

Preschool Field Officer Service Newsletter Term Two 2019

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AREA LEADER UPDATE

Hello Wyndham Educators

Welcome to our Term Two Newsletter.

The PSFO Service has once again received an overwhelming number of requests for support in the first 6 months of the year. I know this is not a surprise to many, as you are all very in tune with the multi-layered needs and requirements of families and children using your programs.



To assist the support of educators while they are waiting for a PSFO to visit, we have been very fortunate to have Michelle Shaw join us for one day a week until the end of term three.

Michelle works as an Early Childhood Educator at Thomas Chirnside Kindergarten in Werribee and is currently studying a Masters of Learning Intervention at Melbourne University. Michelle joins us every Tuesday and contacts educators that have submitted a request for support by phone. During these conversations, Michelle provides support, advice on possible referrals and strategies to start things moving while waiting for a PSFO to visit.

The PSFO Team have taken on the development and delivery of the Wyndham Child & Family Services Network PD Calendar this year as an additional project. It has started off extremely well by having just about every session fully booked with 50 participants. Some of the sessions that are coming up during the second part of the year include *Practical Strategies for Teaching Children with ASD, Sensory Processing, Working with Therapists & Consultants in Your Program, Intentional Teaching* and *Sand Play*. Also included on the professional development calendar has been the roll-out of the *Hanen Teacher Talk Series*. Teacher Talk is an evidence-based program that provides educators with useful strategies to assist with creating rich and stimulating learning environments. You can read more about *Teacher Talk* in this addition of the newsletter.

The planning and development of the 2020 PD Calendar will commence soon so if there are any topics or professionals that you would like to see included, please email through the details: psfo.service@wyndham.vic.gov.au

The PSFO Team are heading off to Sydney this week to attend the International Society of Early Intervention & Early Childhood Intervention Australia Conference. This is an opportunity that does not often come about. We are very fortunate to be able to attend the conference with a PSFO Professional Development grant that was provided through the Department of Education and Training Victoria. We are certain we will experience some rich learning opportunities and bring back an array of ideas and resources that we can share with you all.

If you are having a break over the school holidays, take the time to reflect on the first half of the year and re-energise yourself for the second half 😊

Narelle Keleher, PSFO Area Leader



'TEACHER TALK'

This term the PSFO team, along with several Educators from Wyndham City Council Early Education and Care Services, have delivered the Hanen Teacher Talk Program. Over 60 Educators from a wide range of services have already attended this training. You may have heard some of your colleagues talking about this training... The good news is, additional sessions will be offered this year if you have missed out!

What is 'Hanen'?

Hanen is a Canadian charitable organisation, that has been operating for more than 35 years. Hanen offers a range of resources and programs for not only Educators, but Speech Language Pathologists and parents. All Hanen programs and resources are evidence-based and are offered in many countries. As Hanen is quite well known, Educators may have come across these programs or resources already, or even heard about them from Speech Pathologists in their work.



Hanen's Mission

Hanen's mission is to *'enable parents and professionals to transform their daily interactions with young children to build the best possible lifelong social, language and literacy skills. This includes children with or at risk of language delays and those with developmental challenges such as Autism Spectrum Disorder'*.

Why has Hanen been brought to Wyndham?

As Educators know, many of the children we work with present with a range of learning needs in their language and speech development. Educators encounter children who come from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, some children have language delays and some even have diagnoses of disorders where language is affected, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The PSFO team began considering ways we could best support Wyndham Educators in addressing these needs. We also considered the long waitlists to access specialist support for these children that can be experienced locally, as well as the financial constraints that many of our families face.

The PSFO team considered if Educators can learn strategies to support children in their classroom as much as possible and can teach the parents to also learn these strategies, then we are all hopefully doing as much as possible whilst the child and family are waiting for support.

How was Hanen brought to Wyndham?

The PSFO team approached Hanen to provide a train-the-trainer from the United Kingdom to deliver this training mid last year. We are grateful to Noah's Ark for supporting this process and adding it to their calendar.

Several Educators from Early Education and Care (WCC) expressed an interest to become facilitators. The Educators who were successful included Erin Valentine, Rachelle Lloyd, Candace Smith, Karen Koroneos and Emily McGuire. The program requires that only teachers who coach or train other Educators can be trained as facilitators. The entire PSFO team are also trained in this program.

Upon completion of the course, all services in Wyndham were contacted via email asking for feedback of how they would like the course to be offered. Based on the survey responses, several sessions were then planned for term two 2019 as part of the Wyndham Child and Family Network PD Calendar. To date, both parts A and C have been offered as whole day options. Part A has also been offered as two half days.

What is 'Teacher Talk'?

Teacher Talk provides educators with strategies that will help them create rich and stimulating learning environments for the children they work with. The best part is, that all the strategies can be incorporated into your everyday interactions and routines – so it is not extra work!

Teacher Talk is designed to actively engage participants through discussions, small group activities, analysis of video examples and completion of practical action plans that participants take back to their classrooms. Educators receive workbooks for each session that allow them to personalise the content and think about how they will meet the needs of the individual children in their classroom.

It is beneficial if all members of a team can attend training. If all members are unable to, the workbooks and action plans allow for ease of sharing the information.

The 'Teacher Talk' course is offered in three parts. Part A is a pre-requisite if you wish to complete B and/or C, so A must be done first.

The three parts include:

Part A: Encouraging Language Development in Early Childhood Settings

This training addresses how educators can use everyday conversations, play and daily routines to promote the communication and social development of all children, including those with language delays and those who are second language learners.

