

# TALKING QUALITY: SPECIAL EDITION COPING DURING COVID-19



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*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.*

## Welcome

Welcome to a Special Edition of Talking Quality for 2020. In Edition One this year we referred to the possibility of sharing more stories from the sector. We wanted to do this as we have noted in our conversations with services that many are doing extraordinary things in coping with the challenges presented by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

We wanted to share some of these stories, realising that you will all have your own stories and strategies to cope in these times but also feeling the need to share and learn from one another.

Many of you may have viewed the video “*Making difficult decisions—choosing the right thing to do to move forward*” sent out by Children's Education and Care Assurance and presented by Catharine Hydon and Dr Kate Highfield. As you read the stories from the sector included in this Special Edition you may like to reflect on the decision making undertaken in adapting and changing to meet the challenges presented by COVID-19. You may also reflect on how these stories show that the Guiding Principles of the NQF have been enacted and positively influenced decision making.

We hope you enjoy these stories.

### *Guiding Principles of the NQF*

- *The rights and best interests of the child are paramount.*
- *Children are successful, competent and capable learners.*
- *Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the framework.*
- *Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued.*
- *The role of parents and families is respected and supported.*
- *Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.*

## Our journey through COVID-19

### CSIROCARE Black Mountain

**Coronavirus (Covid-19) are words that will go down in history.** Yes it halted the world, it caused mass uncertainty, but it didn't halt a network of support and gratitude, in fact it brought our small community of families, children and educators closer together. It opened our eyes and hearts to gratitude, it encouraged us to look for the positives, to reflect and to even slow down. Essentially, it helped build an even bigger sense of community and belonging than before. It reminded us of the significance of our roles and the value of Early Childhood Educators, which was reinforced through ongoing support, appreciation and acknowledgement from our families and Parent Committee. Upon the declaration of Covid-19 being a pandemic, multiple meetings took place to discuss reducing risks and maintaining the safety and wellbeing of our families and educators.



**Communication was key, it**

**is always key.** Continuous updates of any warnings, recommendations or helpful websites were forwarded on to families. Extra hygiene measures were also put in place such as extra sanitising stations throughout the centre, having only one parent per family enter the centre to pick up and drop off their child/ren, asking families to sanitise their hands before entering our building, scheduling in extra cleaning/sanitising times in common areas throughout the day, cancelling all non-essential visits or checks to a later date and cancelling all external activities for children such as music and yoga.

**Like many services in Canberra,** we've been doing our best to cope with the challenges thrown at us this year. We had experienced continuous smoke for months on ends, fires and then a hailstorm that damaged our centre and almost every staff member's car. Educators and children were already feeling the effects of these disasters; thus, we knew boosting morale and focusing on wellbeing was to be at the forefront of all decisions made. As the number of children attending dropped dramatically, up went the uncertainty of job security. Thankfully, our Parent Committee, management team and families not once let us hit the ground. Support, appreciation and recognition were offered in a variety of beautiful ways. Educators with school aged children were offered time off using personal leave to help their children transition to online learning at home. Educators were also offered days off or an early mark, where possible, as a token of recognition for their tireless efforts.

**Our families have always been thoughtful and caring,** but the gratitude we received as a team during this time was overwhelming and heartfelt. Our Parent Committee along with individual families brought in a variety of gifts showing their appreciation and thoughts for us during this trying time. Easter hampers filled with chocolates, a variety of herbal teas and biscuits, a huge bunch of Australian native flowers and freshly baked hot-cross buns for our morning tea. There were also gift cards, thank you cards, and hand-made cookies beautifully decorated by children at home that they personally delivered to us. These kind gestures brightened spirits and reminded us that our families and committee had our backs. Many other families communicated their appreciation and support through emails or in person, encouraging us to reach out if needed. Every couple of week's management would also put on a morning tea to say thank you to the educators and to help brighten their day. We felt valued, appreciated and respected as individuals as well as educators.

## CSIROCARE Black Mountain continued...



**Not knowing how long this situation** would last we utilised StoryPark to keep all families (whether at home or at the centre) in each room updated with a “what did we get up to today” story containing highlights of the day with photos, activities, recipes, experiments, books read and links to these experiences. Some of the activities looked at germs and the need to *effectively* wash our hands, others demonstrated how germs spread and grow through simple but effective experiments using glitter, pepper, soap, apples and bread slices. A zoom session was also offered by Rocking Horse Music which was a lovely way for all children to connect and see each other.

