Gilles Plains Children’s Centre Annual Report 2015

Gilles Plains Children’s Centre delivers Family and Community Programs and Preschool to children and families, guided by the principles of universal access and free or no cost, for birth to 8 years. Co-located with Gilles Plains Primary School on a campus with Community Child Care, GP Plus and Maringga Turpandi Aboriginal Health Service. Additional campus service from North East Community Assistance Program (NECAP) is run by volunteers.

The Family and Community Programs served over 100 families with a choice of playgroups, short series or one off workshops, the ever popular Baby Bounce (four sessions each week!!) and resources and information from our hardworking Community Development Co-ordinator and Family Services Co-ordinator. Sessional Preschool served 33 families with up to 15 hours of preschool each week, made possible for many families by the complimentary services of the North Eastern Community Child Care Centre. Staff worked together to enable students to receive long day care and lunch as well as 6 hours of preschool a day.

A notable part of our context is the diversity of family culture and language across all programs. In the preschool it was possible to provide bi-lingual SSO time to support families and children for whom English was an additional language. This support is allocated on a needs basis and in 2015 we enjoyed the support from a Chinese speaking SSO. A further 9 languages were unable to be supported in this way. We did enjoy support from Uniting Care Wesley Bowden in the form of a skilled community worker who was able to share information in Arabic in our Wednesday playgroup. It has become a priority to respond to this diversity of language and culture with staff who can provide assistance and information in the home language of the children and families.

The Quality Improvement Plan is a distillation of data, perception and feedback, reflection and compliance that guides our work. For 2015, four areas were identified by the team for improvement.

First, Quality Area 1, we were anxious to make the documentation about children’s learning and progress more available to families, in the spirit of shared understanding and a desire to match our philosophy to our practice. That is, if we believe that families are the primary educators for children, then we must work carefully to share information and learn from each other. We included a dedicated space for parent comments on learning stories and instead of waiting for parent to find these documents, we showed them promptly after being made and scribed parent comments. Children’s portfolios were brought out of the office into the playspace to be more visible and accessible. We noticed that children enjoyed looking at their folders and more families were looking at them more regularly. Further work is required to make this process even easier. We added an updated information page about the Early Years Learning Framework to children’s portfolios. A simplified ‘sticky note’ page was added to children’s portfolios for everyone to contribute to and added to the transparency of documentation of children’s learning progress. We adjusted the format and times for written reports to include a mid-year report and were able to make progress more visible.
Adding Attendance Data to the mid year and end of year reports gave families good data on habits of attendance and made the link between attendance and progress clear. The DECD Strategic Plan 2014-17 target around attendance recognises the importance of early habits developed during the first years of care and education. The connection between attendance and wellbeing is widely acknowledged and our Attendance Plan for 2015 strove to meet this target. An educator employed to collect and analyse attendance data was able to identify students at risk with poor attendance, she created many artefacts to inform and encourage parents in regular attendance. Celebrations of 100% and ‘nearly there’ 90-100% attendance each term were made for 20 children in Term 1, 13 children in Term 2, 13 children in Term 3. The overall average attendance percentage for 2015 is 82.25%. We report to families about attendance twice per year and the end of year data is collated over the first five weeks of term 4.

A ‘Look At What We’ve Been Doing’ scrapbook was a pictures and graphics based way for families and caregivers to see what children had been enjoying most recently. Further information about our curriculum in general was displayed on the noticeboards and whiteboards to inform families about the important work of children’s play.

Quality Area 2, Children’s Health and Safety, described the improvements we sought for each child’s comfort, particularly regarding their need to seek sleep, rest and relaxation but also to refine our systems for infection control and management of injuries an illness.

We provided large pillows for comfortable resting at any time. A communication system for alerting our colleagues at the child care centre when something such as chicken pox was noted in our community. A simplified documentation system for informing families of incidents or accidents was created and enabled us to keep good records and keep families fully informed. Data from this system shows that during 2015 there were 21 accidents or injuries requiring first aid. Mostly bumps and scrapes from slips and falls from climbing or outdoor play. We are able to be confident from this data that no single play space or piece of equipment is at fault. No major injuries were sustained by staff or children. We are proud of the care provided to children and are pleased to get feedback from families in the end of year survey that confirms this care is noted and appreciated.

