

Star Health

Being Equal Pilot Program

Stories of Change

2021



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Acknowledgement

Thank you for sharing your stories about the changes your services have made to promote and embed gender equity and challenge rigid gender stereotypes so that all children can experience gender equitable and respectful relationships. The services are sharing their case studies to inspire others.

Services:

Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre

Clarendon Children's Centre

Coventry Children's Centre

Renown Kindergarten

Windsor Community Children's Centre

The Health Promotion Team at Star Health coordinated the Being Equal Pilot Program.

You can also read the Being Equal Pilot Program Evaluation Report, 2021

Acronyms

GE and R	Gender Equality and Respect
ELS	Early Learning Services
BE	Being Equal
DET	Department of Education and Training
RR	Respectful Relationships program
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
FV	Family Violence

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Background

Gender-based violence exists when there is gender inequality; and rigid ideas about gender are shaped in the early years of a child's life. Therefore, early learning services (ELS's) play a key role in challenging these rigid stereotypes and in promoting more respectful relationships. Star Health identified that, there was support for Victorian schools to take a whole-of-school approach to promoting gender equity and respect, there was no similar whole- of-setting approach for ELS's.

In 2018 Star Health, partnered with five early learning services across Port Phillip and Stonnington, to pilot Being Equal: a two-year whole-of-service approach to ensuring children attending early learning services experience more respectful relationships and less rigid gender stereotypes. Partnering with Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre, Clarendon Children's Centre, Coventry Children's Centre, Renown Kindergarten and Windsor Community Children's Centre, the Being Equal pilot reached 135 educators and 645 children and their families.

Being Equal was developed using evidence of the primary prevention approaches to gender-based violence, the benefits to children of challenging genders stereotypes and the strength of whole-of-service approaches in creating sustainable change. Being Equal drew on Our Watch's [Change the Story Framework](#) which outlines that gender-based violence is driven by gender inequality and the [Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships](#) in schools' program.

The Being Equal pilot model follows a continuous improvement cycle that focuses on six benchmark areas:

1. leadership commitment,
2. supports for staff and families impacted by family violence,
3. professional development,
4. culture and environment,
5. teaching and learning and
6. community partnerships.

Star Health collaborated with the five participating services, over two years, to test a range of approaches, tools, and resources from other whole-of-service and early years gender equity initiatives to make change in these six key areas.

The Being Equal evaluation highlights that all five participating services made considerable progress to embedding change across all six benchmark areas, and that this led to changes in the experiences of children.

A requirement of the program was for each service to submit a case study after completing the two-year program. The case studies document the changes they have implemented and what changed for the children, educators and the service.

We have shared these case studies from the five participating services and case studies on specific areas of change such as parent engagement, use of books and spaces.

Being Equal Journey

Case Studies

Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre

2020

Name(s) of people sharing story: Michelle Wilson, Sam Aloï-Carlus & Heather Kerr

Who we are:

Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre is a community run, not-for-profit organisation providing integrated early learning and care services to the community. Our programs include Early Years Program (Long Day Childcare), Sessional Kindergarten Programs, Playgroups, Maternal Health Nurse and Parenting Support Programs via City of Port Phillip Council. We are located in Port Melbourne and we are 155 place centre offering care for children 0-5 years of age across 8 rooms. Our team consists of around 45 educators, 3 kindergarten teachers, and 9-member leadership team. As of October 2020, we have completed year 1 of the Being Equal Program.

When did your Being Equal journey start:

Our journey with the BE Program began in May 2018 with collaboration between Heather, our Sustainability Coordinator, and Dani from Star Health. Our policies were reviewed, a brief book audit was done and training with the Room Leaders of each room was carried out. An 'All Staff Training was conducted in March 2019 at which the draft Family Violence Policy was shared with the staff for feedback. This policy was finalised and approved in January 2020.

What we already did well:

Upon commencement of the program, our space was equitable, and we had a good foundation to start from. The images we displayed around our centre were mainly of children and the learning that happened in our programs ensuring that the visual imagery throughout our centre depicted both girls and boys. Our educational staff consists of both males and females, breaking the gender stereotypes of our industry and displaying this clearly to children and families who attend our centre. Our furniture is of natural materials and our communal spaces are welcoming and reflective of the diversity and interest of the community. Our indoor and outdoor spaces provide age appropriate spaces for rest and relaxation as well as risk taking and active play for all.



Critical Reflection:

Although we had a strong foundation, our practices needed a lot of attention regarding bringing equitable learning experiences and interactions to our programs. Very early on in our journey an educator had carefully sorted out the clothing in lost property into "girls" and "boys" baskets. After drawing awareness to this and having a discussion, we created a single "lost property" basket and presented it to families in a gender-neutral manner. We also found that many of our resources were donated, including books and dress ups. As the dress ups were gendered, they invited gendered

conversations leading the educators to use words such as “pretty”, “cute”, “handsome” and “strong” to describe the children. We quickly assessed our donated dress ups and only kept those that offered opportunities for equal imaginative play by all children.

