Early Childhood Development Workforce Study:

Submission to Productivity Commission

January 2011

The Workforce Council

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council Inc (Workforce Council) is a peak body that promotes and supports workforce planning and development in the health and community service industries in Queensland. We work in partnership with organisations across government, non government and private sectors, through networks and coalitions of industry organisations and collaboratively with peak bodies and other stakeholders. Additionally, we occupy a unique position working closely with the education and training sector through a range of projects and initiatives to ensure industry workforce practices are supported by appropriate educational services, pathways and programs.   The Workforce Council:

- Provides information and assistance to our industries and industry partners
- Provides advice to Government
- Supports innovative workforce development strategies
- Brokers quality professional development
- Advocates the value of our industries within the Queensland Community
- Develops workforce planning and development products and services

The Workforce Council is an autonomous, not-for-profit, incorporated association; The Workforce Council's various industry engagement networks, coalitions and alliances provide the Health and Community Services Industries opportunities for:

- Organisations to input into the provision of professional development in their region through participating in sector specific regional networks

- Organisations and industry stakeholders to influence the education and training agenda by participating in consultative forums and surveys through a range of organisational projects and initiatives such as Skills Alliance Project

- Organisations and industry stakeholders to participate in shaping targeted workforce development strategies by participating in projects such as skills formation strategies

- Individuals and organisations can access our careers and pathways page to read career facts sheets, hear the latest news on career promotion and seek assistance with their own ideas and projects on career pathways or career promotion in the health and community services industries

- Organisations to support their own workforce development by supporting their staff to attend workforce development activities

 The attached submission recommendations responding to the Productivity Commissions Early Childhood Development Workforce Issues Paper are drawn from data collected through the Workforce Councils involvement in the above initiatives.

For more information about these workforce initiatives please go to http://www.workforce.org.au/our-workforce-initiatives.aspx

Definition of Workforce

Given the terms of reference, is the suggested scope of the Early Childhood Development workforce appropriate for the purposes of this study?

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council proposes that the scope of the early childhood development (ECD) workforce, for the purposes of this study, may unnecessarily limit the Productivity Commission's ability to gain a holistic understanding of the issues impacting on supply and demand of the ECD workforce and appropriate directions for workforce planning and development. In the Issues Paper, the scope of the ECD workforce is broad horizontally across the ECD fields including care/education; health and family support, yet narrow in the sense that it only focuses on the workforce in direct service delivery roles. This risks overlooking members of the workforce who play critical roles in the delivery of ECD services and/or in shaping the regulatory, organizational and educational environments that influence workforce outcomes. In this respect, it should be acknowledged that the ECD workforce comprises those in direct service delivery roles (e.g. occupational therapists, educators, family support workers, etc.) as well as other roles which have significant influence on ECD contexts. These roles include brokerage agents and government advisers, regional network facilitators, managerial staff, the volunteer workforce, regulating bodies , those responsible for financial systems, management committees, licensees of child care centres, tiers of management and those involved in the tertiary and Vocational Education and Training sector.

While it is obviously necessary to limit the scope of the study to some degree, the Workforce Council recommends broadening the scope of the workforce to at least include those involved in ECD organisational systems such as owners, managers, finance, HR, administration, etc. It is frequently professionals in these roles who are the decision-makers and/or who are primarily responsible for meeting regulatory and reporting requirements.

Descriptions of the Children's Services Care and Education Workforce

It is acknowledged that the Children's Services occupations listed are drawn from the CSMAC (2006) *National Children's Services Workforce Study*. However, this Productivity Commission study may benefit from ensuring that sector and workforce descriptions are consistent with those used in current policy frameworks, in particular, the *Early Years Learning Framework* and *My Time, Our Place Draft Framework for School Aged Care in Australia*. These frameworks both acknowledge the important educational role played by people who work with children, regardless of qualification. This is an important step towards raising the profile of the children's services care and education workforce at a national level. As such, it is recommended that references to the "childcare workforce" be amended to "childcare and education workforce" and that teaching and "contact worker" occupations be amended as follows:

➢ University qualified early childhood teachers

➢ VET qualified educators

➢ Educators working towards a formal qualification

➢ Educators without a formal qualification

Further, as per our rationale above, it is suggested that other occupations/roles that are crucial to the delivery of children's services be included such as owners, board members, finance and administration. This is also recommended with regards to child health and family support workforces.

Characteristics of and Influences on the ECD Workforce

Data relating to the demographics of the ECD workforce including the areas of early childhood education and care, child and family health services and family support services can be found in the following publications:

- Australia's Health Workforce – Productivity Commission Research report 22nd December 2005

http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/9480/healthworkforce.pdf

- Australia's Health 2010 – The Twelfth biennial health report of the Australian Institute of Health and welfare

http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/aus/ah10/ah10.pdf

- Australian institute of Health and Welfare – Health and Community Services Labour force 2006

http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/hwl/hwl-43-10677/hwl-43-10677.pdf

- Health and Hospitals Reform Commission Report July 2009
http://www.health.gov.au/internet/nhhrc/publishing.nsf/Content/nhhrc-report

As the roles of those working in the ECD field vary, so do the reasons individuals choose to work in the sector. The reasons individuals may choose to work in the sector include, but are not limited to:

- That they choose to work in an occupation which encapsulates the notion of service including individuals who wish to participate in and give back to the community

- Desire to work with children

- Lack of employment choice for people who already provide care for family members or children with additional needs

- Some schools have a focus on health and community services school based vocational education and training and this often leads to individuals pursuing careers in the industries

- Returning to workforce after children

Early childhood development services are predominately provided by women and the overrepresentation of women is one of the reasons many roles in the sector are underpaid and undervalued. Pay equity and award modernization arguments have provided evidence to address pay and conditions in the sectors. Decisions by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission in both the children's services and community services sectors outline rates of pay and conditions of the workforces. These decisions have had a significant influence on the development of   modern award

frameworks.   Summaries of significant pay equity decisions made by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission are attached in Appendix A.

In addition to the low wages and culturally undervalued nature of the work, a number of other factors contribute to the difficulty providers of early childhood development services have in finding staff. Disparity between wages for the same work between the public and private sectors can result in shortages being linked to the employer or business type rather than the work role.   Further, the increasing focus on quality and affordability of services for the consumer is creating the expectation that the ECD Workforce acquire additional skills and capacities, yet little consideration has been given to remuneration levels and conditions.   A key strategy for raising the profile of the sector within the community would be to support a marketing and advocacy campaign which increases public awareness and strategic communication of industry careers and workforce achievements.

