Ballara Park
Kindergarten

Annual Report
2012
This year we identified four major priorities in our Quality Improvement plan. The first, relating to National Quality Standards Area 1 and the district priority of Literacy for Learning, was to improve outcomes for all children in the area of phonological awareness. Over the year we specifically planned activities, intentional teaching experiences and assessment tasks that focused on children’s development of phonological awareness skills, particularly rhyming, syllabification and initial sound identification. We also increased opportunities for informal teaching of auditory processing skills through activities, games, songs and rhymes. Data from entry and exit screenings of the cohort of children who started kindergarten in Term 1 indicates that all children have improved in each of the indicators relating to phonological awareness, auditory processing and auditory memory. In 2013, we will continue with this priority for the next cohort of children. We will also have a similar focus on developing numeracy skills.

Our second priority, relating to NQS Quality Area 1 and the district priority of Engagement for Learning, was to ensure that the effectiveness and responsiveness of our routines and practices were not adversely affected by the implementation of the extended day model of preschool delivery. Regular reflection and review of our practices by staff and extensive surveys of families, as well as analysis of attendance data and patterns, indicated that the adaptations we made to ensure that our program reflected the needs of children over the longer day. Feedback from both staff and families was very positive. Typical comments from parents were: “The longer day suits our family’s needs perfectly”, “Initially I was worried that my child would get too tired, but this hasn’t been the case at all. She still doesn’t want to leave at 4.” In 2013, we will continue to monitor that our routines and practices continue to meet the needs of all children over the longer day.

Our third priority, encompassing NQS Quality Areas 3 and 5 and relating to the district focus on Engagement for Learning, was to upgrade our outdoor learning area. Over the year we ensured that we included all the children in decision-making about the planning, designing and establishment of our outdoor area. We have extended our paved area, added a pergola with seating onto the verandah, added fixed seating to the swing area and built a deck around a deciduous tree. The children have been involved, planning, designing and establishment of our outdoor area. We have extended our paved area, added a pergola with seating onto the deck area. In all our redevelopment projects we have focused on using natural materials and promoting sustainable practices. We received very positive feedback about our outdoor area in our NQS assessment in November. The assessor wrote “Sustainable practices are embedded in service operations and consistently promoted in the everyday program. To assist children to become aware and actively involved in being environmentally responsible, educators have focused on providing experiences that involve learning about developing and caring for the environment. They have developed experiences that not only create a natural environment but allow children to explore the science behind looking after what they have created.” In 2013 we are hopeful that the City of Marion will approve our request to extend our outdoor area by allowing us to move our fence on the northern side of our yard to encompass some of the adjacent park. If our application is successful we will use the additional land to build a mounded area and retain a grassed open area. We will also establish a bush tucker and Indigenous art garden.

Our fourth priority for 2012 was to increase the awareness of all staff of Indigenous learners and their families. This priority fitted with NQS Quality Areas 1 and 7 and the district focus on Leadership for Learning. All staff undertook professional development in this area during the year and we worked closely with an Aboriginal cultural guide to introduce Indigenous perspectives to our educational program wherever appropriate. All staff have reported an increased understanding of contemporary Indigenous issues and an increased confidence in addressing Indigenous learner needs. In 2013 we will continue this focus and will consult with our guide to establish our bush tucker and Aboriginal art garden.
Intervention and Support Programs

We are fortunate to have the services of a preschool support worker who works with us each day. This enables us to assess and support children with additional needs by offering extra help through targeted individual and small group work. We have received a small amount of funding to support the children with a diagnosed disability but much of the funding for our preschool worker is from our site budget. We have benefited from the assistance of the DECD speech therapist, psychologist and social worker during the year.

Report from Governing Council

As for all the preschool services in South Australia, this has been a year of significant change for Ballara Park Kindergarten. At the beginning of the year we increased our session times to offer all children 15 hours of preschool per week. After an extensive consultation process in 2011, we implemented the option of extending our full day sessions to 7.5 hours each day, which was the preferred option of our community. This was done with little disruption to our program as our existing part-time early childhood workers agreed to increase their hours and we employed our pre-service student from 2011 as our additional part-time teacher, thus ensuring ongoing consistency of staffing. Our new staff team has melded really well and the additional flexibility an additional staff member has given us has meant we are able to accommodate more consistency across the groups.