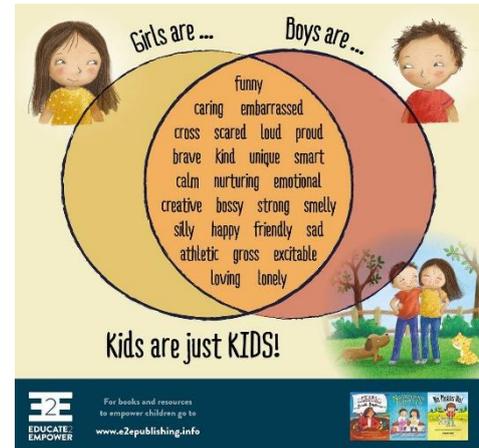
Having this interaction with the educator along with many others made it clear we had a long way to go to reach each educator in our very large service.

What we did:

- All Staff Training:

Through an all staff training co-created by Heather and Dani, the educators were introduced to the BE Program, discussed gender stereotypes, showed how to use a “gender lens” and were given a draft of the Family Violence Policy at BWFCC and asked for feedback. While some champions took it upon themselves to carry on with the BE program, we found it a challenge to follow through and support all of the educators due to our large size.

One way we share information with staff and challenge their thinking around gender equity is through visuals displayed in the staff room. The leadership team shared the ideas of a “gender lens” with the staff by displaying gendered images in the staff room and asking for feedback. This was also shared in the family memo mid-2019.



Posters on display in the staff room

- Quality Improvement Plan:

As part of our commitment to implementing and carrying out the BE Program, we have included it in our Quality Improvement Plan. Under NQS Quality Area 5, our goal is to implement practices that are documented throughout the centre and provide children with gender equity learning experiences that are clearly displayed in each program in order to raise awareness of gender bias to staff and families. Having this as part of our QIP allows us to keep the BE Program an ongoing priority across our centre, reviewing and re-evaluating the way we are using a “gender lens” in our practices and documentation across the service.

- Change in Leadership Structure:

It was still a challenge to reach and support each educator in understanding and implementing the BE program. In early 2019, Sam joined the BE team and was later joined by Michelle in 2019. There was a restructure of the leadership team which meant that four Program Coordinators, could oversee two rooms each. This new structure gave the Program Coordinators the ability to work more closely with the Room Leaders and educators in implementing GE&R, write weekly reflections and embed it into every day practice.

- Book Audit

The rooms all did a book audit from which we disposed of many books. As with our dress ups, many books had been donated and were not appropriate for our educational program when viewed

BOOK WEEK & BEING EQUAL

As we celebrate Book Week, we would like to take this time to share a few books viewed through the Being Equal lens. Our Being Equal Program promotes gender equality, respectful relationships and all the things children can be with 6 key messages:

- Children can be same and different
- Children can be fair and friendly
- Children can do anything
- Children can work together
- Children can be strong and gentle
- Children can be kind and brave

The book titled *One Special Day*, written for babies and toddlers, was found in our recent book audit. In this book, you can see the child labelled as a boy and described as 'strong', 'wild', 'free', and 'loud'. As these are stereotypical labels associated with boys, we found that **this book did not promote equity for all.**

The two books titled *The Princess and the Wizard* and *The Singing Mermaid* both followed a similar story line where a dominant, evil male figure takes a timid, weak female figure captive. Due to these gender stereotypes, we found that **these books were not appropriate for our educational programs.**

The book *Bumping and Bouncing* is a wonderful example of a gender equitable book. In this book you can find all children working in the garden, doing the shopping with dad, and enjoying nature together. **This book challenges gender stereotypes and follows the key message children can do anything.**

Another book we found that challenges gender stereotypes is *The Not-So-Perfect Princess and the Not-So-Dreadful Dragon*. In this book, the princess is labelled "The strongest, loudest, and bravest princess in all the land" and a dragon, who uses the gender pronoun "he", is labelled as "kind and caring and gentle." **This book follows the key message children can be strong and gentle.**

You can find these books displayed in our reception area if you would like to have a deeper look inside. Please feel free to speak to your Program Coordinator or Room Leader if you would like to further discuss the Being Equal Program, promoting gender equity for all.

through a “gender lens.” There is a clear, positive change in the understanding from many educators on how to review a book before reading it to children.

One kinder teacher shared that “When picking up a new book, it is now ingrained into me to check for things that aren’t quite equitable.” The nursery Program Coordinator shared that it has helped the educators to screen which books might be appropriate for the babies in their room when visiting shared spaces with a range of books. Another educator in the toddler room shared that she is now more aware of how a book might challenge gender stereotypes and can share this confidently with her co-educators and the families in her room.

Book Week 2020 was held 17-23 October. Through consultation with families, we decided to invite children to dress up as their favourite book character and bring in their favourite book. We shared this event with families on our Facebook page through a “gender lens” using emojis that challenge gender stereotypes such as the male mermaid and the female pirate. We also took this opportunity to share our book audit with families through our weekly reflection (Figure 1) and with a book display, sharing two books that share the key messages of the BE Program as well as two books that were found to not be appropriate for our educational program.