Some of the difficulties in finding staff are more pronounced in some areas of Queensland specifically in towns and communities affected by the mining boom and those affected by extreme weather conditions such as floods and cyclones. Challenges in these areas include:

- Communities developing around mining areas utilising fly in fly out workforce models

- Accommodation shortages leading to higher accommodation costs and closure of services

- Lack of social infrastructure in areas of mining boom and flooding

- Climate

- Competition for the workforce in certain areas

- Increased demand for family services in areas experiencing domestic violence and high level of male suicide rates

- Difficulty in gathering recent data on numbers of families wishing to move to boom areas to facilitate workforce planning

Please see DEEWR's skills shortage list for more information about Queensland skills shortages

http://www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/LMI/SkillShortages/Documents/SkillShortageListQLD.pdf

Attracting and Retaining Staff

The regulatory burden has a significant impact on attracting and retaining staff which reiterates the importance of including managers, administration and financial staff in definitions of the ECD workforce. Organisational system and policy responses to regulatory requirements are predominately determined, led and monitored by those in managerial, administrative and financial support roles in services. These roles are an essential component of the ECD workforce. Failing to view services in their entirety leads to services being underfunded as most funding models do not consider or incorporate the cost of regulatory, management and administration required for the delivery of a service.

While both the health industry and the children's services sectors are undergoing significant reform which has the intent of transitioning to systems that reduce the regulatory burden, we will not know if this is successful until these new systems are fully operational. We can expect that the ECD workforce will feel increased regulatory pressure during the transition periods as they traverse both old and new systems. In particular, the early Childhood education and care national reform agenda, specifically the Early Years Learning Framework, requires the current workforce to embrace and enact a whole new way of thinking about and approaching work – a paradigm shift is required. Services in early childhood education and care are currently being supported in this transition by Professional Support Coordinators project which is a project of the Workforce Council, funded by the Australian Government. This is funded under the Inclusion and Professional support program and more information about these initiatives can be found at:

- IPSP

http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/programs/ChildCareforServices/SupportFamilyCCS/Pages/InclusionSupportProgram.aspx

- PSC Alliance

http://www.pscalliance.org.au/

- PSC Queensland

http://www.workforce.org.au/our-workforce-initiatives/professional-support-coordinator-queensland.aspx

In some single services and organisations, specifically some community centres in Queensland, organization managers are receiving funding for multiple projects which are funded through three tiers of government – State, Federal and Local. Managing multilayered regulatory systems creates stress, burn-out and increasing dissatisfaction with job roles as individuals work across a number of services and/or a number of regulatory environments within the individual service. In order to reduce the impact of this on the ECD workforce, we propose that all regulatory systems are coordinated in such a way that information only needs to be collected once and shared amongst all tiers of government – a whole of government approach to regulation in the health and community services sectors.

Some examples of effective staff retention strategies in ECD sector include:

1. Collaborative Models

Effective recruitment and retention strategies tend to emerge from collaborative models between sectors and industries, particularly those that promote shared employment and shared training between organisations and across industries. On a small scale, the PSCQ In Service Contribution program does this by offering a higher a subsidy for services to team with other services in their professional development. More information on the in-service contribution program can be found at:

http://www.workforce.org.au/our-workforce-initiatives/professional-support-coordinator-queensland/actions/in-service-contribution.aspx

2. PSCQ Action Research Project (see Appendix B)

The Workforce Council's PSCQ has developed and implemented an Action Research Project designed to build the capacity of early childhood educators to understand their own learning processes and "set the foundations for practice improvement through continual learning and progressive problem solving" (PSCQ, 2009). Provided with backfill support, six facilitated whole day learning days, two core learning days, one sharing day and mentoring support between sessions, more than fifty early childhood educators across Queensland participated in the project in 2010. A further 30 educators are also participating in the project in 2010-2011.

Evidence collected through the evaluation of the Action Research Project supports a case for action research as an effective retention strategy, particularly through the promotion of stronger team relationships and shared decision-making models. One Director clearly stated that she was intending to leave the sector entirely until the action research project. More information on the outcomes of the Action Research Project is attached in Appendix B.

3. PSCQ Staff Exchange program

The PSCQ Staff Exchange program encourages those currently working in early childhood education and care to identify an area of interest or further development and dedicate a period of time to learn from other practitioners. This initiative also provides for individuals to exchange into children's services other than the one they are working in to investigate and get a feel for other career options.

http://www.workforce.org.au/our-workforce-initiatives/professional-support-coordinator-queensland/actions/staff-exchange-program.aspx

4. *Innovation Conference Award Winners -30 Mob*

This initiative provided an opportunity for managers and coordinators from 30 small disability organisations from across Queensland to reflect on business practice and encourage collaboration. A community of practice was formed.

http://ndsqldprojects.net/cop/30mob.htm

How might these strategies be replicated throughout Australia?

Strategies may vary for different occupations and geographical areas. The most successful strategies are those that are generated at a local level and that participants have guided from the beginning. While the basic frameworks and support materials of these initiatives may be replicated throughout Australia, many elements would have to be changed to reflect the specific area and concerns impacting on a particular workforce at a particular time. The

Australian Government's Inclusion and Professional Support Program provides a strong framework for supporting workforce strategies in ways that are nationally strategic, yet provide the flexibility to develop and adapt strategies based on geographic, jurisdictional and organisational differences.

Qualifications

Baseline qualifications are appropriate, however the vocational education and training system does not always support the ongoing and complex needs of the workforce. The nature of the ECD workforce requires individuals to have problem solving capacity and analytical skills - skills that are built up over a period of time with support and guidance. In addition to these skills, the ECD workforce includes people in a wide range of diverse roles, including specialized roles. In this context, a focus on using innovative strategies to support current workers to up-skill and participate in relevant ongoing professional development is fundamental and should be a catalyst for the development of ongoing partnerships and collaborations between industry, the vocational education and training sector and the tertiary sector.

In considering the qualifications of the ECD workforce, attention also needs to be given to the inconsistency in the implementation and delivery of vocational education and training qualifications in the relevant sectors.   Despite the national training package and national competencies, the quality of delivery across the sectors remains varied. This is a key factor influencing whether workers have the necessary skills and attributes to be effective in the workplace. In order to support the industries and the Vocational Education and Training Sector, The Health and Community Services Workforce Council recommends the development of industry benchmarks to support the implementation of the Australian Quality Framework Standards for Registered Training Organisations.   Such benchmarks would assist the audit and registration bodies to understand and implement current industry standards, practice standards and currency of industry trainers for qualification levels in the heath and community services industries.

The Workforce Council encourages programs that support service providers to build their capacity to engage in shared models of training and employment, where education providers partner with industry to deliver training. The delivery of training must be culturally and geographically appropriate to the audience and training organisations should be encouraged to offer improved flexible delivery arrangements including timing, location and the mode of delivery that is responsive to diverse needs.

