

TALKING QUALITY: *SPECIAL EDITION* Stories from Lockdown



IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome

-Welcome to a Special Edition of Talking Quality for 2021.

Stories from the Sector

-Harrison Early Childhood Centre, Georgia Smith and Victoria Petsas

-Weston Creek Children's Centre, Kylie Goodwin

-Torrens OSHC Woden Community Services, Emily Hawkshaw

-Northside Community Services, Leisa Wright

-Community Services #1 Mawson OSHC, Emily Richardson

-Community Services #1 Marlee Education and Care Centre, Rebecca King

-St Judes Early Learning Centre, Karen Leighton

-Communities@Work Neville Bonner and Mt Rogers, Anita Senjic

-Communities@Work Family Day Care and In-Home Care, Philippa Hargrave

-Noahs Ark Early Learning Centre, Nea Woods

-Aeon Academy, Tefany Thiedeman

-Spoonvilles! Kylie Goodwin

Sharing ideas from the sector— a collation of ideas from a variety of services.

Welcome

Welcome to a Special Edition of Talking Quality. This edition aims to highlight some of the great work that has been happening over the past months of lockdown and critical concern in our community around the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The situation this year has been slightly different to last year but one thing remains the same – education and care services have been there for our communities to assist people through these difficult times. Each service has its own stories to tell about how educators, management, families, and children have coped and how they have remained connected to their services.

We have selected a few of the stories we have gathered as we try to maintain our contact with the sector over the past weeks. We hope you find these stories helpful as you cope with these difficult times. Some qualities that are demonstrated consistently by education and care services include; resilience, creativity, adaptability, and perseverance. We hope that in reading this publication you will see yourself reflected, the strengths of our sector are highlighted in your work.

Thank you to our education and care workforce.

You are maintaining places for families and children where they can Belong, Be and Become at a time when these attributes are priceless.

Keep up the great work.

Rainbow Amidst the Storm-Harrison Early Childhood Centre

Although COVID-19 and the ACT's strict lockdown conditions have been unpleasant, and it is a very unprecedented time for all involved, we have found some rainbows amidst the storm. Having less children within our preschool room has provided educators with time to spend some one-on-one time with the children that are still attending our Centre. We have spent the extra time to dig deeper into our relationships with children, exploring their interests further, and creating stronger, more secure connections – this has left us reflecting on how we can improve our interactions with children in the future.

We have also spent additional time enhancing our classroom learning environments, creating new spaces indoor and outdoor, updating resources and creating a stimulating environment for growth, learning and development for when normality



returns. Although we thoroughly miss our 22 children, the busy, loud and tiring environment; the quiet has allowed educators to redirect aspects of our practice that make a substantial difference in how children respond to our Centre. Low numbers has emphasized to us the importance of spending time with smaller groups of children and how this can have a positive impact on the way children behave, learn and develop.

Not only do we maintain strong connections with the children attending the Centre, we also stay connected with the families at home by regularly checking in on them through phone calls and emails. We also send them video resources of educators reading stories, exercising, singing and dancing. Resource kits were also made available for families to take home including a clay kit, beading and threading kit and painting kit for the families to enjoy.

During lockdown I have had many opportunities to participate in professional development training. This included online ECA Learning Hub training, Conscious Discipline, Child Safe Organisations e-learning modules and participating in the 2021 virtual ECA conference. These trainings provided various modules of information to refresh and develop professional learning. The ECA Conference was a particularly educational experience. The theme for this year's ECA Conference was 'Young Citizens: the right to play, learn and be heard'. Throughout the conference we were able to learn new ideas from early childhood professionals and experts about how to respect and support the rights of all children through play, play-based pedagogy and child-informed practices. The conference was a great opportunity to explore and develop knowledge on how we view children as capable, independent learners. Attending the conference reinforced how important it is to view children as life-long learners and recognise different approaches to support children in upholding their own rights. Throughout the conference we were able to reflect on our own and the service's current practices, developing new ideas, approaches and strategies that could be shared and implemented. I have gained a deeper understanding of my role as an early childhood educator and will be mindful of how to support children's understanding of their right and ability to control their play and learning.