What was the Change:

- Room 1 noticed the main difference in the language they use and how they address the children. They now try to use only their names rather than their gender to address the children. Chitrancha, the Room 1 Room Leader said, “It’s not just about the children, it brings a big difference in our thinking as well.”
- An educator in Room 2 said “My philosophy has always been all children can do anything, but the books, toys, and language are all new.”
- The Room 3 team reflected on the BE program saying “It is new for us because we didn’t grow up with this so we are still learning.”
- With a conversation in Room 4, we found that there was a gap of communication with the casual workers. This is something we will need to address to ensure all staff have a sound understanding of the BE Program.
- One kinder teacher shared a story: Before the BE program, there was a song that was sung in the room: “Boys are strong like King Kong, girls are weak, kick them in the creek.” The kinder teacher used group times to have discussions about how children can all do anything, all be strong, and all be “awesome.” She later heard the song again in the room, but this time a child stopped the child who was singing and said “No, we are all equal.” She no longer hears this song from the children in the room.

Clarendon Children's Centre

2020

Name(s) of people sharing story: Sam Newbury

Who are we:

Clarendon Children's Centre is a long day care centre licensed for 40 places and located in South Melbourne. Our team of 18 educators provides early education and care, including a funded kindergarten program, for 53 children aged 0-5 years each weekday. CCC is a parent-managed, not-for-profit cooperative and is currently rated as Exceeding the NQS by ACECQA.

When did your Being Equal Journey start:

Our Being Equal journey started in 2018 when the educator team committed to strengthening our knowledge about the impacts of gender stereotyping, inequality and its links to family violence. We already had a strong commitment to equality, evidenced in our philosophy and policies, and a great culture of reflective practice, openness and willingness to learn and grow.

What we did well:

Our Centre is very open to trying new approaches and actively encourages educators' ongoing learning and participation in research projects. Two of our kinder educators completed the Think Equal program and gained knowledge and skills in social and emotional learning and gender equity which they then applied to the kinder program. This was a valuable starting point for changing the way we approach gender across the whole Centre. A gender equality and respect program such as Being Equal was our next step towards a whole-Centre change. Our Wellbeing Leader accepted the role of leading GE and R change and was allocated two hours a fortnight to progress the program. Time in staff meetings was dedicated to discussion and reflection of Wellbeing issues, including gender and equity, and this was also prioritised as a focus for staff development, sharing resources, reflective practice and group decision making.



Our reflection:

We used the BE staff survey as a catalyst for reflection on GE and R and the responses highlighted that all team members considered GE and R to be important and part of their role as educators. However, educators also said they wanted additional resources and support to confidently engage children and parents on these topics.

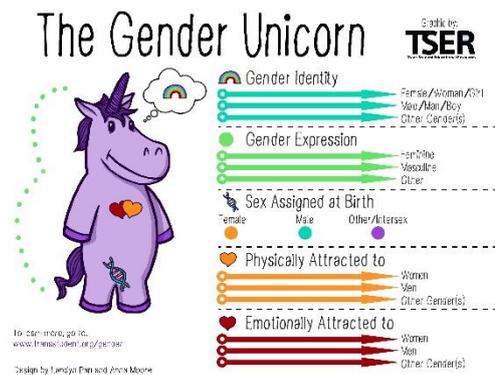
As a team, we decided to focus on building a shared knowledge of what gender is and the impacts of gender on the lives of children. We also decided to review the books we use and to explore how we could use them differently and/or more intentionally with children to challenge gender stereotypes and promote respectful and inclusive relationships.

What we did:

We concentrated on building our shared understanding of why gender equality and respect is important. In a staff meeting, we used the Our Watch *Change the story* video to learn more about the link between gender inequality and family violence, and the drivers of family violence. For the educator team, this was incredibly powerful and instrumental in shifting their thinking.

Next, we explored concepts around gender - what does gender mean to us, the rules children have to follow and how to support them being more expansive. We used the gender unicorn tool to help us reflect on our beliefs and attitudes about gender and how it impacts on our lives.

A group of six educators also completed the *Gender Glorious* PD that discusses gender stereotypes, how educators can better support gender non-confirming children to live comfortably with their identity and also support parents and/or colleagues who are LGBTIQ+. We learnt that boys' social/emotional skills and literacy knowledge are frequently under-developed, so we have created outdoors spaces designed to entice boys to sit and play in small groups with activities that develop pro-social skills and support discussion and sharing of emotions. For girls, who often need encouragement to develop their gross motor skills, we created spaces for ball skills, rough-and-tumble and other 'risky' play.