Some barriers faced by people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds to obtaining entry level qualifications include

- Lack of cultural understanding from government departments, officers and vocational education and training teachers

- Lack of recognition of strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and/or students (which varies for Indigenous staff caring for Indigenous children or for Indigenous staff working in mainstream)

- Lack of flexible delivery options

Some of these may be overcome by exploring the following opportunities:

- Wages backfilling to support staff currently in the workforce to complete qualifications

- Local mentoring - a mentor whose role it is to support a colleague to achieve a qualification

- Recognition of prior learning

- Incentives for study

- Culturally appropriate delivery of qualifications

Other issues highlighted by a group of 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators who were brought together by the Child Care Skills Formation Strategy in 2007 (a project of the Health and Community Services Workforce Council in 2007) to discuss workforce issues included:

- Lack of cultural understanding by mainstream service providers and or staff

- The impact of the many roles (eg. Mother, Sister, Aunty, Elder etc.) an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educator may play during working hours and after

- Advocacy for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander regulators within the system

Professional Development

Opportunities for career progression within the health and community services sectors could be enhanced through:

- Provision and support of ongoing learning opportunities such as action research and communities of practices across organisations

- Supporting emerging leaders through communities of practice

- Remuneration and Career Pathways – creating advanced practitioners and clinical leader levels of remuneration

- Encourage three way collaboration between sector, vocational education and training and tertiary sectors to create pathways from certificate three level to PHD.   Griffith University in partnership with Metropolitan South Insitute of TAFE have mapped a pathway from the certificate three in children's services to the masters of human services child and family studies.

- Supporting more staff exchange programs (as mentioned previously)

- Portable superannuation entitlements and portable long service leave.

Are in service training and professional development programs meeting workforce development needs?

In the case of children's care and education services, in-service training and professional development has some significant benefits, particularly in enabling teams to work together and develop shared models of understanding and practice frameworks.   However it must be complemented by other forms and models of training, professional development and support that holistically promote collaborative relationships across services and organisations and promote a culture of life-long learning in the ECD field.

 It is important to recognise that base level qualifications and traditional accredited and non-accredited training tend to focus expressly on the development of core skills and competencies. However, best-practice and quality frameworks in the ECD field are increasingly demanding learning outcomes that enable complex thinking and problem solving to support the particular needs of different children and families. This requires a capacity building approach where continuous learning is supported and embedded into ECD thinking and practice.

The PSCQ Action Research Project described above has been highly successful in supporting children's services educators to embed continuous learning and problem solving into day-to-day practice. The model also supports collaboration between services which has resulted in the creation of a shared learning culture, sense of professionalism and support networks.

Are there barriers to ECD staff accessing training and development programs? How could such barriers be overcome?

There are a number of barriers to ECD staff accessing training and professional development programs. Some of these include:

- Finding appropriate back-filling staff

    One strategy which has been used to overcome this barrier in regional and remote Queensland has been to run exchange programs in partnership with Queensland TAFE. While an ECD worker is on exchange to another service to

engage in professional development, the role is filled by a vocational education and training teacher who is required to participate in industry placement. The staff at the service has the opportunity to learn from the vocational education and training teacher, the teacher experiences current practice and the exchange participant learns from being immersed in another context for a week.

- Cost of back-filling (notably, most funding dedicated to assist with training and professional development costs makes no provision for the cost of backfilling)

The action research project offered to early childhood education and care organizations through PSCQ offered services a grant to support attendance at the 9 compulsory days.

- Difficulties in accessing training and development, particularly in rural and remote areas

The Yarning Circles project was a project of the Workforce Council, funded by the Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations under the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Best Practice and Innovation Project. This project utilized technology to bring two groups from geographically distant areas together to participate in an ongoing professional development activity – Please see the information about this project in Appendix C

- Limited available technology and/or associated skills

- Geographical access to services and professional development events in rural and regional areas (opportunities which are available less than two days drive from home)

The PSCQ, along with other state PSCs delivering support to children's services in rural and remote areas have focused specifically on building the capacity of selected consultants to provide appropriate support for these regions. They have adopted 'road trip' models for support that reduce the need for educators to travel long distances to receive professional development.

Systemic Issues

Frequently, the increased costs of compliance with quality, regulatory, professional and program requirements are not reflected in funding increases.   This significantly limits the ability of organisations to provide incentives including higher wages or professional development opportunities.

Further, increasing competition and competitive tendering has reduced cost margins, thereby reducing the capacity of services to offer resources to professional development and up skilling.

Examples of effective policies

Broader strategic policy must support localized and community driven hubs which allow local decision making – some examples of local policy which could be supported by broader policy include:

- Blue Mountains City Council Child and Family Plan

- Placed Based Initiatives in the Health Industry in Queensland

- Provision of collaborative tendering opportunities

- Centre for Community Child Health – please see the following link:
  http://www.communicationlink.com.au/marymead/marymead/presentations/Moore%20-%20Royal%20Childrens%20Hospital%20-%20Paper.pdf

It is Important to note that here that localized and community driven hubs should build on existing service and infrastructure in terms of consolidation and expansion – rather than duplication.

Other significant policies governing the early childhood education and care, child health and family support sectors and their workforces that the commission should be aware of?

- Paid maternity leave

- Vocational Education and Training policies – declaration of callings' user choice funding; commonwealth incentives

- Queensland state licensing requirements

- Child protection national framework

- Health reform – particularly the establishment of Medicare Locals

- Industrial relations policies and agreements

Future Supply of Workers, Workforce Planning

How might the training of additional workers be funded?

While it is important that we continue to fund initiatives which increase the ECD workforce, we also need to acknowledge that the notion of skills and workforce utilization is critical in terms of a sustainable approach to the supply of workers and workforce planning – how we use our current workforce must be a key area of focus.

Workforce planning should concentrate on how we can utilize both our workforce and skills more strategically including a focus on our existing unpaid workforce. A critical factor in sustaining an ECD workforce is the significant proportion of workers who leave the sector every year. While continuing to supply new workers to the sector is essential, resources and policy attention should be directed toward supporting workforce planning and workplace practices that address the leakage of qualified workers from the sector. This will not only service to address labour and skill shortages but will also reduce the wastage created by training workers who do not stay in the sector workforce.

Are training providers and courses of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the ECD sector?

This is discussed in the qualifications section above.

What can be done to ensure that there is an adequate supply of skilled trainers to meet future increases in demand for training?

The Health and Community Services Workforce Council recommends the development of a program that supports the development of pedagogic capacities and on-going professional development amongst vocational education and training teachers. Such programs might include formal training, communities of practice, action learning projects, mentoring, etc. and would be of significant benefit in ensuring that trainers are sufficiently skilled. It would also promote innovative approaches in the delivery of vocational education and training qualifications.

Currently wages and undervaluing of the vocational education and training sector results in the leeching of skilled and expert trainers into the private professional development market. Policy must address this and draw these skilled teachers back into the RTO system as mentors and trainers.

An undersupply of skilled trainer's impacts on the ability to provide effective training – incentives should be provided for people who have relevant practice experience to be fast tracked and mentored to teach and train in the system.

Workforce planning – have initiatives to increase the supply of ECD workers been effective?

Initiatives to increase the supply of ECD workers have often resulted in high churn in industries with many people being trained but only a small proportion of these staying in the industries. This will only be addressed if workforce planning is perceived as more than training: training is one part of workforce planning and development and a primary focus on training and qualifications often discounts other critical factors such as remuneration, career pathways and the undervalued nature of

the sectors. Workforce planning must embrace the integrated nature of the system and include the development of mentoring programs, career pathways, ongoing professional development opportunities and relevant skills sets for specific areas.