Staff have consulted with families on an ongoing basis during the year to ensure that the model is suiting their needs. Feedback about the longer day sessions has been overwhelmingly positive. Staff are also feeling positive about the option as it has enabled them to continue to work with the two consistent groups of children and retain the flexibility of program delivery that full days provide. They believe the longer day offers opportunities for more sustained and complex learning opportunities. We are pleased to be able to continue offering the extended days in 2013. While the change in hours has meant that we are no longer able to offer pre-entry sessions, we are pleased that we have been able to continue having playgroup on Friday mornings. This has been possible because of the commitment of our volunteer co-ordinators.

The second major change has been the introduction of the National Quality Framework in 2012. This has meant a huge amount of work for staff at the centre to ensure that our policies, practices and procedures meet all the National Quality Standards. This centre was fortunate enough to be one of the first stand-alone preschools in the state to be formally assessed. The assessment took place in November and we were assessed as exceeding national standards. Also as part of the National Quality Framework, our Early Childhood Workers are required to gain a qualification. We congratulate both of our Early Childhood Workers who have successfully completed their Certificate III in Children’s Services this year.

The third major change has been moving from a termly to an annual intake of children. This will mean that during the implementation year next year we will have very high numbers in the first term but by the end of the year our numbers will be low. The implications for our staff, particularly our contract staff, are not clear as yet. We will endeavor to ensure that we continue to offer consistent staffing and support our staff during this turbulent implementation year.

Student Data

Enrolments

Enrolments at Ballara Park Kindergarten have remained consistent over 2012 with the site operating at or near capacity for each term. We have had to apply our priority of access policy for each intake because requests for places have outnumbered vacancies for each intake.

During 2012 we were advised that the capacity of the centre has been raised to 42 children per session. However, our staffing allocation limits the number of children we can have at each session to 39.

By collaborating with other local preschools, we are managing to provide places for all local families. We will start 2013 with about 40 children in each session. Because we will not have another intake other than in January next year, but will exit children to school at the end of Terms 1, 2 and 3, our numbers will decrease over the year. While there are some indications that the demand for places is slightly decreasing, we already have preliminary enrolments for about 70% of our vacancies for 2014.
Attendance data indicates that we continue to have high attendance at Ballara Park Kindergarten. We have again averaged over 90% attendance, reflecting the similar pattern of the last 5 years. This attendance percentage is above both the region and state-wide figures. Considering that this centre has provided only full-day sessions since Term 2 2008, the high attendance supports the need for and popularity of this model of service delivery in this community. It is also interesting to note that the longer day sessions that we have offered this year are equally as well attended as previous years.

Feeder Schools

Children who attended Ballara Park Kindergarten in 2012 have gone on to 13 different primary schools.

They are:
- Paringa Park Primary School 32%
- Brighton Primary School 13%
- Warradale Primary School 13%
- Christ the King School 10%
- Glenelg Primary School 6%
- Stella Maris School 5%
- Immanuel Primary School 5%
- St Leonards Primary School 5%
- Clovelly Park Primary School 2.2%
- Our Lady of Grace School 2.2%
- St Mary’s Memorial School 2.2%
- St Therese Primary School 2.2%
- Sunrise Christian School 2.2%

This spread of school choice is consistent with previous years. This year has seen an increase in children moving on to government schools (71.2%) compared to those choosing non-government schools (28.8%). While this is a significant increase from last year, analysis of data from the last ten years indicates that the 2011 figures were unusual and not typical of school destination from this site.
Client Opinion

In 2012 we introduced a new parent survey that aims to facilitate feedback about the preschool’s performance in each of the seven quality areas of the national quality framework. We developed this survey as we believe this will more succinctly identify areas for improvement to be addressed in our Quality Improvement Plan for 2013. The survey has five or six statements and asks for comments in each of the seven areas – educational program, health and safety, physical environment, staff, relationships with children, relationships with families and community and leadership and management. Parents are asked to state on a 5 point Likert scale the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement. To collate the survey, a strongly disagree scores 1, disagree scores 2, neutral (no opinion or don’t know) scores 3, agree scores 4, and strongly agree scores 5. Surveys were distributed to families as their child finished their fourth term of kindergarten. A total of 51 surveys were returned in 2012.

All responses agreed or strongly agreed to all 35 statements in all seven areas of the survey. The only exception were four responses of neutral. Three of these responses were about being part of the Governing Council and one was about responding to children with additional needs. In all four cases, the respondents indicated that they “Don’t Know” about these specific areas. Strongest areas of agreement were educational programs and practice, physical environment, staff, relationships with children, partnerships with families and leadership and management.