While using these strategies to build educator knowledge and skills in GE and R, we also focused on our books - an important resource for educators and children which are sometimes purchased by educators but also sometimes donated to us by families and local community members. Because we know that the messages and stories in books help to shape children's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours, we decided to review our books to assess the messages in the stories against gender equity and diversity criteria. The audit undertaken by one staff member revealed that our books and resources were not as supportive as they could have been and were not utilised in a way that supported the messages of equality and diversity we wanted to give children. Educators were interested in the findings but uncertain about how to apply them to their everyday practice, so we organised an all-staff physical jump book audit (using questions from the *Access Health Book Review Tool*) at a staff meeting. Everyone brought three books and moved to different sides of the room in response to facilitator questions about the books' content. When nearly everyone moved to the side of the room indicating that males were the main character in their chosen book, it was a 'light bulb' moment for us all. Our jump book audit demonstrated that boys were nearly always the heroes and problem solvers in children's stories, there were no adults or children with disabilities and only a few characters from diverse cultural backgrounds.

What has changed:

Following the book audit, we have sorted our Centre Library and catalogued the books under sections: equity and diversity, cultures etc. More educators now report they intentionally read books that encourage critical thinking about identity like *'Who am I? I am me!'* and prompt children's discussion and questions. The Centre has purchased more than 40 new books and have used Alistair's list to ensure we include gender diversity and queer books. The stories in the books are all very interlinked and have multiple themes that can be discussed with children. This has been a great success and staff meeting discussions highlight that it has been a key tool to change practices (or at least notice it!). A recent random check of books in all our rooms found more diverse representations such as construction books with females as the lead character.

All educators have included their personal commitment to GE and R in our Quality Improvement Plan and we have colour coded the GE and R entries in each room's program planning 'floor books' to document educators' reflections and make it easy for us to track our progress.

Each room is undertaking specific activities. Educators working with our children aged 2-3 years are focused on the message that **"Everyone is different, and that's ok"**. In the Nippers Room (children aged 0-2 years) educators are focusing on minimising the use of gendered language by tallying their use of gendered words and phrases so they can pick up their own language slips.

"Every time I hear children use a gender stereotype I feel triggered and compelled to question and stop the thinking" - Nippers educator

"I've seen more educators beginning to introduce themselves with their pronouns, introduce the concepts of pronouns with children and a large reduction on comments on children's clothing" - CCC Educator



Over these past two years we have seen a huge shift in our team, with more and more educators critically reflecting on how, what and why they say and do things every day. This has allowed us to support our children to have similar critical conversations and reflect on important questions like: "Why can't boys wear dresses?" "Is everyone the same?" "Is it ok to be different?" It has also allowed us to begin sharing articles and knowledge with families both online and in person. Next year we hope to run some informal sessions with families to help them 'get on the same page' and understand the journey we've been on - and why we believe that it's the best thing for the children!

The Centre is also involved in a Melbourne University research study - ***Gender in the Everyday***. This research involves exploring with children the role gender plays in their experiences within an early childhood education setting. We have also registered with [The Welcome Here](#) project that supports organisations in Australia to be visibly welcoming and inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTQIA+) communities.

Maintaining the change:

Gender equality and respect will be an ongoing process in the years to come, as we meet and engage with new families, children and educators. The Being Equal program has helped us understand the depth of the issues in gender inequality. Our continued focus will be ensured through policy making, induction to GE and R for new staff, staff professional development and continued reflective practice.

Coventry Children's Centre

2021

Name(s) of people sharing story: Janine Sweet, Michele Collins and Katie Bennett

Who we are:

Coventry is a council run long day care with 50 licensed places located in South Melbourne. 100 children aged 0 – 5 years old attend the service over a week. Most children spend between 20-30 hours per week at the service. Our 21 staff come from various cultural backgrounds including Italian, Korean, Indian and Irish and most identify as female. Most staff have Diploma or Cert 3 level qualifications. Accreditation rating 2019: Exceeding



When did your Being Equal Journey Start:

Our Being Equal journey started in Mid-2018, we choose the educators who would lead the work and they attended the Being Equal network meetings to learn more about the Program. Our service is part of the City of Port Phillip Council.

What we did well:

The council has a focus on preventing violence against women and has mandatory online training for all new staff, so several of our staff did have some knowledge about the issue before we started the program.

Reflection:

We got all staff to complete the staff reflection survey this showed us that most staff think gender equality and respect is important and part of their role and having more resources would support them to be more confident in challenging gender stereotypes. We started by introducing the key concepts of gender equality inequality at our staff meetings, we played several short videos about gender and gender roles and discussed these, and two educators completed the Respectful Relationships training offered by the Department of Education and Training, this helped us all to have a better understanding of the issue. Next, we hosted the Identifying and Responding to Family Violence training at our service this was effective in getting nearly all our staff to participate, the training gave staff more insights into all the forms of family violence and gave us an opportunity to talk about the processes we have in place to support staff and families.

What we did:

As a team we wanted to move away from highly gendered coloured toys to more natural colours and to give children more agency in the naming of toys and choosing their clothes and hairstyles. Our educators wanted to focus on the way they use language and to challenge each other on using gendered language and gender stereotypes.