Prepared by Georgia Smith, Early Childhood Educator, and Victoria Petsas, Early Childhood Teacher

Taking a 'Glass Half Full' Lens-Weston Creek Children's Centre



The lockdown period has presented its fair share of challenges, that's for sure. At *Weston Creek Children's Centre*, we have decided to see the lockdown with an optimistic 'glass half full' lens. We used the time to experiment with a range of community engagement and connectiveness ideas as well as get on top of things like archiving paperwork and organising documentation. We are grateful to have such a supportive and passionate team.

We have recently opened a private Facebook group for staff only. We sent out an invite via email to staff and they had the opportunity to opt in to participate by asking to join the group. This was designed as a way to check in with each other socially, share ideas, knowledge and professional development resources.

Staff have positively engaged with the platform and contributed articles relating to Early Childhood Education and have answered reflective prompts about individual practice and values.

When the Chief Minister announced that we would be entering lockdown, there was a lot of uncertainty. By having one-on-one conversations, we were able to fully understand the emotions of our staff and could take this into account with our decision making. Using the Commonwealth supported payments we ensured no staff turnover during this period, and everyone was doing what they felt was right for themselves and their families. We celebrated both Educators Day and RUOK Day virtually and for the staff attending the service.



While brainstorming ways to stay connected we thought about the use of technology that schools and other services have been using, like Zoom. As these communication platforms can present privacy issues, we decided to ask families if they were interested in becoming a 'class contact' for their child's program. This enables families to connect via an online platform outside of the service. The 'class contact' will be the point of contact for families in individual programs who wish to connect online or outside of the service. This helps children and families to develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities as they are still able to socialize with their peers from the Centre safely during this time.



Our educational activity packs were an easy way to engage children who were at home. Educators worked together to come up with a number of different themed education packs. The educators collated a range of worksheets, paint and other craft resources, treasure hunts and matching and categorizing games. Families were able to collect these packs in a contactless COVID Safe way. Families have been very appreciative of these packs and have sent photos of their children engaging in the activities we provided them and we have created a display wall of these in the foyer of our Service.

During the start of lockdown, our educators came up with an idea for children at home to still be connected to us by sending out, via email, links and apps with activity ideas and inspiration for learning from home. During this time, we celebrated a range of community events including Book Week and RUOK Day.

We were able to use these events as the underlying theme for the activity ideas we sent to families. Some of the ideas included links to educational Podcasts, YouTube channels, Wellbeing and Mindfulness apps and educational experiences. We were able to provide families with access to a range of technologies to integrate into their play experiences at home. It also helps to teach skills and techniques to the children and encourages them to explore new information through technology.

Prepared by Kylie Goodwin, Director

Connecting with Community Online

Torrens OSHC–Woden Community Services

At the beginning of lockdown, my initial connections were with our families and children at home through calls, text and emails, making sure they had enough support systems in place and encouraging them to use our service if they were in need. I realised it was important as the Coordinator to connect to my own community. I felt drained and isolated when the sudden lockdown hit, so I reached out to my peer Coordinators to see if they felt the same. I began to realise that my peers were also experiencing challenges.

I work at a service that is incredibly fortunate, so it was important to reach out and offer support to other leaders, especially to those who had not experienced the last lockdown. We were able to bounce ideas off each other over chats on Microsoft Teams which motivated us to plan more enriching experiences for the children still present. We shared digital resources and methods of continuing the great work we do without the need for physical materials we would usually easily pick up from the shops.



Connecting to others inspired me to make the most of the lockdown instead of waiting for it to be over. I have a close relationship with the nominated supervisor of **WCS Duffy OSHC, Sarah Burgess**. Together we undertook a stocktake of our current IT resources and collaborated on the idea of connecting our children through WII sports online and over Microsoft Teams. This activity combined peer interaction and physical activity through the digital world.

During our activity, the children competed in WII sports tournaments and met up afterwards on Microsoft Teams. The educators then facilitated conversations between the service's children, asking questions about each other's lockdown experiences to help build new friendships. Our aim was for the children to continue building their social skills with peers outside of their immediate community and online classrooms. We wanted to encourage face-to-face social interactions with new and unfamiliar peers as online classes at home can run the risk of children sticking to their comfort zones.

Keep networking. If you are not as fortunate as I am to work for an organisation with multiple services, jump onto Facebook and search for OSHC groups (type keywords such as OSHC, NQS, EYLF and many will pop up), **OR** connect to online resources and webinars through small organisations such as Be You, Firefly HR and We Belong Education.