Will the workers who are required to upgrade their qualifications do so, or will they leave the ECD sector?

Ultimately, whether workers who are required to upgrade their qualifications will do so or leave is highly dependent on a range of factors associated with the sector and an individual's role in the sector.

What are the implications for the ECD workforce in terms of skills mix requirements and work practices, from integrating and co-locating ECD services?

Skills in collaboration and partnership are an essential skill set for the ECD workforce to access in order to work in an integrated way with other services. The ECD workforce must also be able to access flexible and innovative skilling and professional development opportunities which result in the workforce having the skills and capacity to deliver and respond to local needs.

The Workforce Council supports an approach which highlights not only the importance of skills mix's and skills sets approach (rather than whole qualifications) but also the importance of developing the capacity for the ECD workforce to think across sectors. Cross sectoral action research projects are an example of how this capacity could be built over a period of time. The PSC Alliance research into Integrated Early Years Provision recommends that particular attention needs to be paid towards professional development which supports the development of governance and leadership skills and abilities for ECD workers in integrated contexts. For more details please go to http://www.pscsa.org.au/cms/?q=system/files/PSC+Research+Executive+Report.pdf

Demand for ECD Workers

Child development reasons families choose to use or not use difference ECEC services

It is important to note that families' choices to use different ECEC services are based on diverse rationales many of which are not related directly to children's development.

Through the Inclusion and Professional Support Program, in particular the Inclusion Support Agencies, all child care and education services whose families are eligible to receive the Australian Governments Child Care Benefit are supported to include children with diverse needs.

Where families do make choices based on their children's development it is often due to difficulties accessing particular kinds of services. For example, legislative distinctions made between medical conditions and disability restrict some families from accessing additional funding; for families in regional areas, choices are fundamentally restricted due to inability to access support services due to workforce shortages. Many families receiving family support have been ordered to do so through the statutory bodies, as such this does not represent a choice on the part of the family.

To what extent does the relative cost of ECEC services determine the demand for those services?

At an obvious level, increasing cost of early childhood education may deter some families from accessing these services. However it may be the case that many families are unfamiliar with the reasons behind increasing costs and do not relate these to improvements in quality of service delivery. It is therefore important to ensure that there is sufficient education and information for families to build their capacity to understand and engage with workforce issues. This also plays an important role in raising the profile of the sector.

Future workforce – what options are available for funding the increased wages and salaries of more highly qualified ECD workers?

When the cost of services to families is subsidized by state or federal governments we would recommend that the commission explores alternate models of funding which result in universal access, equity and higher quality service delivery. This is achieved in other countries through the provision of operational grants to services which minimise the risk of substandard service delivery which sometimes results from funding models which place families and shareholders in competing roles as the service attempts to provide a quality services while ensuring profit to shareholders.

Flexibility in funding models is recommended to ensure that ECD services are able to respond to local needs as required.

ECD Workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

What skills must ECD workers have in order to provide effective services to indigenous children?

ECD workers must have:

- The capacity to understand and analyse their own invisible enculturated practices in order to provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

- A degree of cultural awareness together with an ability to critically reflect on their own practice

- An understanding of Indigenous issues, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history of Australia including colonial and post colonial theory.

One initiative which resulted in the increased capacity of early childhood educators to provide effective services to Indigenous children was the Yarning Circles Project, a project of the Health and Community Services Workforce Council, funded by the Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Workforce Best Practice and Innovation Project – Appendix C

How well are services engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and services and communities, collaboration and partnerships?

Policy frameworks must support relationship building and collaborative partnerships if services are to build their capacity to work with Indigenous agencies, services and communities.

Do all ECD workers who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have these skills?

Not all ECD workers who work with indigenous children have these skills. It is important to acknowledge that the ECD workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as well as children with additional needs includes the *whole* ECD workforce. One of the core barriers to building capacity for inclusion in the ECD workforce is the idea that cultural awareness and skills that support inclusion for all children are specialized areas. Any and all members of the ECD workforce have a role to play in the inclusion of all children and building capacity for inclusion across the whole ECD workforce is a high priority.

What strategies are being used to attract ECD workers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce capability and how effective are these strategies?

- Indigenous professional support program

- School based pathways

- ACT for kids – traineeships and cadetships

ECD Workforce for Children with Additional Needs

To what extent are workers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds represented in the ECD sector?

The representation of workers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds varies according to the sector and job role. In early childhood education and care educators from CALD backgrounds are highly represented in some regions, particularly in the provision of family day care. This sector previously has not required a minimum qualification level and often services are provided in languages other than English. However with the introduction of the National Quality Agenda this workforce will now be required to obtain a certificate three in children's services and practice according to the Early Years Learning Framework. Currently National Quality Framework transition arrangements don't provide any additional support or culturally appropriate documents to support this transition. We recommend that future and current policy relating to systemic changes which impact on the ECD workforce acknowledge and provide for the additional culturally appropriate support mechanisms to ensure that workers from CALD backgrounds are retained in the sector.

Examples of integrated and co-located services in health and family support

- Queensland Hubs - Early Years Centres

http://www.communityservices.qld.gov.au/family/earlyyears/early-years-centres.html

- Federally Funded Communities for Children
  http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/progserv/communitieschildren/Pages/default.aspx

Numerous Community centres throughout Queensland act like hubs, providing a number of services from a single organization. However currently they are providing these services by accessing funding from numerous tiers of government and through various departments. We recommend that policy decisions support and add value to currently running 'hub' services through streamlining funding models. Please see some examples below:

