

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

Case study: C&K Flagstone Community Kindergarten Jimboomba

Resources for Queensland early childhood education and care services

It's not a daunting process because most of what you are doing in early childhood meets or addresses the domains that are mentioned in the AEDC. It's about maximising the potential for all children in your community.

For the C&K Flagstone Community Kindergarten, demographic change is a part of life. The small town of Jimboomba is undergoing a development boom, part of ongoing high population growth in the Logan region south of Brisbane. Educators at the kindergarten are determined to understand the changes, and they are using Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data to ensure they meet the needs of children and families every step of the way.

The director at Flagstone, Sue Taylor, is conscious that the service is sitting at the heart of what will become a large educational community. 'The Flagstone community in which we're located is a relatively new development,' she explains.

Engaging with the community

A professional network meeting was the stimulus for Sue to create a much deeper understanding of the children and families using the service. 'I really wanted to increase the community involvement in our particular location, to make sure that children were getting the support and resources that they need, and also the families,' says Sue.

Sue knew that the AEDC data could provide valuable information for her educators, but she also knew that creating strategies to address children's vulnerabilities would require a team effort from throughout the community. She initially approached the deputy principal at the school next door, and then assembled a response group 'to get that community engagement and resourcing happening'.

The group included all the community and governmental organisations that might be interested and able to assist: Logan City Libraries; the local playgroup; the C&K family day care scheme; the Benevolent Society; the school next door and its outside school hours care service; Flagstone State College; the Department of Human Services; and Queensland Health. 'We're very lucky that, in our area, we've got a lot of community groups that are really interested in the same idea in terms of maximising children's potential and supporting parents and families,' says Sue.

At its first meeting, the response group surveyed the AEDC data for Jimboomba, with expert assistance. 'We were fortunate to have a member of Queensland Health who was interested in forming part of our response team, and who had been offering professional development to long day care services around the AEDC,' Sue explains. 'To have that in-service was really important because it helped us understand the data and what the implications were for us as a response group, but it also helped us identify which particular domains we wanted to work on as a response group.'

By the end of that first meeting, the Jimboomba response group had pinpointed two domains where it would concentrate its efforts: communication skills and general knowledge, and language and cognitive skills.

Informing practice

Back at Flagstone Community Kindergarten, Sue met with the educators to explore their knowledge and ideas for action. 'We talked about things that we might have seen within our program that could have been evidence of those vulnerabilities, and ways in which we felt we were working towards addressing those—ways in which we could incorporate different areas of our program to address the vulnerabilities,' she explains.

For Flagstone Community Kindergarten, working intentionally to address the AEDC vulnerabilities involved several elements:

- providing opportunities for children to explore language, literacy and numeracy emergently
- modelled examples for children to extend their capabilities and realise their potential in those areas
- resources to equip parents to consolidate the learning at home.

For example, in language and literacy, the Flagstone educators created picture-based dictionaries that children could consult while engaged in writing activities, giving them a greater sense of both competence and independence. As part of their reflection, the educators realised that the content of the dictionaries would need to respond to the environment. 'At the moment our playground's being redeveloped, so that means putting 'excavator' and 'skid steer loader' or 'tip truck' in that book, so that the children have that to refer to when it's required,' explains Sue.





Working with families

The role of families became a critical component of the Flagstone approach. ‘We talked with the parents about the same sorts of things [as we did with the educators]—it was interesting because a lot of parents didn’t fully understand the whole process of data collection and the idea of vulnerabilities at first,’ she says.

After consulting with the families about what support they would like, Sue and her team provided them with specific resources, including written lyrics for nursery rhymes and a list of suitable books for different age groups of children, compiled with the help of the local library. Feedback from parents has shown that they are using the resources at home, with their kindergarten-aged children and also with younger siblings.

For the educators at Flagstone Community Kindergarten, their two target AEDC domains are particularly important, but not to the exclusion of efforts to support children in other developmental areas. Physical health and wellbeing was another domain in which Jimboomba children benefited from extra support. Flagstone educators convened parent information sessions to encourage a healthy approach to lunchboxes. They also taught the children about wellbeing concepts—the meaning of tiredness and hunger—and introduced flexible lunchtimes and rest periods, to help the children make good choices in response to their individual needs.

Supporting transitions to school

The collaborative approach established by Sue in Jimboomba has been particularly important in developing transition plans at the kindergarten. Working with their school-based colleagues, Sue and her team have established a multi-layered program:

- kindergarten children attend the school library once each week to borrow books
- a ‘reading buddy’ system pairs kindergarten and Year 1 students for weekly reading sessions
- a kindergarten-Prep buddy system provides the younger children with peer-based information about starting school.

Sue’s advice for early childhood services that have not yet explored the AEDC data is—‘Have a look at the data and reflect on whether that is what you’re seeing in your local community. It’s not a daunting process because most of what you are doing in early childhood meets or addresses the domains that are mentioned in the AEDC. It’s about maximising the potential for all children in your community.’

Reflections

- What services may be available in your community that your service could collaborate with to improve outcomes for children?
- How might your service respond to AEDC data through programming and practice?
- How might your service connect with local schools to help support transition to school?