**The lower numbers by no means meant less work**, it instead meant opportunities for reflections on routines, indoor and outdoor refurbishment and of course much more individual or small group meaningful interactions and experiences. It was also a reminder to slow down and see the world through the eyes of a child.

**One of our educators had a beautiful idea**, her mum was in a nursing home down the coast and with the restrictions on visit-



ations there, they were feeling isolated and depressed. So, she wrote them a letter with the children in her room and sent the nursing home artwork to cheer them up. We later received a lovely reply letter with photos of the children's artwork hung up on the walls of the nursing home. Knowing we had warmed the hearts of those far away, we wanted to reach out and do the same with those closer to home. A recommendation was made for Sir Leslie Morshead Manor at Lynham. Artwork was sent, emails and letters of gratitude were received and a conversation regarding future visits was discussed. This wasn't just rewarding, but also a lovely teachable moment for all our children too: to reach out and think about others, not just themselves.

**Regardless of the challenges over this time, we continued to work as a team and support one another. We might be a small centre but we are one big supportive family.**



### Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ The article talks about communication being key, *'it is always key'* during a time of crisis. Have the challenges surrounding Covid-19 created a better system for communication with families or has it stayed the same? Reflect on why you think that is.
- ⇒ The article states that *'boosting morale and focusing on wellbeing was to be at the forefront of all decisions made'*. How is wellbeing and morale prioritized at your service?
- ⇒ Is this something that changed during the pandemic? What worked well and what strategies will you continue with moving forward?

## Sharing learning with families through COVID-19

### YMCA Gungahlin Early Learning Centre

Attached are a few photos of the Family/Educator Conferences that took place in mid April as we endeavoured to continue our high quality partnerships with families for children's ongoing learning and development. The summative assessments were completed and delivered to families prior to the booked family session via StoryPark.

Our family connection forms were at the ready and the open, honest and robust dialogue commenced. This led to wonderful family feedback, input and strategies to assist in the development of their children's goal for learning for term two. It was honestly such a special time for the educators and families to have together, especially for the families who have not been attending the centre for quite a few weeks.



The centre also provided links to learning opportunities to share with families who have been away from the centre via StoryPark as well as our social media platforms for the broader community to join in on as well.

Prepared by Zoe Zatschler, Director



#### Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ What strategies has your service had in place to maintain communication with families about each child's learning during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- ⇒ How do you document communication with families to ensure that children's goals for learning are developed through this collaboration?
- ⇒ Could some of these strategies be ongoing and support the work/life balance of families within your service community?
- ⇒ Could you develop a goal for your QIP that will provoke ongoing discussion and reflection in this area?

## A meaningful community project Flynn Early Childhood Education Centre

**At Flynn Early Childhood Education Centre**, we recently received a grant through the office of Dr Andrew Leigh MP to improve the aesthetics of our pre-school outdoor play space. We commissioned a large piece of Australian Indigenous artwork to cover an existing wall that was quite plain.

**We asked Ronnie Jordan from Culture on the Move**, to see if she would be interested in creating a mural for the service. Ronnie was more than willing to undertake this work for us and took the time to liaise with the rooms, gathering input from children and staff from across the service to create something meaningful and magical for our wall. The mural incorporates the links that we have with each other, the rooms, community, children and families.

**The mural was started in February** prior to the current pandemic. It came to a halt initially but we were able to explore ways for Ronnie and her son Coen to work from a safe distance outside, allowing them to continue to work on the meaningful, inspiring and creative mural that will be a lasting memory for all educators, children, families and the community. Once restrictions are eased further, Ronnie and Coen will be inviting children, families and members of our local community to add their handprints on the wall too. The children have been inspired by Ronnie's ideas and enthusiasm and this has progressed into further learning experiences within the rooms and additional discussions outside of the service.

**Thank you to Ronnie and Coen** for all their hard work and dedication in helping to create this mural. Ronnie has been part of our community for many years, educating children and staff on Indigenous culture and language. Our favourite shared experiences have been the game days on our local oval and weaving. We look forward in continuing to work with Ronnie. We would also like to thank Dr Andrew Leigh MP for this community initiative and opportunity.