While the surveys gave very positive feedback about our work over the seven quality areas, we appreciated the thoughtful suggestions that were included. The recommendations and suggestions in the surveys were – establish a borrowing library for children, provide a written report on all children each term, have parent/teacher interviews each term, update outside of building, get police to monitor road for speeding motorists and improve signage. We will act on all of these suggestions in 2013.

Comments of commendation included:
“My child loves this preschool. Always lots to do and learn”
“The most impressive, professional and enthusiastic group of staff I have encountered in early childhood education”
“We couldn’t be happier and have nothing to fault.”
“Outstanding leadership.”
“The educational program is amazing. It’s varied, well directed, well thought out and of a high standard. My child couldn’t have had a better preschool educational environment”
“Brilliant staff. Very approachable, great sense of humour. Interact with the students in a very caring, positive and enthusiastic manner.”
“All cultures are embraced and great effort is made to educate all children about cultural diversity”
“Kindy is always clean and neatly presented. Their safety standards are exceptional and they need to be commended for this.”
“We are extremely happy with the kindy. The staff are amazing and we could not ask for a friendlier environment. Thank you for making us feel so welcome”

We also received numerous commendations about our newly developed outdoor area, our extensive use of Auslan and our communication to families.
Financial Statement

To be attached
Financial statement P2 to be attached
Educational Program Term 1  2012

We began the term with a focus on sea life – showing special interest in fish and creatures that live in the ocean. The children were involved in lots of discussion on what fish need to help them survive, their environment, their characteristics and how they protect themselves –using the word ‘camouflage’ and demonstrating what this means and why it is important. We discovered the children used this word often in play experiences, reinforcing to us that they had a solid understanding of the word. We also incorporated the importance of the food chain. The children had the opportunity to touch and smell a real snapper and crab, looking closely at the body parts and the characteristics of both.

The children were involved in a variety of painting and cutting activities to extend this interest area. Our choice of songs, fingerplays and stories assisted in developing the theme and we taught the children many Auslan ‘signs’ to complement the songs.

We incorporated many water activities into the programme e.g. water painting, floating and sinking, boats, sea creatures in the water trough, fishing game and a variety of sensory experiences. We also experimented with colours- talking about ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ colours, this then led onto mixing of colours.

The C.S.I.R.O. visited with their programme ‘Sounds like Chemistry” where the children were involved in a variety of science experiments to extend their problem solving, hypothesising and questioning skills. This proved a good ‘hands on’ experience allowing the children the opportunity to learn and use some scientific terminology.

To extend the interest in water and creatures we introduced fresh water creatures and habitats, looking at who lives in these areas and what are the differences between fresh water and sea creatures. We were fortunate to gain some frog spawn and tadpoles which allowed the children the opportunity to observe the development of frogs. We talked with the children about developing our outdoor play area, asking the children to brainstorm ideas. One idea was to establish a frogpond where we will transfer the frogs into once fully grown. We were able to extend this interest through the introduction of the brown and the green tree frogs borrowed from the Nature Education Centre.
We used the interest in tadpoles/ frogs to develop cutting skills, number recognition and creative skills by providing children with a variety of activities – drawing frogs using the tree frog as a stimulus, 5 speckled frog number activity and individual frog cutting.

During the term we had a strong focus on number recognition and rhyming, this was reinforced through our choice of fingerplays, stories and games.
To consolidate the knowledge gained from the term’s focus area we planned a visit to the Urrbrae Wetlands and Nature Education Centre, where the children were involved in a walk through the wetlands and also a ‘hands on’ experience at the Nature Education Centre, touching and observing a variety of creatures. We were able to collect samples of creatures from the waters edge and observe them under microscopes. The children had a visual explanation of the food chain and how that impacts on creatures living in the wetlands.

Some of the animals we saw included children’s python, sugar glider, tortoises, lizards, green tree frog, stick insects, yabby and ring tailed possum. We used the photos we took to stimulate discussion and do follow up drawings to show what aspects of the excursion each child enjoyed.

To end the term children were involved in some fun Easter activities.
Educational Program Term 2  2012

Our main focus for the term was around ‘the environment’ with special emphasis on our outdoor area – establishing the frog pond, digging patch, vegetable/flower garden and dinosaur garden.