Prepared by Emily Hawkshaw, Coordinator

A Return to "Normal" Northside Community Services

Northside has been planning for the return of children to our Early Childhood Centres since the start of lockdown. There are many things that we have considered to ensure a smooth return, including taking into account lessons from the transition out of lockdown last year.

All Centres have installed the CBR Check-In app for educators to use when arriving each day. The centres will also be reducing the number of visitors allowed into the centre. Visitors will only be permitted in the case of an emergency or to ensure the safety of children, such as necessary maintenance work.

Centres will be releasing a fact sheet to all families prior to re-opening up Centres to all children. This will include important information around keeping their children at home if they are sick and reminding them



that children will be sent home if they begin to show signs of being unwell whilst at the centre. Families will need to drop and collect their child at the front door, to reduce the amount of people inside each building. We will also be asking families to maintain social distancing during arrival and departure by not crowding in the entry to limit numbers of people in a small area.

We will also be providing documentation for the children that have not attended during the lockdown about mask-wearing, so families can prepare their children for educators wearing masks in classrooms.

Rooms will not be combining during the day and educators will remain in their assigned rooms rather than move from room to room during the day. The centres will also be engaging in mostly outdoor play where possible depending on weather. Educator breaks will be also staggered to minimise gathering in break areas. Finally, shift times will also be staggered to avoid educators arriving in groups.

To ensure that children are able to transition back into the centre with a feeling of comfort and safety, educators have been sending them weekly videos. The videos consist of educators conducting morning meetings, singing, and reading. This has helped children stay connected to their educators and their classrooms. On return, educators will ensure routines and critical rituals are continued as they were before. The less changes that are made, the easier it will be for children to adjust.

Educators will use their knowledge from the ongoing Conscious Discipline training to aid children with their return. This includes utilising safe places in rooms and practicing breathing techniques which allow children to download calm. Educators will also use these techniques for themselves to remain calm and manage the challenges of the transition back. Educators will use their relationships with children to be aware of any changes that might indicate a child is suffering distress or anxiety, and we will be there to help them navigate their feelings and to self-regulate where possible.



Northside's educators will be supporting each other during this time. They have begun discussions about what the return will look like and how they can support each other and the children. Finally, they will be reminded to also look after themselves, and to let someone know if they are feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

Prepared by Leisa Wright, Senior Manager

Supporting Those in Need

Community Services #1 - Mawson Outside School Hours Care



They say people often show their true colours in times of crisis. If that's the case then our employees are a full and vibrant rainbow! From the start of the 2021 Canberra lockdown, demand for our children's services reduced significantly as many families kept their children at home. Just a small number of essential workers continued to send their children to our OSHC and early education centres. The reduction in demand for our services meant that a number of Educators (particularly casual employees) in our Mawson OSHC and our six Early Education Centres were faced with accepting a reduction in hours.

When CS#1's CEO Amanda Tobler was contacted by ACT Government asking for help with providing daily meals to a group of vulnerable Canberra's in quarantine, she saw an opportunity to offer additional hours to affected employees while taking up the task of helping a group of very needy people. Over the following 4 weeks many casuals took up the call to be deployed and assisted with shopping, cooking, packing and transporting over 5000 meal hampers. Not only did CS#1 employees do a complete pivot - they did it with enthusiasm and a sense of humour and we're more than just a little proud of their ability to make sure we met the challenge.



Story prepared by Emily Richardson, Director

Work Behind the Scenes

Community Services #1 – Marlee Education and Care Centre

There's a lot of talk lately about how tough times can bring out the best in people, and that's certainly ringing true at CS#1. In the past 7 weeks of lockdown we've been able to step up and help thousands of vulnerable Canberra's through our Pantry, Home Care Support Services, Transport Services, Early Education Services and have served over 5000 food hampers to a large group of people stuck in quarantine.

The CS#1 team has shown their support in different ways – some generously offered to reduce their hours and others have been asked to pivot in their roles to help meet the need of the changing environment.

What's also been interesting is uncovering the additional work that some of our employees are doing behind the scenes and beyond their work with CS#1. This week we spoke with Joanna Ventura - a casual educator who has been advertising across social media channels in order to collect donations that she then distributes to more needy people. Her background working in a retail charity shop meant she had many contacts which she's again tapped into in order to distribute a large amount of goods, from clothes and furniture to toys and bikes. We're pretty proud of people like this.