**Prepared by Natasha Bunter, Director**



### Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ When faced with obstacles, how do we adapt practice to ensure that we continue to work towards our goals?
- ⇒ When making changes to environments, how do we make it meaningful and create opportunities for children, families and the community to be involved?
- ⇒ How do we respectfully engage Australian Indigenous people in projects within our centres and what are the ethical considerations we should address?

## Connection through COVID

### Inspired Family Day Care ACT



**Family day care is a unique setting**, where educators and children learn and play together in an educator's own home. At Inspired Family Day Care connection is important not only between educators, children and their mentor (coordinator), but also between educators and educators.

**The COVID19 pandemic paused excursions** and that meant pausing the opportunity for educators and children to connect with each other outside their own group. With children self-isolating at home and with mentors not visiting family day care in person, we all realised how important our connections to one another are. Every educator has spent time and developed resources to maintain their relationships and connections with children during this time. It happened very naturally through educators deciding to put together 'Play Kits' which they dropped off to children self-isolating at home. Each educator did this a little differently however they have all based these

kits on each child's interests and learning journey.

**One educator created a number matching resource** because a child was so interested in numeracy before they began self-isolation with their family. Another educator sent play dough to isolating children and then encouraged them to share what they created with the rest of the group. Pea seedlings that were being planted at family day care were dropped off for children at home so they could watch them grow too. Craft packs were sent to children so when they returned they had shared experiences with their peers. This desire for connection was reciprocated with self-isolating



families walking by their educator's residence and stopping to say a social distanced hello or dropping off their craft creations to their educator.

**Technology has been an incredible support** during this time and has seen educators connecting with children at home via video calls. Stories were shared between the educator and children still attending and children at home. Mentor visits utilised technology as well and virtual visits were a chance to read stories to children via Zoom. Mentors from our other states regularly meet via video link (often with a funny theme or something to support wellbeing and connection) and we have video community meetings inviting all Inspired educators from QLD, VIC, NSW and the ACT to join in and connect with one another.



## Inspired Family Day Care ACT continued...

**We have learned so much through the COVID pandemic**, it has been a challenge, however it has been an opportunity for so much growth too. One of our reflections at a recent zoom community meeting was "what we can take from this experience into a new future?" Words like, community, gratitude, connection and kindness were all strong themes from our team of mentors and educators, and we will hold these themes in our minds and close to our hearts moving to whatever the future holds.

**Everyone was able to maintain a sense of belonging** which has truly shone through now that children are returning to care with no separation anxiety and a beautiful strong sense of belonging and attachment and we are a stronger team because of it too.

**Provided by Emma Cornwall, Nominated Supervisor  
and Educator Mentor**



### Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ How have we been communicating with families to ensure that we understand their needs during these times?
- ⇒ What are the ethical choices and decisions we make when considering how we use technology within our programs?
- ⇒ What have the past few months taught us about community?
- ⇒ In what ways have we changed our processes, to limit feelings of isolation for our educators?
- ⇒ What positive changes were made to our practices during this time, that we will keep as we continue to move forward?

## My Experience with the Majura Hub School

YWCA Canberra



### Overview

**YWCA Canberra was contracted** to supervise children at the Majura Primary School and Kingsford Smith School campus hubs for children unable to learn at home.

**I have worked as Program Manager** at YWCA Canberra's Majura School Age Care for close to two years and was invited to co-supervise the YWCA Canberra staff at the Majura hub. What at first looked like a daunting task presented itself as an amazing opportunity to learn, grow and teach.

**I worked closely with our quality support** team to ensure that I was prepared from day one. We were asked to place YWCA Canberra staff in each classroom from eight different schools across North Canberra, to help facilitate learning.

**I liaised with the two external principals**, Matt and Kristine, to find the best ways to use our skilled educators. To maintain consistency throughout hub school, educators were placed consistently in the same classrooms throughout the period. We decided that it was best to place two educators in adjoining rooms to support each other, teachers, LSA staff and children.

### The challenges

**Our greatest challenge was to ensure** that every child and staff member was given enough time to exercise, rest and relax. This was made more difficult by the wet weather in the first week, especially in a time when children were already staying inside at home more than normal. With everyone stuck inside, it was an opportunity to run different activities throughout the day. The activities included running games, challenges, and ball games in our hall and performing arts room. It gave the YWCA Canberra staff an opportunity to engage the children in a familiar environment, while providing teachers time for a quick break.

