

## 2015 Lady Gowrie Qld. Early Childhood Awards Nomination

### Nomination for Service Management – Excellence and Innovation in Leadership

#### *How do the nominee/s lead/ influence change at the service or in the sector?*

The educators at Mitchelton Pre-Schooling Centre (MPC) are highly regarded among the early childhood sector and have been invited to participate and share knowledge and their experience with other early childhood centres, Queensland Studies Authority, National and international conferences (New Zealand, Estonia) and other organisations within the sector. Educators support, mentor and sustain colleagues to build the collective professional leadership capacity of the staff team. The staff team looks for opportunities rather than constraints, and celebrates professional practice.

We believe that leadership can come from anybody, anywhere, at any time. As stated in our philosophy, we value collegial partnerships and foster a collaborative approach where all staff members are respected as individuals and as a valuable part of the team.

This is consistent with Moyles' (2006) concept of situational leadership in which a collegial approach is advocated. Jones and Pound (2010) suggest that "the move away from the idea that leadership is the exclusive preserve of one person to a process of sharing professional knowledge, skills and personalities, combining and reflecting, striving for continuous improvement, suggests that the actions of every member in the early years team impact on the quality of the provision" (p. 189).

The MPC staff team commit to the specific allocation of five professional development days throughout the year. In January 2015, the staff team met together for two days to plan and discuss some professional actions for the year. Some of the discussions/sessions included:

- The establishment of a leadership team (as opposed to one educational leader- see below)
- Individual and team performance review plans
- Investigating the AEDC data for our local areas
- Continuation of investigation of Executive Functioning Skill interventions
- Introduction to Action Research project for 2015
- Fostering mentoring opportunities across the team, especially in regards to the Before and After (B&A) Kindergarten Care staff members.

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### *How has the nominee/s demonstrated innovative practice in leadership?*

A key criterion of the National Quality Framework recognizes the significance of the role of educational leader within the centre. Mitchelton Pre-Schooling Centre is unique in its size and delivery of services for families of young children. In response to this, we believe a unique model of leadership is required.

We have a three unit kindergarten with a strong depth of knowledge within the staff team. In our context having one designated educational leader places undue pressure on one person to undertake the role of Educational Leader. At the same time, having one educational leader reduces the capacity for individuals and teams to contribute and be recognised as part of the leadership team. We have chosen to re-define the role of educational leader to educational leadership team. We believe this more effectively meets the objective of this role in our unique multi-unit centre.

The Leadership team undertake a variety of tasks both procedurally and visionary to ensure the success of the centre. There is a monthly leadership meeting which all staff members are welcome to attend.

### *How has the nominee/s created or demonstrated commitment to the positive work culture at the service?*

#### **Mentoring of less experienced staff**

NQS Standard/element [4.2.2] reminds us that *Educators, co-ordinators and staff members work collaboratively and affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills, to improve practice and relationships.* Whilst there are a number of opportunities for session teachers and assistants to discuss their understandings about children and ways to improve practice, we acknowledge that these opportunities are not always accessible to the Before and After Care (B&A) staff team. We sought to build knowledge and capacity in all casual staff members to enhance their ability to support children's care and learning.

We believe that building supportive relationships and trusting environments enables new employees to feel safe to ask questions to build their knowledge, understandings and capacity. As a leadership team, we felt that more experienced staff members could take a pro-active role in supporting new employees, particularly informally, providing feed-back at appropriate times. In response, we instigated a mentoring program, matching a staff member to a B&A team member. B&A staff selected their preferred mentor.

B&A Care staff members have acknowledged that they feel confident to approach their mentor to discuss areas of concern, particularly in relation to supporting individual children. There is no one way for mentoring to be successful. Processes have included regular brief conversations, accessing books from the professional library to highlight aspects of practice and support with assignments. The core feature of this relationship is that the mentee drives the conversations to most appropriately meet their ongoing needs, interests and goals.

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Underpinning this innovation is the belief that everyone leads at some time. Recognising and affording opportunities for all educators to take the lead, and reciprocally follow a leader is integral to our understandings of collaborative leadership at MPC. We acknowledge that change takes time, and the capacity for individuals to contribute and engage differs.

*How has the nominee/s shared their understanding and practices in leadership with others?*

We actively seek opportunities to share information and advocate for children and families through newsletters, discussions, webpage, shared e-library.

We have held discussions with educators in other services (workshops, networking).

Some experienced educators have been invited to join Government/ University research projects as well as community projects. These include:

- the development of AEDC resources (ECA- Lisa);
- investigating transitions with local schools (Leanne);
- an exploration of the Prep year in regards to the Australian Curriculum (QUT- Lisa);
- a year -long Sustainability professional development project (UNE- Lisa and Louise).

In addition, the collective Staff team was invited to join a QUT/Monash/CSU Research project investigating the integration of Perezhivanie (Vygotsky) with the development of children's executive functioning skills. Staff members continue to share insights from this study with colleagues as well as academics.

Furthermore, Lisa and Leanne have presented numerous workshops exploring the shared leadership practices implemented at MPC with educators across Queensland through PSCQ. Insights from these collaborations continue to be shared within the staff team, the families and local community as well as the wider early childhood network.

References:

Jones, C. & Pound, L. (2010) *Leadership and management in the early years*. McGraw-Hill, Open University Press: Berkshire.

Moyles, J. (2006) *Effective leadership and management in the early years*. Open University Press: New York.