We began the term with an interest in the weather – encouraging the children to be aware of their surrounding environment. We appointed daily ‘meteorologists’ who observed the weather focusing on the changes in weather during Autumn. We went for a walk around our local streets to look at the changing colours of the leaves and we collected some for our activities. The children learned the terms ‘deciduous’ and ‘evergreen’ which were then reinforced through stories and discussions. A variety of art/craft experiences were provided to develop cutting and creative skills.

We continued our interest in frogs and pond life by watching the tadpoles develop and began preparation for the outdoor pond. The children were very excited about the ‘launching’ of the frogs and a ceremony was held to wish them well in their new life.

Through the discussions about frogs and what they eat, the children showed a strong interest in insects and bugs which we extended through songs, stories, art/craft and hands on experiences. We borrowed creatures from the Nature Education Centre – stick insects, green tree frogs and cellar beetles which allowed the children the opportunity to observe these creatures close up.
The children were very involved in the preparation for the new garden beds – they helped level the ground and when the soil was delivered by a tipper, they were busy in their visy vests moving the soil in wheel barrows to the garden beds.

Once the garden beds were established, we began planting a variety of vegetables and flowers – the children were reminded of the needs of plants to keep them alive.

Our main emphasis for the garden redevelopment was to make a more natural environment for the children to play in, so when we organized for the very large gum tree next door to the kindergarten to be lopped, the wood and logs were incorporated into our plans. We used the logs as borders for the digging patch and ‘dinosaur garden’, and the large stepping stones to develop balancing and offer variety and challenge to our climbing area. The children watched in amazement as the man hung in the tree and lopped branch after branch. It proved an interesting learning outcome as the photos were made into a story and were viewed on the large computer screen.

To finish off the term we looked at a variety of fruits and vegetables with special interest in their seeds, skins and what type of plants they grow on. Children were involved in activities to consolidate their knowledge.
Educational Program Term 3 2012

We used the Olympic Games as a basis for our learning this term. The focus was on Countries, Cultures and Customs. We talked about the Olympic sports and the relevance of the rings and torch - we made these symbols using different art media.

We celebrated our own Olympic games where we participated in a variety of sporting events. The games were opened by our own ‘Queen’ and all children were presented with a gold medal. Learning about the games promoted much interest in other countries, their flags and cultures. We took this opportunity to ask families for information about their cultural backgrounds and we used our world map to pinpoint where children and their families come from.

We looked at many countries particularly those relevant to our kindergarten families – China, Italy, Papua New Guinea, Africa and Sri Lanka. We used dress-ups, cooking, art & craft, displays and power point presentations to extend the children’s awareness of these countries. Many families contributed to our learning by providing resources and artefacts from their homelands.
To give us a deeper insight into the African culture, Sam from Nigeria, came to talk to us about African life. He made drums with the children from deer and cow hide and explained about his traditional clothing and tools.

From this interest in other countries we moved onto ‘homes around the world’ – looking at and talking about the way people in other countries live and the different materials they use to build their homes. This led us to building houses using bushes, large wooden blocks and material, erecting a tepee and assembling tents of various sizes. This provided the children with great role play experiences. We even had a campfire and cooked sausages and potatoes.

To finish the term we attended the ‘Lion in the Night’ presentation by Patch Theatre at Brighton Performing Arts Centre which provided us with lots of language and dramatic play opportunities.
Educational Program Term 4 2012

Continuing our learning about different cultures, we focused on Aboriginal culture this term. We had an Aboriginal cultural guide come to show us Indigenous artefacts. Another time he told us a Dreamtime story. We learned how Aboriginal people light fires, track animals and hunt for food.

We also learned about Australian native animals. We were able to see and touch the crocodile, parrot, wombat, sugar gliders and snake from Remabi Park when they visited.

We painted pictures of Australian animals and wrote their names.

Our discovery tables always have interesting things to observe, like marsupial mice and silkworms, and we love learning how things work.
Outside we continued with our outdoor learning area redevelopment and we did lots of planting. We made a sunflower hedge, grew our own bean plant and replanted the vegetable garden. With our new pump we planned and made watercourses. We made a worm farm and planted a butterfly garden.

Our other focus for the term was learning about different art forms and media. We worked with clay, did some still life paintings and experimented with watercolours. We learned about portraits and self-portraits.

We followed this up with an excursion to the art gallery where we participated in self-portraiture workshops.

What a busy year we’ve had!