### The highlights

**My experiences allowed me** to grow as an educator and a supervisor. I worked with two external principals who were very supportive over the three weeks. They gave me autonomy to run the staff the way we felt was most suitable but were always there to help if needed.



## YWCA Canberra continued...

**Observing how the YWCA Canberra staff** and teaching staff interacted pleasantly surprised me. They were able to communicate with each other very well from the beginning, to create a safe environment for learning. Teachers supported educators to run small group times, active games, and experiences with children. Educators were available to provide support on Chrome Books and to read with the younger children.

**Staff were given the opportunity** to form new relationships with children from the different schools and reconnect with children from holiday care. They built respectful and reciprocal relationships over the three weeks and were able to support children in a unique learning environment. We normally operate our program in conjunction with the My Time Our Place framework, so it was a chance for all educators to gain valuable experience from watching the teachers work from a different perspective.

**During recess and lunch times**, all children played in the same spaces. This provided opportunities for children to interact with children from different schools.

**The year six and some year five children** from all schools gathered each lunch time to play netball. Some of the children already had connections from sports they play outside of school. Through this, the children were able to build new relationships and expand their networks. It was a good opportunity to build new relationships, going into high school next year. As many of these children will attend high school in the North Canberra region, I hope these connections will help them settle in next year.

**The community aspect of this work** surprised me the most. The relationships that developed between YWCA Canberra educators and teaching staff, between staff and children, and between the children themselves were incredible.

Prepared by Damian Miles, Program Manager



### Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ How did we adapt current procedures and practices in order to support educators during this time of change?
- ⇒ How do we ensure that we are being ethical in our decisions and supporting educators to be a part of changes to their normal roles?
- ⇒ How do we support children and families who may be experiencing high levels of stress during the uncertainly occurring in their lives?
- ⇒ In what ways were we able to meaningfully engage with children, families and teachers, who we may not have known previously?
- ⇒ How do we plan to continue the relationships which were developed during the Covid19 pandemic?

## Acts of kindness and authentic recognition

### Forrest Early Childhood Centre



Community Services #1 are currently running a Kindness Matters Project. Forrest Early Childhood Centre is promoting this project with their service community. Regular challenges encourage the community to engage in random acts of kindness such as sending someone an "I'm thinking of you card" or giving one genuine compliment each day for a week.

Educators are reading books about kindness and recording children's ideas about kindness in action. The service community has also been engaging in acts of kindness to support the team at Forrest Early Childhood Centre. For example, the team has received beautiful gifts from families to thank the educators for their wonderful work throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Prepared by Shruthi Tikare, Director



#### Questions you may like to ask:

- ⇒ How did you/your service prioritise a sense of belonging throughout the pandemic?
- ⇒ Throughout the pandemic, how did you/your service promote positive experiences for staff, children and families on a day-to-day basis?
- ⇒ Could some of these strategies be ongoing? What other strategies could be used moving forward to uphold morale and authentic recognition?

## 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 families:

#### [Burgmann Anglican Preschools and Early Learning Centre](#)

Educators developed take home packs of sensory resources such as clay and playdough for children and families to take home. They recorded group times and reading sessions and provided families with links to online resources and games.

#### [Communities@Work Narrabundah Early Childhood Service](#)

The service sent out their "Snapshot of the Day" to all families to share ideas of experiences to try at home and to keep the children connected with what is happening at the service while they were in isolation.

#### [Ducklings Early Education](#)

The service offered to collect children from their cars and take them out to meet families on pick-up. This supported families that were more vulnerable such as pregnant mothers.

#### [Emmaus Christian School](#)

The team sent out daily emails with links to YouTube videos to support children to engage in art, craft, sensory, literacy and music experiences. They also provided links for families to support children's wellbeing such as <https://emergingminds.com.au/>.

Parents were provided with recipes to make playdough. Sending daily emails enabled the team to plan experiences according to what is happening that day. For example, educators suggested that children engage in mud play outside on a rainy day.