Story prepared by Rebecca King, Director

Connecting with Community Through Floriade St Jude's Early Learning Centre

This is the time of year where our families and communities from far and wide would be enjoying a day at Floriade, taking time to enjoy the sunshine, fresh air and to spot the many gnomes in the gnome garden that various local community organisations have painted for display. Well, COVID19 certainly put a stop to our annual outing but it did not stop St Jude's Early Learning Centre in Holder from continuing their tradition of purchasing gnomes from The Rotary Club of Canberra East, which in turn supports community service activities.



Like many services, St Jude's ELC are providing online remote learning for families and children through this challenging time of the declared lockdown period, with the centre remaining operational for essential workers and vulnerable children. The staff took this opportunity to engage the children in attendance in planting flower bulbs, that a local community member had donated, to create our very own St Jude's Mini Floriade garden for the community to enjoy whilst on their limited outdoor recreational time.



Families were offered contactless collection of gnomes to paint as an at home activity, they then returned the gnomes to the ELC for some weather proofing and to be displayed. Many Weston Creek community members have taken the time to stop whilst on their recreational walk to spot our gnomes. The children then thought we should leave signs next to our gnomes, some remind people to wear sunscreen, some to take time and find their favourite flower and some have clues to a friendly gnome for them to seek out.

As lockdown restrictions ease and we see a return to school, children will be able to spot their gnome and those of their friends as they start back. We are hoping this will ease the transition back to school in what has been such an uncertain and confusing time for all. What we have learnt is that in the most challenging of times, we can find alternate ways in keeping community connection and engagement with our centre.



Prepared by Karen Leighton, Director

Sustaining Connections with Children, Families and Community-Communities@Work Neville Bonner and Mt Rogers

During the state-wide lockdown, **Communities@Work** has continued its not-for-profit work delivering essential community services. Crisis support, Children's Services, and the Food Pantry have continued to operate guided by the organisation's Covid Response Plan. Educators have used ICT to conduct digital environment walkthroughs, documentation workshops, compliance checks, inclusion meetings, and WHS inspections in partnership with the Leadership Team. Through. Our Inclusion Team continues to meet monthly with the Australian Childhood Foundation's Trauma Champion Network, providing the opportunity to discuss the impact across the sector.

Our Neville Bonner team have not slowed down their efforts on supporting and sustaining connections with their children, families and community. They decided to fundraise for Camp Quality's "Big Walk for Kids Facing Cancer" and accumulated the kilometres by walking around the school for the month of September. They extended the invite to children and families who weren't attending OSHC at the time, tracking their distance and adding to the total. Ashlee (Program Coordinator) explained it "initially started because we wanted to continue our engagement with families and the community. We noticed a lot of families were going for walks and it was a good way to connect with them." Their initial target donation was \$360, with a distance of 100km. They have currently raised just over \$600 with 183 kms logged.



Our Mt Rogers team have explored and extended on a very specific interest of children at the service. Dinosaurs! Amy (Second in charge) stated, "We are enjoying planning experiences that children may not be able to do at home due to time constraints for working families and lack of resources. We noticed a lift in their (children's) mood and excitement around the activities". The focus on specific projects such as their "Dinosaur Story Book", playdough dinosaurs and research into volcanic eruptions allowed a safe and engaging environment for children. One Mt Rogers family noted the considerable change in their children's mood after they spent time at the school holiday program with their friends. Upon receiving this feedback, Amy shared "it's really validating for educators, it's really worthwhile for them to be coming in everyday and putting effort into the experiences that have an impact".

Story prepared by Anita Senjic, Senior Educational Leader OSHC

Exciting Ideas for Children and Educators Communities@Work Family Day Care and In-Home Care

Some of the exciting ways we are engaging with children virtually are:

- Weekly sessions with a music therapist for children and educators (this has been ongoing in the service for around 18 months, but moved to zoom last COVID lockdown);
- Farm and garden tours from one of our support coordinators who lives on a farm;
- Auslan song sessions;
- Scarecrow project- educators and children are creating their own scarecrows at home to share with everyone and still maintain a community connection we have with Erindale Community Gardens;
- Inclusion support will be attending a playgroup in the coming week to assist educators with any questions they may have.

The coordination unit is conducting zoom/teams sessions where educators can drop in for a chat. Our educators are also being very proactive making learning packs for families at home and sharing their ideas with fellow educators on our closed facebook group for educators. This facebook group has also been another great way to connect educators and share additional resources and keep in touch.

