

Innovative Solutions Support Story – Rosebud West Community Hub

Do educators at your service need further support to include children presenting with challenging behaviours? Do educators want to build their understanding of the individual child and to introduce new strategies which support children to engage positively with peers in the service's program?

This is one service's story of introducing an Arts Program delivered by a specialist and funded through Innovative Solutions Support.

What did the Art Program involve?

Each session was on Thursday and Friday over the 10 weeks and were scheduled at the same time of day at 1:30pm. This cut down anxiety levels and allowed the children to enter the positive creative space more easily and fluently.

All the sessions had the same session structure that consisted of, 'introduce children into the space', 'relaxation and focus breathing', 'art therapy creative part of session', 'debrief, focus breathing and reintroduction to their classroom'. This aided the children to relax into the sessions with more ease, with little or no anxiety and the children could express themselves in a more secure and positive way.

Children would always have had a choice of mediums so their comfort and expressive creativity had no boundaries. All language used by Cath during the sessions was affirmative and inspiring and Cath encouraged the other children to be empathic, nurturing of self and others.

What did educators gain from the experience?

Educators, through support and assistance from the therapist, developed a deeper understanding of their vulnerable and challenging children, therefore relationships became stronger and more dynamic. With this knowledge we can meet the emotional, physical and educational expectations and needs for all these children. The educators received a more holistic view of the children and the children themselves found their voice and felt understood.

Along with the sessional notes Cath helped educators detect minute body language cues that could help assist in identifying when a meltdown, anxiety attack or event is about to occur. This allowed educators to diffuse a situation before it arose and therefore children were more at ease, less anxious, more positively stimulated and the room dynamic was far more organic, balanced, enduring and settled.

Cath showed the educators some techniques in calming the children and what triggers to look for after a session. Many educators commented that some of the children that participated in the program, that were prone to meltdowns, showed improved self-regulation, less anxiety, lower frequency of and reduced intensity of meltdowns.

This is what one parent wrote about the benefits of the Art Program for her child:

As a parent of a very bright but emotionally challenged little boy, I found this program to be a wonderful support for me and the educators, in assisting Leonardo with his anxiety. His time spent in this program was invaluable, enriching, and a wonderful resource for Leonardo to use at times of stress. Leonardo would talk about the sessions with intense delight and describe all the beautiful artwork that he had created. He would articulate his feelings and use his words to express their meaning through his art. Leonardo learned how to understand that he was having strong emotions and that he could let them go peacefully through expression in words, pictures and colours.