#### [Gold Creek World of Learning](#)

The team developed packs for families and children who were at home. They also developed risk assessments that related to issues relevant to the Covid-19 changes.

#### [Guardian Services](#)

Introduced a procedure in all services for educators to meet children in the foyer and take their temperature and then educators take them to their room. The provider created a "Learning Exchange" which is a place to share links, recipes, experiences and story times with families whilst they are at home. Some services used this time of lower attendance rates to implement more family grouping to support children to interact and learn with their siblings.

#### [Nan's Child Care Centre](#)

The service has been sharing lots of ideas and resources on their Facebook page for families.

## Sharing ideas from the sector continued...

### Supporting educators:-

#### [Amazing Family Day Care](#)

The co-ordinator sourced information in a range of languages to support educators. Educators all participated in online training relating to Covid-19 and have been using this knowledge to develop policies. [Covid-19 infection control training](#)

#### [Communities@Work Stirling Child Care and Education Centre](#)

Educators had the opportunity to work through modules on the Be You online learning portal to support their own wellbeing and had reflective discussions within their teams.

#### [Communities@Work Taylor Child Care and Education Centre](#)

The leadership team accessed information from the Union to implement practices to keep educators safe.

#### [YMCA Early Learning Centre Jamison](#)

They implemented 'Thankful Thursday' for educators and brought in morning tea & educators had the opportunity to write on the whiteboard things they were thankful for.

### Supporting children:-

#### [Bruce Early Childhood Centre](#)

The preschool children and educators participate in a mime of washing hands together each morning. Parents reported that the children had transferred this learning to their home environment and were doing a 'surgical standard' hand wash. Other rooms at the service made use of The Wiggles or the Baby Shark handwashing songs.

[The Wiggles Handwashing Song](#)

[Baby Shark Handwashing Song](#)

#### [Conder Early Learning Centre](#)

Educators planned experiences to focus on emotions and provided children with opportunities to share how they were feeling. They also used science experiences to demonstrate to children how effective handwashing is.

#### [Coombs Early Learning](#)

The service recommended resources from The Worry Bug website to support children and families through this uncertain time.

[The Worry Bug Website](#)

#### [KU Braddon Children's Centre](#)

The service is using a resource called "Hi, My Name is Coronavirus". They were sending home video stories and songs to children. The staff did a Tik Tok video to the song "Happy" to share with families.



## Resources that may be of assistance in supporting children and families during Covid-19.



### Suggested Links

The resources listed below may be useful to services as they work to support children and families.

Belonging, Being and Becoming for Educators—[https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-04/QA4\\_BelongingAndBecomingForEducators.pdf](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-04/QA4_BelongingAndBecomingForEducators.pdf)

Covid-19 infection control training—<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covid-19-infection-control-training>

Developing a Culture of Learning Through Reflective Practice—[https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-09/QA1\\_DevelopingaCultureofLearningThroughReflectivePractice.pdf](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-09/QA1_DevelopingaCultureofLearningThroughReflectivePractice.pdf)

Developing and Reviewing Your Quality Improvement Plan—<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-03/DevelopingandReviewingYourQualityImprovementPlan.pdf>

Emerging Minds - <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/supporting-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/>

NAEYC: Focus on Ethics: - <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2016/ethical-responsibilities-dilemmas>

National Quality Standard and Educator Wellbeing Posters - <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/supporting-materials/posters>

NQS Knowledge Game: Quest for Quality— <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/supporting-materials/games>

Practical Ideas to Support Continuous Quality Improvement—[https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/Practical-ideas-to-support-quality-improvement\\_0.pdf](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/Practical-ideas-to-support-quality-improvement_0.pdf)

Supporting Agency: Involving Children in Decision-making— [https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-04/QA1\\_SupportingAgencyInvolvingChildreninDecisionMaking.pdf](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-04/QA1_SupportingAgencyInvolvingChildreninDecisionMaking.pdf)

Supporting Educator Wellbeing Through These Challenging Times—<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/SupportingEducatorWellbeingInfosheet.pdf>

The Baby Shark Handwashing Song—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L89nN03pBzI&vl=en>

The Wiggles Handwashing Song—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJD9zPv2NmM>

The Spoke: Reflective Practice: Making a Commitment to Ongoing Learning- <http://thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/reflective-practice-making-commitment-ongoing-learning/>