- Charters towers neighbourhood centre

http://www.ctnc.org.au/

- Kingston East Neighbourhood Group

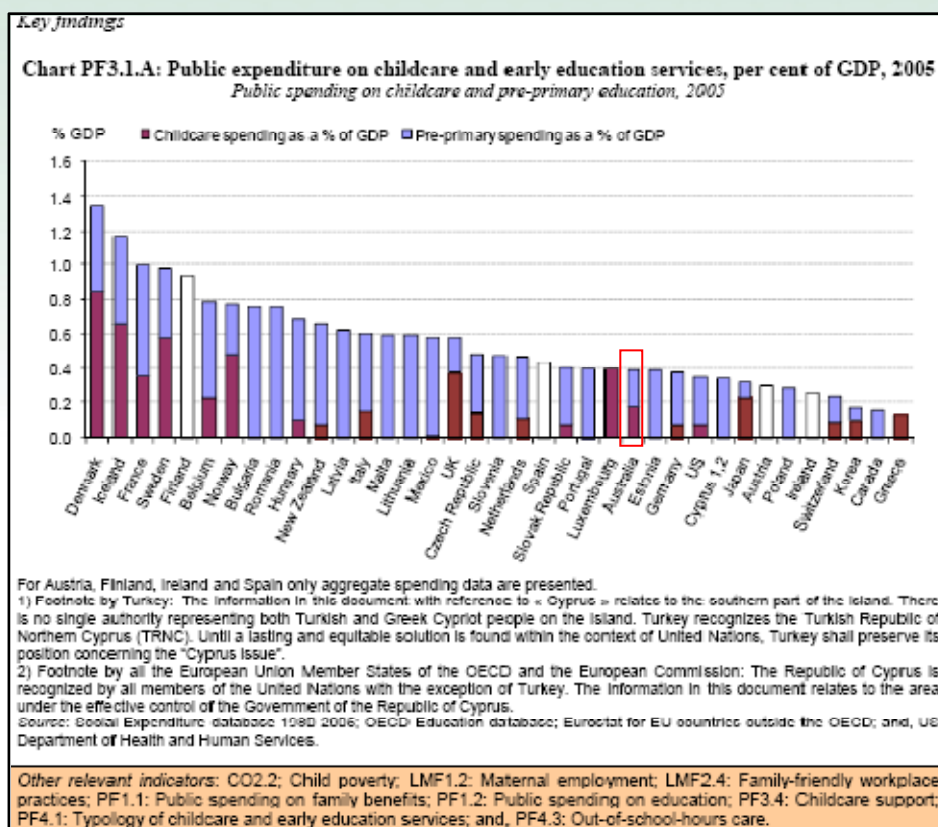http://www.keng.org.au/

- Multilink

http://multilink.org.au/

- Aboriginal Medical Services in community controlled sector also provide integrated service delivery

- Health Care Placed Based Initiatives

- Large Community Based Health Services (Government and Non Government agencies)

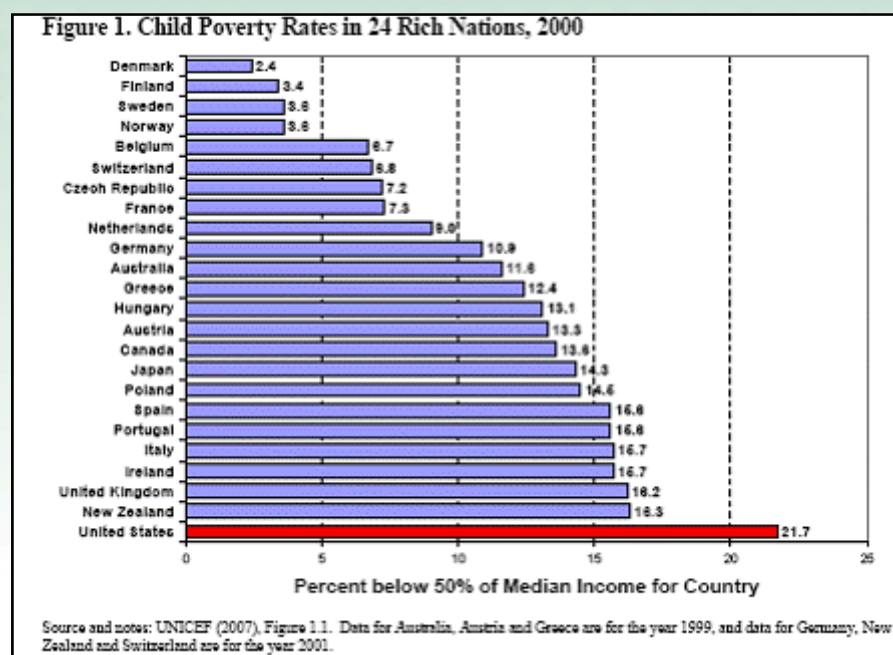# Lessons from Other Sectors and Other Countries

Cost benefits studies

Public expenditure on children's services in 2005 indicated that Australia was well down the league ladder compared to other OECD countries. The report also went on to suggest that voucher systems which placed funds in the hands of individual families would make it difficult to predict regional allocation of funds and planning of workforce. http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/27/37864512.pdf

Key findings

Chart PF3.1.A: Public expenditure on childcare and early education services, per cent of GDP, 2005
Public spending on childcare and pre-primary education, 2005

For Austria, Finland, Ireland and Spain only aggregate spending data are presented.
1) Footnote by Turkey: The Information in this document with reference to « Cyprus » relates to the southern part of the Island. There is no single authority representing both Turkish and Greek Cypriot people on the Island. Turkey recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Until a lasting and equitable solution is found within the context of United Nations, Turkey shall preserve its position concerning the "Cyprus issue".
2) Footnote by all the European Union Member States of the OECD and the European Commission: The Republic of Cyprus is recognized by all members of the United Nations with the exception of Turkey. The Information in this document relates to the area under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.
Source: Social Expenditure database 1980 2006; OECD Education database; Eurostat for EU countries outside the OECD; and, US Department of Health and Human Services.

Other relevant indicators: CO2.2; Child poverty; LMF1.2: Maternal employment; LMF2.4: Family-friendly workplace practices; PF1.1: Public spending on family benefits; PF1.2: Public spending on education; PF3.4: Childcare support; PF4.1: Typology of childcare and early education services; and, PF4.3: Out-of-school-hours care.

Broad economic indicators of health and child care expenditure compared

According to Julia Issacs (2009: 3) in her article, *A Comparative Perspective on Public Spending on Children* uses UNECEF data of 2000 of the 24 rich nations; Australia holds a middle level position for its rates of child poverty.

Figure 1. Child Poverty Rates in 24 Rich Nations, 2000

Source and notes: UNICEF (2007), Figure 1.1. Data for Australia, Austria and Greece are for the year 1999, and data for Germany, New Zealand and Switzerland are for the year 2001.

The recent report (2010) of the Early Life Working Group of the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy (SCPHRP) led by Dr John Frank and Rosemary Geddes is a thorough and rigorous review of numerous major UK and international early childhood intervention programs.

Among its findings is the fact that the four early childhood programs having the best evidence base revealed the high economic value of such preventative spending. It notes: *Every dollar invested, however, resulted in returns of between $3.72 and $6.89. Returns were from reductions in government spending as a result of reduced use of special education services, reduced involvement in juvenile delinquency, reduced welfare and dependency costs, reduced criminal justice costs and increases in tax contributions.*

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/finance/inquiries/preventative/PS-ChildreninScotland.pdf

Appendix A

In Queensland, the QIRC made an interim decision in relation to the *Child Care Industry Award - State 2003* (the Child Care Award) on 24 March 2006. The interim decision increased the wages of affected employees, bringing their pay rates into line with work value cases that had been heard in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. The same rates had also been passed on to Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

The decision on 27 June 2006 found undervaluation of work performed by child care workers. It gave detailed reasons for the interim decision, and also further increased pay rates. Some improvements to conditions were also awarded. The Award was renamed the *Children's Services Award - State 2006* to better describe the range of services provided to children and their parents by child care workers.

The Commission concluded that many of the skills of child care workers (such as communication, multi-tasking and domestic skills) had never been properly valued. Limited attention had also been given to work conditions (for example, lifting children, dealing with human waste and work intensity) and other relevant features of the work (such as attending meetings out of normal hours, limited access to breaks and unpaid and self-funded training requirements).