We held a **Careers Dress up day** for all the educators and children, the parents got involved and children came dressed as photographers, girls as emergency workers, female educators came dressed as builders and farmers. The children seeing the educators dressed differently initiated lots of conversations about what women and men can do and what children can do.



Source [thriveglobal](https://www.thriveglobal.com/)

We have a family that dresses their children in whatever clothes they have available this often results in the boys dressed in skirts and dresses, this has challenged the thinking of several of our educators and they have questioned their assumptions about gendered clothing. The boys are very happy wearing whatever is in the wardrobe. Our spare clothes box has changed from being gendered to being just one box and children are encouraged to choose what they feel comfortable wearing. Boys seeing men wearing the man bun on the TV has led to them requesting for educators to style their hair in buns and ponytails.

We did a book audit in some of our rooms and are now more mindful of the books that families donate to the Centre. We have asked parents not to donate books with Disney or branded characters we find these books often promote very gender stereotypes characters and roles. We want children to be able to use their imaginations and creativity in stories.

Our Educator Lead supports the educators with planning and development and has been able to support educators to reflect on how they can incorporate the Being Equal messages into their activities with children. We have also put gender equality and respect as a focus in our Centre philosophy and our quality plan, this helps keep it alive in the Centre.

What has changed:

The naming of the dolls was driven by the children and we now have names like *Chi Chi* and *Wooki* for our dolls and they are dressed in all sorts of coloured clothing. We see more children wearing a range of clothes that aren't stereotypical and we don't see Disney type books in our collection.

Our educators have developed some posters to help them to promote gender equality and respect, including a poster on the 6 Being Equal messages and tips on using non-gendered language and phrases. These are displayed in the rooms.

As Centre Coordinator I've observed more conversations challenging gender stereotypes between educators and educators and children. Our culture has changed to a more learning and supportive one where we are more comfortable to explore these issues.

Keeping gender equality and respect alive :

The Being Equal network meetings have been useful in sharing ideas and talking about our challenges its helped us to bring new ideas into the Centre. We have a number of new staff this year, so we will need to develop their knowledge and skills in the program and to continue to use the assessment tools for our spaces and books. It's hard to have all of staff discussions on this issue as we only hold quarterly meetings so will need to explore other ways to support our educators. The Lead Educator will continue to support and prompt educators to consider gender equality and respect in planning and in the Centre quality plan.

Renown Kindergarten

2020

Name(s) of people sharing story: Sally Norman and Coral Groves

Who we are:

Renown Kindergarten in South Yarra has been providing kindergarten children with their first educational experience since 1920. We have a rich history & traditions and we are committed to offering an early childhood service of the highest quality.

Renown offers three different kindergarten programs, including our Three and Four-year-old programs and our Bilingual English/French program. In 2019, Renown launched its Extended Care Program for 3 and 4-year-olds, which runs Monday to Friday. It is delivered by a qualified Activity Group Leader and supported by a team-orientated Educator.

When did your Being Equal journey start:

Renown commenced their journey with the Being Equal project in October 2018.

What we did well:

Staff discussed a range of things that we believed we were already effectively doing. Our use of language was already appropriate, and staff were very aware of their use of gendered language. The service's resources, toys and equipment were all gender neutral and the visuals inside the service was diverse, colourful and did not reinforce gender stereotypes.

What did you do first:

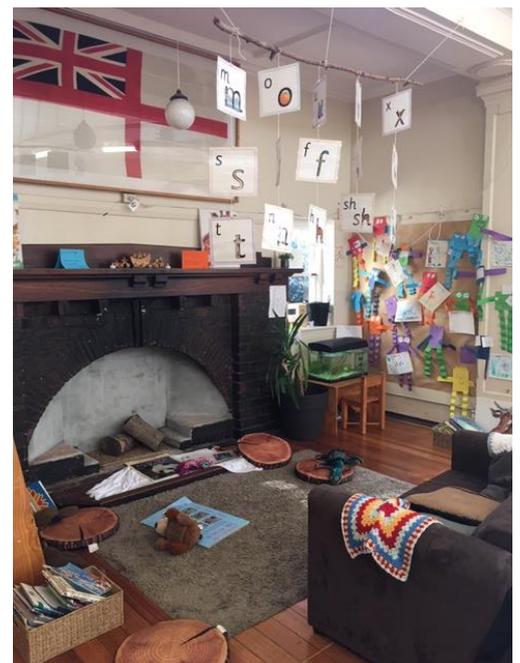
We carried out an all Staff briefing with staff and committee.

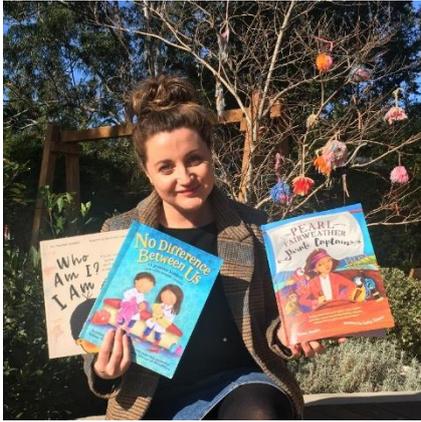
Reflection:

Policies and Family involvement were our two areas that required significant change. We also identified that the dress ups needed to be reviewed.