Story prepared by Philippa Hargrave, Assistant Director, Children's Services

Virtual Learning and Routines

Noah's Ark Early Learning Centre



Despite the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19 and the current lockdown uncertainty Noah's Ark Early Learning Centre continues to source and implement ways to support children and families to remain connected to the service and ensure children's ongoing development and learning is supported throughout the crisis.

This has led to major shifts in practices including creating digital interactive material, supporting parents to run play-based activities and producing sessions and resources to engage with children through online platforms. One way we have supported this ongoing connection is by setting up teams and inviting all Noah's families to join in. Using teams, we have implemented a virtual group time at 10AM every morning Monday to Friday and the response from the children and families has been amazing. Our virtual group time programs vary from day to day as we

encourage and receive feedback from families and reflect on our new teaching strategies, which is co-facilitating children's learning process digitally.

We start our virtual group time every morning with an Acknowledgement of Country both verbally and in AUSLAN.

This is followed by a music session, in which an educator, (who can sing and play the guitar beautifully), performs some songs as per the children and family requests.

Book Club follows the music session with a variety of interactive books so that the children can read actively. Our educators are taking turns to join virtual group time Book Club so that Noah's Ark children and families still have an opportunity to connect with each educator at the centre during lockdown.

Art & Craft Session: normally the day before the next virtual group time, we inform the families about the art and craft theme and which materials they may need to prepare

Cultural Competence: (which we feel is a strength at the service). Each day our educators take turns to teach the children to sing, count and say simple words in Tagalog, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, German, Afghans, and Hindi.

Fundamental Movement Skill: we strive to encourage the children to be active as much as possible. Thus, we usually end our virtual group time with Yoga, Movement Cards, Treasure Hunt or even Bingo!



Prepared by Nea Woods, Director

Running Online Programs for Children 7+ Aeon Academy

Here is a little bit about some of the ways we continued to maintain contact with our families over the Spring lockdown vacation.

At Aeon Academy we run a number of programs, two of our oldest and best loved programs are Creative Catalyst Visual Arts and Vala Adventures. Many of our children spend years attending vacation workshops, volunteering in the programs and then picking up some paid work from age 16. We were devastated when we realised we would have to cancel the program this year for the lockdown!

BUT WAIT we thought... Let's go online!



So Vala Dramatic Adventures involved families booking a day, providing a computer and a steady internet connection for their child, awaiting the zoom invitation and logging into the live streamed, role playing game, facilitated by our very inspiring Educators, Mathew and Enki. They made sure there were plenty of fresh air breaks, stretching and guided exercises tied in with the story. The children were very committed to the program.

Meanwhile in Creative Catalyst Visual Arts we had our amazing artist Educators; Lauren, Isabelle and Ochre (from her studio in Tasmania) delivering ceramic workshops like Prehistoric Pots and Dragon Animalia as well as painting workshops such as The Bird and Botanical Oils. We prepacked all the art kits with the materials required, contacted the families and arranged for contactless pick up.

It was all quite labour intensive but it kept our core team working together (although apart) and we had fantastic feedback from the families and kids involved. In fact we are still running these classes until lockdown finishes and even then we might keep on going!

Story prepared by Teffany Thiedeman, Artist and Provider of Aeon Academy



Spoonville's around Canberra

Weston Creek Children's Centre

We were excited to invite families to help create our very own Spoonville. Families were encouraged to decorate a wooden spoon and place it in the garden out the front of our service. This trend originated in England during their first lockdown and has taken off on social media.

The idea of Spoonville is to help children and families in the community to stay positive during lockdown by seeing the different creations of Spoonville and watching the population grow. It also encourages creativity and physical activity as families use their daily exercise time to walk to the service and place their spoon in the garden. We are very excited to watch our Spoonville family grow over the coming weeks.