Social and Community Services Workers

Not all sectors of the workforce in Queensland are covered by the Child Care Award. The workforce involved in child protection, therapeutic services and emergency accommodation and residential care are covered by other instruments. The Queensland Services Union (QSU) applied for a new award covering community services and crisis assistance workers on 11 April 2008. The new Award incorporated the wages and classifications of the federal *Social and Community Services (Queensland) Award 2001*, and the *Crisis Assistance Supported Housing (Queensland) Award 1999*.

The second stage of the application sought increased pay rates for workers covered by the new Award, to correct historical undervaluation, as well as an Equal Remuneration Component to maintain ongoing wage parity because of a lack of enterprise bargaining in the sector. The QIRC in 6 May 2009 decision identified the factors contributing to the historical undervaluation of community services work as:

- the middle-class, charitable origins of the community services sector
- cultural devaluation of care work as women's work
- industry features such as low unionisation rates
- industrial issues such as a general lack of over-award payments
- Government funding of the sector as a more 'cost effective' way of delivering services.

The wage increase awarded to community service workers included increases to basic pay rates, using a global approach to reflect present work value of each individual classification, with reference to comparable rates in relevant certified agreements. It also included an Equal Remuneration Component to compensate for lost opportunities for collective bargaining, but with a sunset clause in recognition of continuing efforts to campaign government to adopt funding models allowing for enterprise bargaining outcomes.

On 11 March 2010 the Australian Services Union (ASU) lodged an application to Fair Work Australia for equal remuneration orders to increase rates of pay in the *Social, Community, Home Care and*

Disability Services Industry Award 2010. The ASU application seeks to replicate in the Federal jurisdiction, increased pay rates awarded to Queensland workers in the social, community and disability services sector in the 2009.

Prior to lodging the application, the ASU entered into an agreement with the Australian Government about the conduct of the case. The Commonwealth Government has agreed to:

- make a submission to Fair Work Australia supporting the development of a federal ERP, drawing on the Queensland ERP; and
- assist Fair Work Australia and the parties by presenting evidence and research on the state of the labour market and applicable legislation.

This matter represents the first opportunity for Fair Work Australia to determine an equal remuneration claim under the expanded definition of equal remuneration in the new Commonwealth *Fair Work Act 2009.* The Fair Work Act's equal remuneration provisions now provide for equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value, mirroring Queensland's existing provisions. The case also provides Fair Work Australia with an opportunity to establish a precedent framework, such as an ERP, to guide gender-sensitive work value assessments and future equal remuneration matters. Hearings are underway.

The State and NAPSA Awards for child care workers has been abolished and a new system (known as Modern Awards) commenced on January 1, 2010. This means that all child care services, including OSHC will be covered by the one Award under the Federal system. This new Award is titled 'Services Award 2010'. While the Modern Award commenced operation on January 1, 2010, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) has allowed for transitional arrangements, which means that the terms and conditions of employment were effective from January 1, 2010, but the rates of pay and some certain other conditions do not come into force until July 1, 2010 and may be phased in over time.

Appendix B

The Health and Community Services Workforce Councils Professional Support Coordinator Queensland (PSCQ) is a project funded by the Australian Government under the Inclusion and Professional Support Program. As part of their goal to support the professional development of children's services educators across Queensland, the PSCQ has developed and implemented an Action Research Project designed to build the capacity of early childhood educators to understand their own learning processes and "set the foundations for practice improvement through continual learning and progressive problem solving" (PSCQ, 2009). Provided with backfill support, six facilitated whole day learning days, two core learning days and mentoring support between sessions, more than fifty early childhood educators across Queensland participated in the project in 2010. A further 30 educators are also participating in the project in 2010-2011.

From its inception, the project was underpinned by a rigorous outcomes-focused evaluation framework involving data collection throughout the course of the project as well as focus groups and interviews with educators, facilitators and mentors at the end of the 12 month project cycle. Evaluation data clearly demonstrates the workforce related benefits using the action research process and of adopting a longitudinal and embedded approach to professional and workforce development.

Action Research as an Approach to Workforce Development

Action research is a process that supports continuous learning through on-going cycles of reflection, investigation, action and evaluation. It is inherently flexible in that it can be geared to any topic or issue of relevance to a person or team, yet provides a framework that enables the person/team to work towards their goals in a progressive and informed manner.

Children's services educators who participated in the project in 2010 cited a wide range of positive outcomes resulting from their use of action research. Despite focusing on a diverse range of topics and research questions, many of the most commonly cited outcomes related directly to workforce issues. Notably, the analysis of evaluation data also suggests that there is a relationship between workforce development outcomes and the various layers of change that emerge as part of the process. Specifically, data suggests that "tangible" workforce development outcomes would not have occurred without change in areas that are more intangible in nature and, as a result, are often undervalued. The following provides an account of the workforce outcomes of the Workforce Council's PSCQ Action research project in relation to various layers of change that occurred for participants:

Conceptual Change

The conceptual change that occurred for educators who participated in the project acted as the foundation for change in other areas. While the process of conceptual change is complex and on-going, focus groups revealed a number of key outcomes that have emerged through the conceptual shifts experienced by educators including:

➢ taking a positive attitude to change
➢ change in attitude towards others (e.g. staff, parents)
➢ enhanced ability to explore and understand different perspectives
➢ improved capacity to 'analyse' conversation and feedback with from educators, parents, P&Cs, schools, etc through reflecting on different contexts and perspectives
➢ enhanced capacity to respond positively and constructively to negative feedback
➢ increased confidence in themselves as professionals
➢ increased confidence to engage with Quality Reform
➢ willingness to take a risk
➢ willingness to 'let go' of things they cannot control

Relational Change

The changes in relationships that have occurred as a result of engaging with the action research process represent, in and of themselves, cases of workforce development within the children's services sector. These fall into three categories:

a) Partnerships and Collaboration

The PSCQ Action Research Project was designed to promote the development of relationships and networks across children's services by ensuring educators from participating services come together for action research days and incorporating three days for learning and sharing with other services from each region. Many educators described the benefits of the relationships they have formed with other members of their action research groups, particularly in terms of the enhanced support they provide and shared appreciation of the common issues they experience. Several educators also cited specific benefits associated with learning about other kinds of services (eg: Long Day Care educators learning about Family Day Care). In some cases, the relational change that has occurred amongst educators within individual services has provided the foundations for the development of authentic grass-roots partnerships and collaboration. For example, after one family day-care reviewed their environmental audit processes as part of their action research project, they invited all family day-care services in the region to a meeting to facilitate agreement around the use of a consistent environment audit across the region. All services invited participated and plan to continue meeting.

b) Team building and Decision-making

Almost all participants cited improvements in the quality of relationships in their teams particularly in terms of trust, valuing different perspectives, inclusive decision-making and emotional support. Of particular significance in this respect, is the number of educators who chose to conduct action research projects that focused on the improvement of relationships and communication amongst staff and/or families, rather than issues associated directly with children. While educators did not expressly use the term "workforce development", their perspectives closely aligned with a workforce development intent/approach with many explaining that the improvements in their team own relationships would "filter down" to have positive impacts on the children in their services. Many participants also reported positive changes in their relationships with management and their broader organisations. For example, one service has now become members of two college committees while another educator saw clear to negotiate a professional development plan with service managers.

c) Implementing Quality Reform

A further set of relational outcomes involve improvements in the quality of relationships with and between children and families – both as part of the "flow-down" effect described above and in more direct ways, particularly when projects focused on topics involving children and families. Not only did many educators cite an improvement in the quality of their service delivery and service environments, there was a opinion that they were far better equipped to understand, interpret and implement the Early Years Learning Framework. This, combined with their positive attitude towards change and the sense of structure provided by the action research process, was recognized as a major strength in the implementation of Quality Reform.

