

Innovative Solutions Support Story

Ashmont Preschool Centre

This is one service's story of engaging with a local Aboriginal Elder to facilitate connections and relationships with their local Aboriginal families and community.

What did the project involve?

Our service includes a high percentage of Aboriginal families, and although the team felt they had a good knowledge of Aboriginal history, they did identify that they required a greater knowledge of the real issues facing our local Aboriginal families and community. This lack of understanding was a barrier which was impacting on our practices and relationships with children and families from Aboriginal backgrounds. We also really wanted to embed sustainable, inclusive practices in our program so all children develop a sense of belonging and understanding of Aboriginal culture.

Through Innovative Solutions we were able to engage with local Aboriginal Elder Aunty Kath Withers to help educators develop an understanding of the hardships and issues many local Aboriginal families face. This specialist advice enabled educators to be better informed to support the children and families within our service.

Aunty Kath initially visited the service and developed relationships with the educators and children through informal conversations during play, meal times and throughout the daily routine. She then attended a team meeting and engaged educators in a "yarn" where she shared real life stories on the issues many of our Aboriginal families and local community face, challenged thinking and encouraged educators to reflect on their own attitudes. In our next team meeting we continued our "yarn" during a weaving session which provided an informal opportunity for educators to share and discuss their issues without feeling judged.

Aunty Kath visited our service for 10 weeks for two hours a day and participated in the arrival routine to help make connections with families. Aunty Kath also supported all children to explore Aboriginal culture through art, weaving, play, song and dance, language and storytelling. This allowed Aboriginal children to gain a greater sense of belonging and all children to develop an understanding of Aboriginal culture.

Aunty Kath helped us introduce a breakfast program by being available to talk to the families about "filling your tummy" on arrival and guided families through the new process of accessing cereal for their child when they arrive at our centre. As a result, we have seen a positive difference in children's behaviour and an increase in communication with families on arrival.



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What did educators gain from the experience?

Listening to Aunty Kath share her real-life stories had a profound impact on the educators as they couldn't believe what she had gone through, and it was heartbreaking to hear about how she and her family were excluded. However, it really challenged educators to reflect on their own attitudes and practices.

Through working with Aunty Kath our practices have become more authentic because we understand the meaning behind what we are doing. Educators are also more confident and less resistant to change as they understand why we are doing it.

It has helped us engage with the community on a bigger scale of inclusion as the children were invited to the Roads and Maritime Services to help them celebrate NAIDOC Week. This involved making message stones to give them, singing songs in Wiradjuri and dancing to Wombat Wobble.

Families have recognised our commitment and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and this has enhanced our relationship with families. A great example of this newly established connection with families was one father who approached us to become more involved and play the didgeridoo. We are having more conversations with families which is strengthening relationships and allows us to engage in some of those tricky conversations that we previously were not confident in having.

Educators are more confident in talking to children and challenging their thinking, for example, one child said to another Aboriginal child "You have white skin, you are not Aboriginal". The educators were then able to discuss how you can have white skin and be Aboriginal. We have also planned to explore this further and discuss Aunty Kath's white skin and share the story "Fair Skin Black Fella" with the children.



The Inclusion Support Programme is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training