What we did:

- We created a policy called Respectful Relationships that addressed specific needs around child safety and the safety of families and teaching staff. This policy was then reviewed by the Committee, staff and families. This policy is reviewed once every 2 years as part of our policy review system.
- Parent information sessions were held to give an overview of the key concepts around Gender Equality. We covered things such as language, donations and the key BE messages.
- New families are sent a one-page document that outlines the key ideas. There are links to additional resources in the document.





What has changed;

The conversations around GE are much more frequent around the classroom and staff room. Teachers feel more empowered to educate and intentionally teach children about the importance of the key BE messages.

Tools we found useful:

Classroom Audit - this encouraged us to look at the images displayed and whether or not everyone was represented.

The daily learning space check - This gave us an insight into where children were spending the majority of their time.

Keeping gender equality as a priority at the Centre:

We have monthly meetings where 5 teachers meet from each class to discuss upcoming projects and ideas. This ensures that our practice is embedded across the entire kinder.

Windsor Community Children's Centre

2020

Name(s) of people sharing story: Sam Vale

Who we are:

Windsor Community Children's Centre located in the inner suburb at Windsor. We are a Community run not for profit centre. We have 54 places a day with the age range of 6 months till 6 years. Our most recent assessment and rating saw us rated at Exceeding.



When did your Being Equal journey start:

WCCC has been a participant in the Star Health Gender Equity program since 2018. This is a journey that we are proud to be continuing.

What we were already doing well:

WCCC's Being Equal journey began as a focused reflection on the centre and on professional practice in 2018 under the wonderful leadership of Rose Kelly (Previous Director) and Alistair Gibbs who as Educational leader motivated us as a collective to examine our practices and reflect with each other in relation to how we could achieve best practice through the lens of Gender Equity. It formed a part of each staff meeting agenda.

For us, the starting point was to examine the Anti bias goals and to look at if we were indeed working within the 4 goals. We undertook a lot of professional reading and had workbooks in the staff room so that we could comment on the articles that we were reading. It was important that there was a sense of trust and respect to undertake this focus. All of us needed to know it was a safe space to voice questions. We also had to be willing to reflect on things that challenged us. By discussing topics that challenged us honestly and openly, we can promote a deeper respect and engagement for all educators, children, and families.

What we did:

I think that our service has always strived to be a welcoming space for our community members. With Alistair we developed a rich anti-bias library that children and their families could take home and enjoy together. We undertook audits of the rooms, the books, and resources. We have critically reflected

and made decisions to discriminate for gender diverse children and families and educators within our centre.

Sam, Mel, and Jono have continued to have open and honest conversations regarding what we are doing, can we do more. Looking at new ways to reflect and make changes to practices and language around the use of gender daily.

Provocations for children – block corner had baby beds made from blocks and babies placed in the area. A small area in the three-year-old kinder room with a variety of photos, people in dresses, suits, dancers, to challenge stereotypical ideas around who can be what, and who can wear what.

Changes we made:

We have continued to champion the rights of all children to access high quality early education through our service. Ensuring that educators can answer the questions that children often will ask or make assumptions on based in long held gendered beliefs. And for all of us to feel ok and safe to ask a question and to be honoured with a thoughtful response.

Small provocations for children and families upon entering the gate to the service. I.e. “Miss Spiders tea party set up. And a message to families not to disregard children’s book but to reimagine them.

The monthly newsletter contributions have provided podcasts, book recommendations with a focus on Gender equity, Indigenous issues and celebrations. For NAIDOC Week and then Trans Awareness week we proudly displayed the Black rainbow organisations poster with fabulous Indigenous art and definitions for the term LGBTIQ.



What was the change:

We believe our educators are always re-evaluating their practices. Looking at what they can improve upon and where we can make gentle changes that uphold the centres philosophy of Respect, Resilience, Responsibility and Belonging.

We continue to provide strong leadership for educators who are requiring opportunities to reflect on the language that they are using and what small changes they can use to enact a huge shift in the children and the communities thinking around gender equity.

Keeping gender equality as a priority at the Centre:

We have a gender equity group that reflects using What’s app. We continue to inspire each other by appreciating that we are all still learning. We can each share articles of interest. Make suggestions for videos, books through the google classroom platform which we use for all staff communication.

Our goal is for the centre to continue to champion the rights of all children. To create a space where all families feel valued and fully embraced. To share what we do in a more impactful way with our community to engage with families who do not attend our centre. We will be creating a street library and street pantry at the front of the centre. We will begin using these areas to create connections with others and hopefully start conversations where previously there has been none. To use social media in a way that promotes the importance of a curriculum that upholds the anti-bias approaches and empowers our youngest citizens.