Part B: Let Language Lead the Way to Literacy

This training discusses the important links between oral language development and literacy and provides teachers with practical strategies for paving the way for children to read and write.

Part C: Fostering Peer Interaction in Early Childhood Settings

This training addresses how educators can provide a physical and social environment that encourages peer interaction and creates many opportunities or successful interactions with other children.



Further Information

See the Hanen website for further information on courses and resources available www.hanen.org

'It Takes Two to Talk'

and

'More than Words'



are both valuable resources to consider for your parent and educator library.

WHEN YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT



Early childhood educators are in a privileged position when working with babies and young children and may notice if a child does not appear to be developing typically. We know that it is important for a child's lifelong development and learning to receive all possible support early in life. It is, therefore, best not to ignore concerns or hope they will go away if you adopt a 'wait and see' attitude.

When concerns arise, how do you address these in a respectful way that works towards getting further professional help for the child?

Several key elements to keep in mind can support you to navigate these often challenging situations:

- Early childhood educators work with children over many hours and long periods of time; there is usually ample opportunity to observe and reflect on a child's development.
- Early childhood educators are in a unique position in their relationships with families; a partnership approach to supporting the learning and development of young children is integral in all our work.
- Early childhood educators, like families, have extensive experience and knowledge of the child; the difference being that educators are professionals who observe and understand the child in a group learning and care context. This is the unique contribution that you may 'bring to the picture'.
- Early childhood professionals are skilled at working with others—for example, other educators, inclusion support and early childhood intervention professionals—to promote a child's learning and development.

Here are some helpful tips for you to consider in communicating your concerns about a child's development to their parent/s or guardian:

- *Explain your professional role in observing and planning for children's development right from the start of your relationship with parents, in parent handbooks and at enrolment.* Share with parents that these observations will usually be positive. However, let parents know that sometimes you will be sharing challenges or concerns about their child for you to work on together.
- *Reinforce this message through practical demonstration—sharing program plans, having regular planning discussions.* What you are aiming to do is build a relationship of engagement and support with every parent or guardian. For example, it is always good to greet parents with a positive message about their child's day when they come to pick up their child.

'EXPLAIN YOUR PROFESSIONAL ROLE IN OBSERVING AND PLANNING FOR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT RIGHT FROM THE START OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS ...'

Ensure all parents hear about your knowledge and experience of their child—the little, everyday good points about what their child was interested in during the day, how they demonstrated their developing social skills in play with other children, etc. These are the building blocks for deeper discussions.

- *When concerned about a child, consult with your director or service leadership.*

Discuss your observations and concerns specifically. Jointly decide how these may best be raised with parents—by whom, when and where. It may be best if the educator who knows the child well has the initial conversation with the parent/s, as this approach builds on the relationships already developed.

- *Know your local referral pathways so that you will be able to support parents with the correct information.*

For example, a local doctor or paediatrician, or your local area Early Childhood Education Intervention (ECEI) partner for the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). See www.ndis.gov.au for further information.

- *Choose your time and place carefully.*

You need to consider confidentiality, so this conversation should not be in the children's room or somewhere you may be overheard. A staff room or office may be best. Also, consider when the parent may be most likely to want to hear your concerns—this is probably not at the beginning or end of the day when parents may want to rush off. Ask parents for a time when they are free, or utilise your regular planning discussion meeting with parents if the date is not too far away.

- *Be aware of the whole gamut of possible parent feelings on hearing your concerns.*

These feelings may range from relief that someone shares and acknowledges their concerns, to anger, distress and/or anxiety. Regardless of how parents initially respond, continue to speak sensitively and respectfully, and reassure them that you will continue to support their child as you work through this together. Take time to listen to the parents.

- *Remember that you are an education professional rather than a medical professional.*

Be very careful not to 'diagnose' the child yourself. You have specific and extensive knowledge of the child—their learning, how they function socially in a group, how to support their wellbeing. You bring these specific contributions as an educator,

but this knowledge does not mean that you can diagnose the child's condition or disability. Your role as an educator does, however, enable you to play an important role in continuing to support the child's further learning and development. Your aim is to support the family to seek further assessment or assistance and discuss referral pathways.

- *Once the parent has followed through with seeking assessment, it is likely that you will need to collaborate with a range of other professionals to support the child.*

You may have views and strategies suggested by early childhood intervention professionals to consider in your planning for the child, and/or you may benefit from inclusion support to assist you with improving your capacity and capability to effectively demonstrate high-quality practice in including the child. See www.education.gov.au/inclusion-support-programme-isp for further information about the Inclusion Support Program, if required.

- *Continue to consider the parents' possible feelings as you go on with your work in educating and caring for their child.*

What are their hopes and aspirations? Can you include these goals in your programming for their child and other children at your service? Families often experience grief, as their image of the child they were hoping for may change. Be sensitive and responsive as you continue your work. A helpful little story about parental feelings that has been around for many decades is *Welcome to Holland* by Emily Perl Kingsley. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welcome_to_Holland.

- *If the child is diagnosed with a disability or developmental delay, continue to remember that this child is, first and foremost, the child you have been working with all along, with the same personal qualities and interests as before. The child has the right to meaningful inclusion, participation and learning in your service, and you are the person best placed to ensure this right is fulfilled.*

Addressing your concerns, and collaborating and partnering with the child's parent/s and other early childhood professionals is both your responsibility and an essential support for the child.

Jackie Brien

Manager Inclusion Access and Participation
Department of Education and Training, Victoria



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