WT3 VISION:
Confident and creative three year olds, thriving in strong, connected communities.

The Tasmanian Government’s commitment to Working Together for 3 Year Olds (WT3) is opening up opportunities for eligible 3 year olds to access quality early learning.

Pilot update
The WT3 pilot was conducted between February and July 2019 using a co-design approach, which assumes that people are experts in their own lives. The pilot’s objectives were to:

» Co-design WT3 with relevant stakeholders – with the voices of families and children central to the design and continued refinement of the initiative.
» Increase participation in quality early learning for 3 year olds who are experiencing barriers to participation.
» Facilitate the delivery of a quality early learning program for eligible 3 year olds.

Fifty-one eligible children and their families were enrolled at 11 early-learning centres in nine suburbs.

As part of the pilot, targeted supports were funded for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector and families.

The evidence is clear that this directly enabled children, who experience barriers to participation, to learn and thrive as they transitioned from home into centre-based care. The coming months will also see the children supported into school.

The WT3 Project Team are continuing to analyse the findings from the independent evaluation of the pilot and are preparing the Implementation Plan for 2020 and beyond with the goal of releasing more details in October.

In this edition of the e-Newsletter we have an interview with Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) Cultural Awareness Coordinator Dewayne Everett-Smith, insights into how WT3 is contributing to the landscape of education and support services in Tasmania and feedback from children and their families who have been involved in the pilot.
Cultural competency: understanding our shared history and connection to the land

Just over a third of the 51 children who have taken up the WT3 opportunity have an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.

As part of the WT3 commitment to creating a sense of belonging for children and families, a large group of our service partners undertook cultural competency training, run by the TAC last month.

One of the best places to start developing cultural understanding is by seeking out the lived experiences of our First Nation People to help us create a sense of belonging, whether it’s in our workplaces, homes or in communities.

Service partners want to create culturally safe spaces and the training has resulted in some adapting their practice. Examples include: adapting cultural activities to make them more relevant to the Tasmanian context, such as singing local songs or using hands and thighs to make music, instead of clapsticks.

The training was led by Cultural Awareness Coordinator Dewayne Everettsmith, a palawa man descended from the community of Cape Barren Island, Tasmania and the gunai/kurnai people of Victoria.

Dewayne said there was a growing desire from the community to understand the unique Tasmanian Aboriginal culture and their connection to it. He said his role as a cultural awareness trainer allowed him to grow a level of activism that he hopes will be transformative for the next generation.

“I think about my three boys all the time,” Dewayne said. “I hope they will grow up and have a life where they won’t have to justify who they are and explain everything about their Aboriginally to everybody.”

“But also, as an Aboriginal person I’m very lucky to have this culture that has the connection of 2,000 generations or 60,000 years of connection to this place and space.”

“The best way to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is to understand who they are and their story within the broader community and to acknowledge the barriers they face,” he said.

“Like all children we want to strengthen their identity so they can grow up to be who they are and want to be.”

“Don’t treat Aboriginal people differently, treat them according to their needs, with the opportunity to speak for themselves by providing a culturally safe environment and they will tell you what they need when they want it.”

“With that knowledge, understanding and connection, I feel very grounded. I like to share that value of Aboriginal culture so people can also feel connected.”

Dewayne said early childhood educators had the opportunity to create a culturally safe space that unites people.

“I heard a line in a song recently called ‘Freedom’ that features Archie Roach that says a community that doesn’t show unity doesn’t move forward or work together.”

“One of the big opportunities in providing a culturally safe space, is that we provide unity.”

“When there is a better understanding of Aboriginal culture and values that will help enhance our identity and bring the broader community closer together and create a safer place for Aboriginal people.”

“For childhood educators, it’s really important to instil identity and with that comes direction, grounding and an understanding of who we are.”

“From an educational point of view, we also want people to be understanding and tell the truth about Aboriginal people from a young age to change those conversations as children grow older.”

He said some of the ways ECEC services can create cultural safe spaces involve:

» Visually showcasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and life (such as a flag or cultural items)
» Having an understanding of the potential barriers families can face and ways to overcome them
» Giving children and their families the opportunity to practice, share and connect to their culture
» Celebrating cultural activities all year round
» Learning about cultural values and instil them in the organisation’s mission or values.

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The images show Cultural Awareness Coordinator Dewayne Everettsmith and ECEC educators involved with WT3.
Dewayne also said he hoped the cultural awareness training gave educators a greater connection to Aboriginal culture and with that new understanding, came responsibility. "

Educators can have the confidence to speak up as required and help us bring back together our cultural picture that has been ripped apart."

“We want to change the conversation at the dining table and in the workplace.”

Drawing out children’s feedback on WT3 through conversation and art:

These drawings from children have been shared by our WT3 partners the Tasmanian Council of Social Services (TasCOSS) to shine a light on the children’s positive experiences.

“Getting out there” drawing and story

“Why?”
“Because he’s happy.”
“What makes him happy?”
“Going out there [indicates to the play area].”
“There’s the grass and the toys and- oh we need sky.”
“Do you like playing outside?”
“Yeah, it’s pretty good.”

Illustration by a WT3 child, story by Liam Dunn, TasCOSS.

