

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

Case study: Silky Oaks Child Care Centre Manly West

Resources for Queensland early childhood education and care services

If your educators are well informed about what the domains mean, then when your programming is either intentional or spontaneous, child initiated or teacher initiated you can draw on those domains, you can draw on that understanding of children who are on track or those who may be seemingly not meeting milestones and you can develop that program to meet those children's needs.

For the Silky Oaks Child Care Centre, an information session on the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) began their journey of discovering how the data could be used to influence their programming and improve the outcomes of children in their area.

Located in the bayside community of Manly West, Silky Oaks is a 54 place long day care service that is located next to Manly West State School. The service is part of a larger organisation (Silky Oaks Children's Haven) which provides community welfare programs such as therapy programs, family care and support programs, food banks and housing support for families.

While the centre was already well connected with the community, for Director Tracey Longley, the AEDC data revealed a deeper level of understanding of children's development at a community level. The data was showing that children in the community had vulnerabilities in the areas of social competence and emotional maturity.



Getting started with the AEDC

Tracey's first step of the journey was making sure all of the educators were aware of the data and what it meant, including floating staff, room assistants, lead educators and inclusion support assistants. They discussed AEDC data at staff meetings and brainstormed ideas about how it could be used in practice.

When the service examined the AEDC data, they looked at how it related to all other frameworks and documents including the *Early Years Learning Framework* across the five learning outcomes. The service also used the data in their quality improvement plan to identify areas of strength and areas of improvement against the *National Quality Standard*.

'All of these documents meld so well together and we are looking at how we can support social development by providing experiences that engage children not only with other children, but also with adults as that's an important skill when they go in to formal schooling,' says Tracey.

'Looking at those areas of vulnerability, we looked at the quality area that these domains related to and then linked it to the kindergarten learning guidelines for learning outcomes areas ... so when we were devising solutions or improving practices to support learning and development we had a holistic approach to the information we put into our quality improvement plan,' explains Tracey.



Putting the AEDC into practice

Using their quality improvement plan as their guide, the service then sought to collaborate with others to meet their quality improvement objectives. Training for educators was an integral part of the plan to support the development of children who attend the service.

'Children come into our environment from all different family experiences and we need to know how to respond in a positive way, a reassuring way and a way in which we are developing and improving children's outcomes,' Tracey says.

One of the ways in which the service addressed vulnerabilities in social competence and emotional maturity was to access one of their broader organisation's child and family therapists. With the support of the therapist, the service introduced a program to support the emotional regulation of children, enhance their social skills and focus on mindfulness. Storybooks were extended upon with art and craft activities related to emotions that children were exploring or displaying.

Supporting children's transition to school

The service has collaborated with the local school to see how they could better support children before they enter a formal school environment.

Excursions to the school were organised so children are familiar with the environment and prepared emotionally for entering a larger environment.

'In Prep they move from the Prep classroom to a music classroom, they go to a physical education teacher, an e-learning teacher and a library teacher. So that requires quite a lot of social confidence to move from one adult to another. It also requires quite a lot of emotional maturity to feel confident and have a sense of belonging in all those different environments,' says Tracey.

Along with excursions, the service has children involved in a Reading Bug program where the children are read to by primary school students. Attendance at school assemblies and being part of presentations, as well as having guests visit the child care service have also been included as part of the service's proactive approach to supporting children's social competence.

Further, the service arranged for their kindergarten teacher to attend a Prep classroom so she could establish relationships and be well informed of how to support children to make the transition to Prep.

This was a really valuable experience for the teacher. 'She spent an entire day there getting to know the daily routine, what the expectations of children are, group time, structured activities, required social skills, how much independence is required and what the experiences of the teachers are,' says Tracey. She also shared information about the learning opportunities children engage in at the centre.

Collaborating across the community

'Working with the school has been invaluable. We've begun linking with primary schools and the early years groups of the bayside area. We've brainstormed a 'Get Ready for Prep' guide to support not only parents, but to provide a consistent approach for early years educators in our community to use,' says Tracey.

The 'Get Ready for Prep' guide has been provided to all services in the local community. Feedback and suggestions for improvements have been welcomed to create a document that is user friendly.

The service, as part of its work with the early years group, has future plans to continue to review the AEDC data and work with their community, with an early years expo planned for educators and parents. The aim of the expo is to inform educators and parents about allied health and other services in their community that support families and provide a space to collaborate, liaise, meet with and find information.

'Educators often have families coming to them who do not have contacts within the local community—we are their contact and they rely on us to support them in identifying services, programs to help their parenting and support for any medical or family needs', says Tracey.

The service has identified long term and short term goals and will be using the AEDC data collected in 2015 as a resource to analyse any trends.



Reflections

- How might you engage educators to discuss and implement strategies to address the AEDC data?
- How might collaboration with local schools help to improve children's transition to school in your area?
- What type of professional development might help to improve children's outcomes in areas of vulnerability in the community?
- What local services are available to support children's social and emotional development in your service?
- How might families be engaged to help them connect with community services and support?
- What information might you share with schools and families about the learning opportunities children engage in at your service?