Practical Change

Focus groups with educators in the final stages of the PSCQ Action Research Project suggest that significant practical changes have been implemented as a result of the project. First, in the pursuit of understanding, participants have made a variety of changes in order to embed action research methods and related processes into practice. In this respect, action research is being used as a practical framework for workforce development. For example, some services have implemented regular meetings and/or altered team meeting processes dedicated to reflection and sharing perspectives and stories amongst educators. Many have also applied new skills such as survey design (including the use of on-line survey tools), focus group/interview techniques and observation in their approaches to obtaining feedback from parents, facilitating inclusive decision-making amongst staff, and examining children's behaviour.

Second, in the pursuit of change, participants have implemented a range of change in practice to improve the quality of outcomes in relation to their respective topics and action research questions. For example, one service undertook a major environmental restructure in order to address aggressive behaviours amongst children in their toddler room. Participants in several services have significantly increased their engagement with communication technologies such as facebook, email, SMS, notebooks, kiosks and skype to enhance communication amongst educators and families. Others have changed their practices in relation to pre- and post-enrolment processes to enhance sense of belonging for new children and families, changed their documentation strategies to add value to team meetings and accreditation activities, instituted regular cycles of in-house professional development to support the continual professional and personal growth of educators, implemented activities to gain better appreciation of educators' learning styles and personality types, incorporated strategies to encourage and facilitate mutual support and manage personal/professional relationships amongst educators and developed enhanced strategies for inclusion support through combining the use of reflective diaries with professional conversations.

It is significant to note that while some practical changes were put in place as part of each educators' specific action research project, several educators noted a range of other practical changes that have occurred as a 'side-line' to the project itself. Educators linked their ability to promote and implement these changes to the "infrastructure for change" provided by the action research process. It was noted specifically by one educator how action research provides a structured process through which to implement and manage change rather than simply trying to do everything in a "higgledy piggledy" fashion. Another explained how action research has provided them with the appreciation that it is OK to simply try something with the knowledge that if it doesn't work there is always an opportunity to try something different. This suggests that an important relationships exists between the mind shift that engagement with action research promotes, and the practical changes that occur as part of the action research process.

Sectoral Change

While further research is necessary to reliably establish a relationship between action research and outcomes for the workforce at a sector level, several educators indicated the potential to influence change across the sector. In addition to sharing their action research stories with others from their region at the final 'sharing day', educators have developed a range of resources to support change in other services. Some educators have also proposed the development of an "invitations and provocations" resource such as a calendar to inspire positive attitudes to change and motivate others to begin the journey of change. A DVD is also being produced for distribution across the sector. The relational changes described above further suggest that relationships are forming across services and regions that promote sector wide change through new partnerships and collaboration.

Outcomes for Children and Families

Educators whose action research projects focused directly on children and/or families described a range of positive outcomes in this respect. For example, educators from one service explored the question *"How can we refine and manage children's behaviour to foster a sense of belonging?"* noting, in particular, problematic scratching and biting behaviours amongst children in the toddler room. After conducting an environmental assessment and collaborating with another service to generate ideas for redesigning the environment, the service engaged in a re-structure of rooms, placing toddlers in a larger room and making various other changes to promote positive behaviours amongst the children. Educators who undertook the project reported that the problematic scratching and biting behaviours almost completely disappeared instantly. Educators from another service focused their project on fostering a sense of belonging amongst families. Based on a review of their communication methods, this team implemented a variety of changes to the ways they communicated with parents. Drawing ideas from a conference they attended, they introduced SMS, email and a closed facebook site in order to broaden the avenues from communication with an increasingly 'Gen Y' cohort of parents. Educators from this service, as well as several others who undertook projects focusing on family involvement, inclusion and sense of belonging reported improved communication with, and involvement from, families in their service.

Appendix C: Yarning Circles Project

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & CARE

WORKFORCE BEST PRACTICE & INNOVATION PROJECT

Introduction

The Yarning Circle Project was funded by the Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace relations under the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Best Practice and Innovation Project. The aim of the Yarning Circle Project was to support the implementation of the EYLF and to explore this in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion and integration across services types (indigenous and mainstream childcare providers and kindergartens).

The Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU) in Queensland, the Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) in the North West and Sunshine Coast Regions, and PSCQ collaborated with the planning and implementation of Yarning Circles. This project worked across two groups of service providers in Mt Isa and the Sunshine Coast to investigate and build on participants' inclusion practice in support of all new EYLF learning outcomes, especially Outcome 1 (Children have a strong sense of identity and wellbeing) and Outcome 4 (Children are confident and involved learners). Additionally this project looked closely at the Australian Government's Social Inclusion agenda and Closing the Gap strategies. The Yarning Circle project was inspired by the concept of conversing to gain insight and understanding and therefore change professional practice.

Yarning - a word that is frequently used by the Noongar people of the Southwest and generally means to converse or have a conversation or a talk.

Conversations can be social, artistic, political, professional, religious, and therapeutic or research focused.

Bessarab D. (May, 2008) *Yarning about different types of yarning in the doing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.* Fourth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (IQ2008), University of Illinois, Illinois, USA.

Participants were invited to take part in an ongoing discussion over five months, to explore the practical implementation of the EYLF and how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion was part of this in their everyday work with children and families. The participants in each Yarning Circle came from a diverse range of backgrounds that included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood educators and community members. The Yarning Circle Project involved 19 participants from across Queensland including the project team.

The groups met four times between July and November 2009 at the two sites and each time were linked for some of their time together via videoconference. This element provides an opportunity for further sharing of ideas and thoughts across the state, in addition to the opportunity to share with colleagues from participants' own regions. Each session at each site was facilitated by a Project Officer

from either the PSC or the IPSU, who had jointly planned the sessions to maximise discussion and participation. Each session was planned around an Action Learning framework.

Action Learning is a strategy that involves identifying issues to be explored, establishing key actions, implementing the actions, reflecting upon practice change and impact, and establishing the next phase of strategies and priorities for implementation. Action Research allows participants time to explore their beliefs, practice framework and then their practice and is more likely to culminate in change in practice.

The Yarning Circles participants used the Action Research technique to identify information and support required to effectively implement the new requirements and practice models in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Inclusion. As the project unfolded they explored these concepts in relation to Belonging, Being and Becoming.