Reshaping the conversations around early childhood development and learning

Early experiences have significant effects on developing brains and biological systems with the potential to profoundly shape a child’s future life. It’s more important than ever to communicate the importance of development and education in the early years, but it’s not always easy to be heard and understood.

CoLAB, a partnership between the Telethon Kids Institute and the Minderoo Foundation, has launched an interim guide to help change the conversation.

The B4 Early Years Coalition is one of the partners working on a long-term communication initiative to transform the way early childhood development and learning is understood in Australia.

The guide, ‘Talking About Early Childhood Development in Australia’, is available.

You can also sign up for updates on the Core Story for Early Childhood Development and Learning Collaboration.
SERVE AND RETURN:

Finally, ‘serve and return interactions’ are a great way to explain how children’s brains are shaped by their interactions with their caregiver.

Without responsive relationships a child’s development and well-being is under threat.

It is important to build the capacity of the caregiver to help strengthen their interactions with their child to best support their healthy development.

The power of collaboration: working together to help children thrive

The WT3 pilot evaluation has reported positive shifts in the lives of children and their families and ECEC practice, with enhanced bonds between educators, families and community services.

Recently WT3 team members were invited for morning tea with children and the team at The Valley Children’s Centre to celebrate the changes to the physical environments which have been reshaped to maximise outcomes for children.

Improvements to the outdoor learning environments include: introducing small garden beds, growing vegetables, herbs and fruit trees for children to look after and introducing more challenging equipment for children to use in risky play.

Within the service, the team engaged in ongoing professional learning and discussion around their learning environments and how these contribute to the children’s engagement, play and behaviour within their spaces.

The staff participated in in-depth critical reflection and recognised a need to restructure their age-based room arrangements. They created a specific 3 year old room, tailored to the capabilities, interests and skills of this age group.

WHAT FAMILIES ARE TELLING US IS GREAT ABOUT WT3:

Children are developing healthy eating habits and the confidence to try new things:

“I’ve been surprised that [they] actually ate cucumber. That was a different one. I’ve never actually known [them] to actually eat cucumber… I was like ‘okay! You’re trying this out! This is great, this is different, this is new!’”

This change was driven by the educators: Cheree, Paula and Marie and their commitment to enabling the 3 year olds at their service to thrive, working in collaboration with Rebecca Lazenby, the Community Inclusion Worker at ptunarra, the local Child Family Centre (CFC). Together they are creating a community of learners to share practice, new perspectives and strategies.

Families have also noticed how capacity building and joining-up services makes a difference.

“You know, back in the day this network wouldn’t work with that network, so you’d have to deal with all of them separately,” one parent/carer told TasCOSS.

“You’d have to go here and explain it to them, and then here and explain it again…What I love is all these networks want to get together…. You know, everyone’s working together.”

Upcoming events

Early Childhood Australia’s (ECA) National Conference

25–28 September – Hobart

The ECA’s National Conference this month in Hobart has sold out, but delegates can still get a virtual pass. The conference is also seeking volunteers, find out more about the benefits via email: conference@earlychildhood.org.au or call the ECA Conference Team: 02 6242 1800.
A day to consider quality in early childhood education and care with Gunilla Dahlberg

1 October – Hobart

Hosted by the Department of Education’s Early Years Partnerships and Projects Unit. Register your interest by emailing eypp@education.tas.gov.au and we will be in touch with more details. Gunilla Dahlberg is professor emerita of education at Stockholm University, Department of Child and Youth Studies. Since 1971, she has carried out research in the area of education and social welfare policy for young children and their families. In 1993, Gunilla was the scientific leader of an experimental and network-oriented project, in which new philosophical, theoretical and aesthetical perspectives were brought into the field of ECEC. The project is considered a huge inspiration for ECEC in the Nordic countries, as well as internationally.

National Early Childhood Education for Sustainability Alliance Forum

24 September – Warrane

Early years educators are invited to the first National Early Childhood Education for Sustainability Alliance Forum - a pre-ECA conference forum. The guest speaker is Adjunct Professor Julie Davis, Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Panelists include: Dr Sue Elliott and Di Nailon and national and local early years educators.

The event will be held on Tuesday September 24 at the Eastside Lutheran College, 15 Acorn Dr; Warrane, Tasmania. It will run from 3.30pm–8.30pm and includes: an introductory lecture, workshops, a Q&A panel, afternoon tea and dinner.

Australian Conference for Neurodevelopmental Disorders

19–21 September – Launceston

Tickets are available for the event at the Launceston Conference Centre. The conference has streams for educators, education specialists, families, clinicians and practitioners. One of the keynote speakers is Russell Barkley, who is known internationally for his work on Attention Deficit, Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

WHAT FAMILIES ARE TELLING US IS GREAT ABOUT WT3:

Families are setting goals for their children’s future:

“I’m wanting to break that cycle... I want that to change for these guys, I want them to be able to have the best life possible, and in the right way.”

Families are building connections in their local communities:

“We’ve pretty much formed a little family sort of thing. Without the WT3 program, I wouldn’t have had anyone to invite to [my child’s] party, pretty much. But it was great – full on, but excellent! There were about 15 there.”

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