Prepared by Kylie Goodwin, Director

Other services creating a Spoonville for their communities

- KidsClub Symonston Early Learning Centre
- Marlee Education and Care Centre in collaboration with Narrabundah Early Childhood School
- Manuka Childcare Centre (MOCCA)



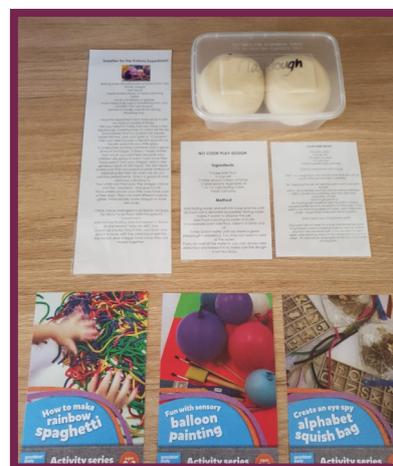
Sharing Ideas from the Sector

CECA have been keeping in touch with the sector during this difficult time and have been inspired by the creative thinking and innovative ideas educators, teams and organisations have implemented to best support their families, children and each other. Examples shared with us demonstrate how well services were aligning their practices and decision making with the guiding principles of the National Quality Framework. Here are a variety of different ideas that have been shared over this period from services across the ACT.

Supporting Children:-

Goodstart Early Learning Kingston

Educators have developed a range of experiences for children to engage with at home, including reading and sharing videos. Take home kits have been prepared by educators and collected weekly. For example: the service made playdough and attached activities for children to complete. Nursery take home kit included tips on making resources at home and attached resource ideas they can use within their own home.



Lollipop Early Learning Centre

Educators have been receiving lots of requests from children for favourite songs and stories to be shared. Families have been invited to send photos and videos of their children learning from home through a closed Facebook page/WCS PublicCenter Shared Point.

Uniting Bunyarra Early Learning Chisholm

Children have been encouraged to make things at home which can be displayed at the service when they return.

Birralee Early Education and Care Centre

The service has been utilising online tools to make sure families, educators and children stay connected. Disco parties and play and paint packs have been enjoyed by all.

Busy Bees at Crace

Educators have been working hard to develop videos to support children at home, including daily virtual group times for each room and inquiry learning experiences where ingredients are sent out and children can join in from home.



Wattle Early Childhood Centre

The service has been holding regular zoom meetings, including story sessions, cooking classes, incursions with our music and drama teacher and the Wiradjuri Echoes. The lead educators of each space have also been scheduling zoom meeting with each individual child and family to remain connected and put support plans in place for their transition back to Wattle.

Sharing ideas from the sector continued...

Supporting Educators:-

Woden Community Services– Red Hill OSHC

The service has been hosting a virtual trivia. The only resource required to participate was an internet connection, and the general knowledge of trivia. The nature of trivia makes it fun and accessible for a diverse range of people. The trivia was developed on the Kahoot! platform, the coordinator used their knowledge of educators' interests and cultures to come up with questions which they hoped would be engaging and promote discourse. The invite was extended to everyone within the team, and they ended up with a great turnout (including other members of educators' households joining in!). With the conclusion of the quiz, there was a reluctance for people to log off, and it morphed into a virtual games night lasting several hours.



Sage Education and Childcare

Families have shown their appreciation to the service by sending in positive feedback, chocolates, kind messages and checking in with staff. Educators have been calling families regularly, completing 'summative assessment calls' and checking in. Families have responded well to this and are keen to continue after lockdown ends.

Supporting Families/Community:

Heritage Early Childhood Centre

Educators at Heritage have taken the time to update their well-resourced library, connect with families online, engage with their close community including supporting families at ANU and providing upkeep for the ANU community garden (environmental centre). Online material and zoom sessions have included yoga/fitness/health, music sessions and STEM-related learning. Educators have additionally taken feedback from families about computer fatigue and hand-delivered forest school learning packs made specifically for getting children and siblings outdoors to play in nature.

Lavender Lane Child Care Service

The service has developed a virtual tour for families wanting to enrol but not able to visit. To continue engaging children in learning from home, educators have been connecting with children throughout each week on Zoom, showing them the veggie garden and asking their input on what can be planted for Spring. The service has also created an "I went walking" lockdown innovation of the book with children's photos to support children to express their experiences during lockdown.

Gungahlin Children's Centre

The service has been making good use of the School Bag app to send news and activities to families. Educators are facilitating a "click and collect" arrangement for families to be able to pick up ingredients for experiences.

Yerrabi Ponds by Busy Bees

The service is utilising their ongoing practice of their "gratitude plate," The idea behind this project is that when you receive the Gratitude Plate, you are to fill it up with some yummy home baking or cooking goods and deliver it to a staff member, family or services within the community to thank them. They then give this to another person or family from the Service who repeats the ongoing cycle of gratitude.