Quality Area Three, Provision of a Suitable Physical Environment, requires both indoor and outdoor spaces to be designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both natural and built environments. We worked to provide richer outdoor experiences by including mud play, garden planting and care play, more loose parts play with natural materials such as rocks and sticks. The addition of pets, ‘Shelley the Snail’ and Spiny Leaf Insects created opportunities to interact with creatures from the garden. Each spider found in the garden created much excitement and we worked hard to model careful observation instead of destruction!
A sustainable practice is a marker of a quality service and we extended the work already begun to teach and model the principles of re-use, recycle and reduce. A worm farm was managed by the preschool and children enjoyed observing the worms with magnifying glasses as well as feeding them the food scraps from snack time.

The nature playgroup was an especially good platform to demonstrate respect for the environment and gave families and children an enthusiasm for the beauty and fun of outdoor play experiences.

Finally, Quality Area Six, Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities was identified through the rating process as needing improvement, primarily because the governance structure of the Children’s Centre and Preschool falls under the umbrella of the Primary School and there is no requirement for governing council members to be found in the parent community of the Family and Community Programs or Preschool. Instead a recommendation is made to form a parent engagement group. This group did not form during 2015 as hoped but the good relationships between our staff and families across all programs gave us confidence that parents and caregivers were able to raise issues and make suggestions as needed. The work to build capacity in our community will continue with shared responsibility for programs such as Baby Bounce, a necessary shift due to staffing restrictions but a timely one too to create opportunities for our capable parents to support each other. The parent engagement group is still on the agenda and will be by invitation to the whole community in the first instance and a personal approach to individuals who might consider being part of this forum. It follows the principle that our programs are not designed or delivered to families but for families, sometimes by families, in response to what they want. Simply put, we are here to serve children and families.

As a conclusion I would like to demonstrate the scope of the collaboration between families and our program by the number of schools our families choose at the conclusion of their preschool year. We worked to support transition and familiarisation to 17 primary schools.

An exit survey is conducted at the end of the preschool year. The following are comments made by parents and demonstrate the value given to participation in our services.

“Thanks Always. You are perfect teachers!”. 

“I appreciate all the teachers for all the kindness to A and his family and helping new parents with A’s experience at Preschool.”

“Thank you for all the amazing work you have all done with V.”

“A enjoyed her kindy days very much. She said she missed the first 2 terms but happy to get the last 2.”
“Thank you very much for all the support and guidance. All the teachers are wonderful. Thankyou from the bottom of our hearts.”

“Thank you so much all of you. I am very happy for this year. You help my son to making all things.”

“L’s enjoys kindy so much and would always tell me she wants to come to kindy. She tries really hard to be part or play with the other kids. I appreciate the work and support of the teachers.”

“Thank you so much to all the teachers and helpers. This year has gone to quick but the experience my children have had at this kindy has been fantastic. Thank you for helping J and the support. He will miss kindy very much.”

“Thank you so much to all the teachers and helpers and making kindy a fantastic experience for learning and play. Very happy.”

“Thanks for comments and best wishes. Y really enjoyed his one whole years at kindy. And he would love to keep this sweet memories for rest of his life. Thanks to all lovely teachers for their co-operation.”

“We are thanking all teachers and all the staff of Gilles Plains Preschool for giving good beginning and good experience to M’s studies.”

“Malinda learnt many more craft works in his class and it helped a lot to develop his artistic skills.”

“Thanks to all teachers for making my child a wonderful student/person ☺ ”

“Extremely pleased about W’s growth through preschool.”

“I am very happy and proud with S’s progress in his first year at kindy.”

“She had the best time this year in kindy. She will miss all the teachers. Thank you ☺”

“Thank you for all your support. I have seen O mature throughout the year and a big part of this is due to kindy!”

“Thank you for helping T move his way through his early childhood education! We are really happy with his progress!”