In between the Yarning Circles, the IPSP Project Team continued conversations with participants via face to face visits, emails, telephone linkups and 'Moodle' to share ideas. These strategies supported the ongoing exploration of the key issues that were identified by the participants

Beginning the Journey

The respectful place to begin the journey was to foster a sense of 'Belonging' by introducing participants to the Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal community members. This assisted with the development of positive relationships with local Aboriginal community members. Participants at both sites had an opportunity to connect with Aboriginal community members and increase their awareness into some of the history of the local area. This was a good foundation to develop cultural respect, foster engagement in the local area and acknowledge their place of 'belonging'. The Welcome to Country contextualised the journey they were about to embark on and initiated the yarning.

The group were presented with the purpose of the project and were also engaged in a process to identify their expectations in being involved in this project. The question was asked:

What is the one thing we could do to make the biggest difference with this Yarning Circles project?

Responses from participants are below in italics:

(a) the development of inclusive practice

      i. *To implement the EYLF respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture*

      ii. *To have clarity of the EYLF and incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture*

      iii. *To share knowledge and understanding of the EYLF in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Inclusion*

      iv. *To open up, accept and share culture*

      v. *To include everybody yarning – continuously*

(b) the inclusion of the EYLF in the development of service delivery

      i. *To uncover; unpack and gain in-depth knowledge of the EYLF*

      ii. *To develop a sense of community inclusion*

      iii. *To develop a sense of belonging with families*

      iv. *To work towards making a difference for children*

      v. *To holistically meet the needs of ALL children*

(c) the development of the early childhood education and care staff working within these services

     i. *To assist staff and children with inclusion; sharing of cultures; better understanding of inclusion*

     ii. *To strengthen links with local community and develop ongoing relationships*

     iii. *To establish a space where learning goes on forever*

     iv. *To grow and walk together on this journey*

To achieve these objectives and meet participant expectations it was important to create a safe space where people could yarn about the EYLF and explore different aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Inclusion as a cohesive group.

After this clarification of group forming there was then an opportunity for participants to start to deconstruct the document, focusing on the introduction. Participants shared their understanding of the aims and purpose of the EYLF. The groups were then engaged in professional conversation around the principles, practice and learning outcomes. Conversations included:

- how participants could assimilate and accommodate the multiple theoretical perspectives that support the document;
- developing understandings of the definitions that have been included in the document; and
- the links to other documents that informed the development of the EYLF.

Evaluating the Journey

The process for the 5th Yarning circle was designed to help evaluate the participant's experience. This session had 6 distinct parts that wove together to provide participants an opportunity to think and reflect on their journey over the previous 5 months. The 6 process parts included:

1. Reflection on their personal learning's and practice changes
2. Describing the support they required to continue their journey
3. Identifying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion that was occurring in their service & area
4. Social Systems Mapping –Who do they need to yarn with to further develop their Inclusion Leadership role
5. Through making an artefact – What imprint they wanted to leave behind as a leader of Inclusion
6. Created a joint story of their journey

What Happened?

- Participants gained a deeper understanding of the EYLF e.g.
  - Developed a list of extra definitions for the EYLF to deepen their understanding of the text.
  - The concepts of Belonging, Being and Becoming were investigated and began to take shape
  - Developed a range of practical ideas for implementation of the EYLF
  - Participants' understanding of who we are and where we come from develops a sense of "belonging" and this sparked conversations about how the participants could explore these concepts with children

- - Participants gained a deeper understanding of core concepts such as intentional teaching, scaffolding learning, building from children's point of being, and the importance of respectful and caring relationships

- Participants gained a deeper understanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion e.g.
  - The importance of and the protocols for engaging Aboriginal community members to do a "Welcome to Country"
  - Wrote their own Acknowledgement of Country with the purpose of introducing this to children and peers and were feeling more comfortable and confident about using these acknowledgements and including this in their daily practice
  - Developed a list of other stakeholders that could support Indigenous inclusion in their services
  - Began to feel that they could be role models for others with Acknowledgement of Country and that this may spark further connections with others
  - The significance of Australia's First people.
  - How to link their own services with local Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander community

- Participants also developed their understanding of
  - Their own professional support needs in this project.
  - Working with group process
  - Utilising technology to support their learning e.g. accessing group sites and their value
  - The importance and value of exploring their own experiences and stories and the impact on their practice framework and start using this process with their own teams

In summary, the participants have indicated that they had developed personally and professionally because of their experience of coming together with like-minded professionals (see inset).

Reflecting on the Journey

"Having the opportunity to be at larapuna (our country) was a wonderful experience. Reconnecting with Country is a very empowering thing. Being together as a group and being able to share experiences, skills and ideas with other weavers has been amazing, particularly to see how some of the weavers are moving into very different styles is exciting."
    - participant

Tayenebe: Tasmanian Aboriginal women's fibre work

Partnership between Arts Tasmania, the National Museum of Australia (NMA),The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery And more than 35 Tasmanian Aboriginal women over 3 years.

 As they reflected on their learning's they felt that the Belonging related to the creation of a safe space in which they could have professional dialogue.

This allowed the group to affirm a connection as like-minded educators 'moving forward' by critically reflecting in the context of that 'country'.

To the participants the Yarning process represented many opportunities including:

- to increase their awareness of self and ways in which this impacted on their work,
- participating in a safe space where they could be comfortable within the group to share personal information and approaches
- having both time and space to connect and 'be' in the here and now, and
- to be supported to be respectful of each other's learning styles and wisdom.

Throughout the Yarning Circles project we provided opportunities to share and explore stories and to document these within the group process. As participants deconstructed the EYLF they were encouraged to reflect orally and document their insights in a group journal and their individual journals. The purpose of this was to enable participants to later, look back over the documentation to help them reflect.

As the project progressed the documentation depicted a change in practice and life, which occurred as a result of the professional conversations that were facilitated at each of the Yarning Circles. Participants felt that there were a range of concepts that overlapped between the personal and professional realms.

A process was designed for the final evaluation forum to highlight and reflect on these stories and what participants in North West and Sunshine Coast had achieved. It had become apparent that the geographical factors played a role in the implementation of the EYLF. The stories that were chosen support the conversations that happened during the Evaluation forum. The success of this project can be witnessed through the words the group put together during their final Evaluation Forum (see inset).

The Legacy

Once upon a time there were a group of educators who came across this vast state via video link up technology to talk about *'many exciting new challenges'. Most importantly they gathered to put First Australians first. For the first time they had the time and space which gave them the passion to really focus on where they came from and where they're going in the context of the Early Years Learning Framework and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Inclusion. It took five months before they met together face to face and straight away there was a connection and bond because of their common goals, empathy, beliefs and values. If they had more resources this magical group around the campfire would meet on a cruise ship to float more ideas* (laughter), *further strengthen the bond with support from relevant sources.* (pause)

And someone said… *We need to add the children in the story*… And what would that look like… *Children playing together, safe environments, fun and laughter. You'll be able to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander awareness coming through across all age groups.*