Being Equal Activities - Case Studies

Case Study: Intentional Teaching Activity: Challenging Gender Stereotypes

Coventry Children's Centre | **Jodi Green** | October 2019

What we did:

We held a Careers dress up day to raise money for Kids Cancer. All the staff and children were asked to dress up as a career. We encouraged children to come as any career they wanted to be.

Careers dress up day was successful – most staff participated with many wearing fluoro jackets, Jodi came as a doctor. The girls probably challenged gender stereotyping in careers more than the boys. The girls dressed up as a photographer (like her Dad), firefighter, astronaut, one boy came as a nurse, a few boys came as builders as they wanted to bring their tools in so they could play with them all day. One toddler girl came dressed in superhero costume. We had lots of conversations with the children about the careers everyone came dressed as.



Case study: Environments and Use of Space

Renown Kindergarten | **Sally Norman** | 2019

One four-year-old class made up of 29 children (13 girls, 16 boys), conducted a classroom gender map at 15 min intervals over the course of a full day (8.30am-3pm). This gender map was only observed in the indoor classroom space.

What we found in the mapping:

- Over the course of the day the block construction area was predominantly used by boys for longer periods of time. When girls engaged in this space it was for shorter periods of time and often additional resources were moved to this space by the girls (dolls, picnic resources)
- Book area was accessed equally throughout the day.
- Smaller construction (Lego) was used equally however we found boys spent a prolonged period of time in this space.
- Dramatic Play area (sushi cafe) was used equally throughout the day.
- Art/Collage space was predominantly used by girls for extended periods of time. We found that a couple of boys used this space for short periods of time and often had no structure or productive learning (one child spent time tipping out all of the feathers from the containers)

What we changed:

- We moved the block construction area to the centre of the classroom and extended the floor space of this area. We displayed images of constructions that had been previously built in this space as inspiration.
- We collected large cardboard boxes of all different shapes and sizes. We engaged with families and encouraged them to recycle these materials for us at home. Teachers then spent time each day in the art/collage area setting tasks for children. This was especially designed to give boys structure and direction. We also created a space where these pieces could be stored safely for the next day/week of kinder, encouraging continued learning over a period of time.

How the children interacted differently:

- The block construction area was a busy space with both boys and girls working together. This was helped by the addition of a teacher assisting with creating tall/different/unusual towers. Children took turns using the iPad to document and display their work.
- The art/collage area has been hugely popular, often with children needing to push back and move furniture to allow for more space. By having parents starting the collection process at home children are coming in with ideas about what to build. There has been a lot of collaborative work taking place between the children and children work in pairs and small groups to complete a structure.

Case Study: Book Audit

Clarendon Children's Centre | **Sam Newbury** | 2019

What we did:

Creating a culture of critically reflecting on books as a means of sparking shared conversations. This led to rich learning and how the books that children have access to, shape their evolving view of gender.

Reflection:

I performed a book audit, recording the results of the number of books in each room and their reflection on gender/diversity. The results were quite shocking to me. As an educator surrounded by other educators that really value reading books, I thought that the books that children had access to were going to be reflective of our diversity, love and inclusion. My assumption was wrong. It's not that the books were 'bad' but there was only one page, in one book, with a character that had a visible disability; despite the service having multiple children with visible disabilities. We had almost no books that contained an aboriginal perspective and our books had a strong leaning towards male characters.



When I approached team leaders about this, each team was equally as shocked but little to no action came from it. I tried to explain the idea of gender equal representation through a brief point at a staff meeting where I had quickly (very quickly) selected 3 books. One that was inappropriate, one that had some questionable themes and one that I felt was a great story. The feedback that I got was that some staff were unsure what it meant, that it wasn't explained well and that they were now unsure what books were 'ok' and what was 'not okay'. Some staff members felt like they might be doing the wrong thing, and this was not my intention for the

learning. I needed to communicate my knowledge in a way that was accessible to all members of the team, and not assume that their prior knowledge was similar to mine. My assumption that people would just 'get it' was incorrect, and I knew that I needed to reiterate the links that I was seeing, in a way that everyone could understand.

As educators, we all enjoy a bit of fun and silliness- so I thought getting educators up and moving around would help them to realise the impacts their book (and themselves) had on the space. I asked each educator to bring a book to the staff meeting that contained people (animals are very hard to talk about diversity with!) and asked them to have a quick read through before they attended. Each staff member was asked to stand up with their book and be the physical embodiment of that book. I labelled the sides of our room female, male, non-binary or unspecified. I asked each book to move to the most appropriate space for it when answering the following:

- What gender is your author?
- Is your main character male or female? (if multiple characters, who had the most speaking lines/what were the percentages in the book.)
This is where we started to see the greater divide and the leanings towards males being more represented.
- Who solved the problem? Who is the fixer?
This really was the most altering idea. Many of the books that had a female main character and had a male who solved the problem. I feel like the wording around this really enabled the team to think critically through the story.
For example: Snow White: "The problem is that she was too beautiful, and an evil queen was jealous, so she was put into a deep sleep by being poisoned. Who solved the problem and saved the princess? A man.
- Does your book show POC Yes/No
- Queer families? Yes/No
- People with a disability Yes/No

Reflections from staff:

"Mind blowing, changed my perspective completely, I didn't even think about the messages children are getting through the books we are reading. Especially the idea of the problem solver or the fixer who is usually male. Even in the Indian films, my children watch a lot i never realised how that fixer is always male and the girl always needy and in need of rescuing. It really changed my personal perspective, and I shared this with my husband, and his mind was blown too."

