said.

"There are a lot of strengths in the Early Years Learning Framework in Australia, but in the UK early childhood is included as a fundamental part of the structure of education, along a lifelong continuum – not an extra.

"It's called the Foundation Stage and it sits alongside all the other stages of education.

"The head or principal of a nursery school is paid the same as a primary school teacher and has the same status.

"That's a big difference to Australia."

Rosanne is a supporter of the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch Teachers are Teachers campaign and believes the UK approach to early childhood education – which acknowledges the impact of early childhood education on later academic achievement in school – needs to be adopted by Australian governments.

In the UK, Rosanne gained experience as a primary principal, with her early childhood qualifications being wholly accepted.

The approach used by early childhood educators to understand and assess young children was much sought after by primary principals in the UK.

She also studied and gained a Forest Schools award. The UK Forest Schools movement is a popular push to get children out into nature.

Rosanne has used this Forest School learning to set up her Bush Preschool at Ourimbah, and is looking forward to extending her knowledge with the scholarship.

"I really wanted to amplify and draw on the threads of sustainability and reconciliation. I want to see things in the environmental paradigm, looking at the need to tread lightly, the indigenous ideas of the sanctity of the land and sovereignty over the land.

"Hopefully I can find a greater degree of cultural competence."

Your questions answered

Sherryl Saunders is an industrial officer for IEU-QNT and Lisa James is an organiser for the IEUA NSW/ACT Branch. They answer your industrial and legal questions as they relate to state laws and regulations.



Dear Sherryl

I am a teacher/director at a kindergarten. This year, the kindergarten has enrolled a child who displays extremely challenging behaviour on an almost daily basis. He has frequent 'meltdowns' and often becomes violent towards other children and staff. I am afraid he is going to hurt himself and/or others, and I am also feeling more and

more stressed by having to manage his behaviour. I have spoken with his parents, but nothing has changed. What can I do? Can I refuse to have him in my group?

Alicia

Dear Alicia

I appreciate this must be a difficult situation for you. Your employer is entitled to provide you with lawful and reasonable directions. A direction to teach a particular group of children would, in most circumstances, be regarded as 'lawful and reasonable', so you would not be able to refuse to teach the child.

That being said, your employer has a duty of care towards you, other staff and the children who attend the kindergarten, so they must take reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of the staff and the children. If you have not already done so, you need to make the employer aware of the risks imposed by the child's challenging behaviours (including the risks to your mental health). The employer must then put in place reasonable measures to address those risks. Such measures might include providing additional staffing to assist with the child and/or designing an individual program for him. If the child has a diagnosed medical condition, the kindergarten may be eligible for extra funding for resources to support him.

You should also ensure that you safeguard your own health and consult your treating medical practitioner for advice, if necessary.

If you have any difficulties in obtaining the necessary support, please contact our Union for assistance.

Sherryl



Dear Lisa

I'm on leave without pay as I have decided that working under my current director is not a safe or wise decision, and I'm entitled to a safe working environment.

I am meeting with management to discuss this. My question is, I said I would take leave without pay as I thought this was the only

option, however somebody I was talking to said that I'm entitled to get paid given the circumstances. Is this correct, and if so how do I request payment?

Lee

Dear Lee

If you are suffering from a stress related medical condition such as high blood pressure, insomnia, anxiety or other condition, you can access paid personal leave by obtaining a medical certificate for your absence from work from your doctor.

Alternatively, if you have a work related medical condition as a result of the alleged bullying by your director, you may make a workers compensation claim. You will need to advise your employer that you are claiming workers compensation and provide supporting documents from your doctor stating that you are suffering from work related injury which precludes you from attending work. You need to be aware that workers compensation claims for mental or stress related injuries are difficult to prove.

In addition, I encourage you to make a formal written complaint to management detailing the bullying behaviours to which you were subjected by your director and request they investigate these allegations.

Lisa

BEDROCK GIVEAWAYS



Marvellous Miss May, Queen of the Circus

Author: Stephanie Owen Reeder

Publisher: NLA Publishing

Three copies to give away

In 1901, aged just seven, tiny contortionist May Zinga was given away to Wirth Brothers Circus by her desperate mother. Imagine Miss May's horror when the first thing the Wirths did was cut off all her long hair. Poor May had lost both her family and her crowning glory! But this feisty, talented and determined little girl did not give up. Despite many setbacks, including a horrific accident, she kept fighting to fulfil her dream of becoming the best bareback rider in the world, performing the same dangerous acrobatic feats as male riders – only better!

This fourth title in Stephanie Owen Reeder's award-winning *Heritage Heroes* series retells the remarkable true story of equestrienne May Wirth, while providing historical insights into life in an Australian circus at the beginning of the twentieth century.



At the Beach I See

Author: Kamsani Bin Salleh

Publisher: Magabala Books

Three copies to give away

This delightful book for early childhood will mesmerise young children and older readers. The black linework and colourful wash backgrounds work beautifully with the lyrical text. Together they introduce extraordinary creatures and birds that we can discover and observe around our Australian coastline. 'Dancing jellyfish', 'scuttling crabs', 'scattered shells', 'drifting seaweed' and 'waving coral' evoke the wonder of our beaches and the treasures to be found.



Incredible Floridas

Author: Stephen Orr

Publisher: Wakefield Press

Three copies to give away

As Hitler's war looms, famous Australian artist Roland Griffin returns home from London with his family to live a simple life of shared plums and low cut lawns in the suburbs.

In the yard: a daughter, and a son, Hal, growing up with a preoccupied father who is always out in his shed stretching canvases and painting outback pubs. An isolated man obsessed with other people and places. Everything is a picture, a symbol. Even Hal, the boy in the boat, drifting through a strange world of Incredible Floridas.

As the years pass, Roland learns that Hal is unable to control his own thoughts, impulses, behaviour. The boy becomes the destroyer of family. The neighbourhood is enlisted to help Hal find a way forward. *Incredible Floridas* describes Hal's attempts at adulthood, love, religion, and the hardest thing of all: gaining his father's approval.



Email entries to giveaways@ieu.asn.au with the giveaway you are entering in the subject line and your name, membership number and address in the body of the email. All entries to be received by 26 April 2018.



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*Comparisons modelled by SuperRatings, commissioned by HESTA. Modelled outcome shows 10 year average difference in net benefit of the main balanced options of HESTA and 77 retail funds tracked by SuperRatings, with a 10 year performance history, taking into account historical earnings and fees – excluding contribution, entry, exit and additional adviser fees – of main balanced options. Outcomes vary between individual funds. Modelling as at 30 June 2017. This information is of a general nature. It does not take into account your objectives, financial situation or specific needs so you should look at your own financial position and requirements before making a decision. You may wish to consult an adviser when doing this. Before making a decision about HESTA products you should read the relevant Product Disclosure Statement (call 1800 813 327 or visit hesta.com.au for a copy), and consider any relevant risks (hesta.com.au/understandingrisk). Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance and should never be the sole factor considered when selecting a fund. See hesta.com.au/superraterassumptions for more details about modelling calculations and assumptions.