"It has been extremely useful for my learning and has guided me to critically reflect on my resources. The best bit for me was focusing on 'who solves the problem. I have: changed the gender of the story to make it fair and equal, changed the language of the songs (miss polly's doctor is a woman. Daddy finger's family can be made of lots of different family types) Reflected on books in our room, and purposefully having diverse books. When buying new books, I am assessing for equity and diversity"

What we found:

Now when I talk to the team about this approach, I feel like I have really increased their understanding of the inequalities that can be seen in the books we read to children. They are more critically reflective while reading books, and I hope feel more confident in the understanding of the importance of this practice. Staff feel more confident in trying new things (like changing pronouns) and have greater awareness when purchasing books and resources. The exercise although really simple, yielded great results for us.

Case Study: Parent engagement

Renown | Sally Norman | 2019

What we did:

To engage families in the Being Equal: gender equality and respect program we sent out a parent survey to our families. We wanted to start to raise awareness of the concepts and to gauge their level of interest. We have received 60 responses from our 113 families in total so far or 53%

The Questions:

1. Boys and girls should have equal opportunities to be heard, learn and play.
How important is this to you?
2. When choosing toys for a boy/girl I would choose:
 - Dolls
 - Trucks
 - Dress Ups
 - Blocks
 - Bucket and spade
 - Tea set
 - All of the above
3. I have a role to play in promoting gender equality
4. I would like some more information on how I can do my part to support Renown in becoming a gender equitable Kinder.

What we found:

- 96.7% of parents believed that boys and girls should have equal opportunities to be heard, learn, and play.
- 46.7% of families said they would select all of the above when choosing toys for boys.
- 66.7% of families said they would select all of the above when choosing toys for girls.
- 81.7% of families believed that they had a role in promoting gender equality.
- 75% of families wanted more information on how that can support their child.

Following this survey one family spoke directly with a teacher expressing their dislike for the path our gender equality work was taking and felt that the survey did not provide an opportunity to express their views.

Their main points of concern were:

- They felt it was not giving children a choice.
- Teaching this at a 3-year-old level was not age appropriate, children are so innocent and that thinking about these things was messing with subconscious thoughts. This made them very uncomfortable.
- The parents wanted to know about research findings and the impact this approach has on children.

What happened:

This gave us an opportunity to have a discussion with this family and have their voice heard but also for us to talk more about the program and the positive benefits for children. The parents were, if not completely convinced, felt much better about the program after our discussion and continued their child's enrolment at the centre.

Moving forward:

Parents are now provided with information about 'Being Equal' at the point of enrolment through an information page outlining the goals and process at Renown.

Parents are invited to our AGM night which is another platform for sharing the work that is being done in class.

At the beginning of each year we will send out the parent survey to new families and then follow up with an information session offered to everyone.

Case Study: The Environment

Windsor Childrens Centre | **Melissa Lowndes** | 2019

What we did:

Viewing the natural environment as a foundation for true learning, we have observed deeply how the modifications in the environment have changed the narrative for children's play and the engagement of how complex the interactions have become through a neutralised play lens.

What we found:

We observe that as the environment becomes more neutral, more grounded with native plants, larger logs, a reflexology water stone and developing fire pit, the play is more child directed into shared non-gender ideas. The dramatic play has moved away from the narrative of superheroes and PJ masks to camping, holidays, travels to different lands, boats, building giant channel and forts, tree cubby houses and large loose part constructions whereby the outcome is not important.

Ideas and values are openly shared without a word of 'you can't play, because you are a boy or girl.' The children are seeing beyond our conditioned society and the polarisation of our world that is black and white ideas, fostering a realisation of the spectrums of colour. We will continue to support the children to embody this way of being and hope that they are able to take it with them into their future learning.

Moving forward:

Following on the interest and family feedback of Lego, a large collection of Lego was added to the kinder space recently, including all colours and not just primary and ridged, by pastel tones and Lego people that can be pulled apart to question stereotypes. For example, a fire person's torso with a mermaid tail, which has provided the children a platform to discuss what is normal and what is identification of self in its truest form. From a gender lens, at first, we found more of the boys engaging in the play, however as the Lego remained accessible in the indoor environment the girls gravitated to the Lego also. We observed that this space become a hub of play with multi-peer play, often with two to three children in parallel play, social or objective play, moving into the realms of imaginative and role play. The children engaged for longer periods and were uninterpreted. This shift of our furniture to create protective spaces in the indoor environment has also allowed these wonderful changes to occur. We will continue to participate in this deep reflection of gender roles through pro-social modifications.