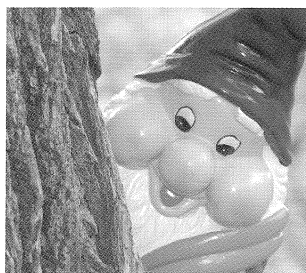


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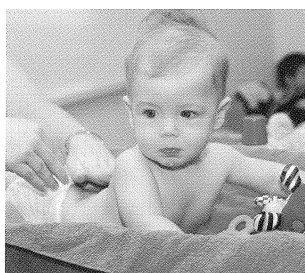
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Early Childhood Australia sincerely regrets the use of a photo in The Organic House advertisement in *Every Child* Vol. 12, No. 1 without the correct permission. We apologise to the child and family involved for this unauthorised use.

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# Challenges ahead for universal preschool

**Recent calls for comprehensive preschool education for all children in the year before school have been widely welcomed and supported. Internationally, there is overwhelming agreement that the early years shape later social and academic outcomes and that young children require rich, nurturing learning opportunities to optimise social and intellectual development.**

Calls for universal preschool are especially timely because recent evidence shows that educational disadvantage is established early in life and the significant socio-economically linked learning gaps at school entry are difficult to close without targeted early interventions.

Improving early developmental outcomes for children in economically disadvantaged communities is largely dependent on the quality of early childhood programs, along with parenting support. To date, access and affordability are continuing problems in Australia and quality is variable.

The link between quality and outcomes is now clear. Evidence demonstrates that experiences and pedagogy impact on children's wellbeing and development, and that early childhood practitioners have a central role in promoting quality experiences and environments for young children. However, the clear connections between staff competence and outcomes for children have not yet been reflected in improved preparation for practitioners, course accreditation or more nationally consistent curricula or learning programs.

Should universal preschool in the year before school become a reality, this is likely to change.

However, while good early childhood education can help close early developmental

gaps it should not have to shoulder the entire weight of deeply entrenched societal problems that impact on young children's early development.

**As former head of the OECD's education sector Professor Barry McGaw said recently, 'ignoring inequities in the education system has enormous implications for the future workforce'.**

Everyone must share responsibility for building a just and equitable education system. Strong programs are needed to boost learning in the preschool years, but if developmental gaps exist at school entry they must be closed with targeted interventions. Blaming preschools or hiding behind deficit theories won't solve problems. Successful education is a joint family, community, school and government responsibility.

The current interest in strengthening family capacity and optimising early learning requires a strong and united public commitment to universal integrated approaches to care and education.

Early childhood programs must capitalise on the diversity of children's backgrounds and experiences. Simultaneously they must strengthen social and cognitive outcomes to facilitate smooth transitions to school and build strong foundations for school learning.

And here is a problem: nationally, there is no agreement about what learning experiences and outcomes could and should be expected, what a 'preschool' curriculum might look like and about ways children's learning and development should be monitored and reported. Continuity of experience and information sharing between preschools or child care centres and schools are rare.

The quest for universal education programs in the year before school signals the need to boost professional preparation for early childhood educators. As preschool education requires degree-qualified early childhood educators, university training

capacity must be expanded. For the last decade or so, universities have fought to maintain strong, specialist early childhood degrees but they struggle to attract places and students in the face of competition from 'sexier' courses.

Young people are spoilt for choice when it comes to careers. The low pay, low status and shift work in child care is hardly a drawcard. There will need to be real incentives to lure graduates to the many new positions that will be created if universal preschool education goes ahead.

Nationally, early childhood care and education is in need of an 'overhaul' and any plans for comprehensive preschool provision must be in light of families' needs for child 'care' and 'education', and what we already have that works well.

But, even if there is a preschool place for every child, children cannot reach their full potential unless they are healthy. Good nutrition and exercise are central to healthy, happy children. Yet, an apparent epidemic of overweight, undernourished and sedentary children is threatening both the ability to learn and longer-term health. Active healthy children become active healthy teenagers and adults. Physically and mentally healthy children want to learn and have the energy needed for positive engagement with learning.

Helping children become healthier means working in partnership with their families to promote healthy eating, physical activity and safe homes and communities. In this issue of *Every Child* we raise a host of issues around healthy environments for children. Some of the ideas will readily translate to practice; others relate more to policy. What is important for all children, is that we as parents and early childhood practitioners model healthy eating, lifestyles and activity patterns.

**Alison Elliott**

Editor  
*Every Child*

# Letters to the Editor

*Every Child* readers are invited to respond to articles published in the magazine. Publishing a diversity of opinions (which are not necessarily those of Early Childhood Australia) provides a forum which promotes professional growth, creativity and debate in the early childhood field. By encouraging letters, we would like to build a community around *Every Child*, where readers are involved and engaged. *Every Child* is for you—so let us know what you think!

Please send your letters, marked 'Every Child' to either: PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602 or publishing@earlychildhood.org.au

## Every Child giveaway

This month, in keeping with our theme of 'healthy children', Early Childhood Australia is delighted to offer our readers six prize-packs containing Coles Cares Healthy Lunchboxes and Nourish Whole Kids organic snacks.

### Win

Each prize includes:

- A Décor Coles Cares Healthy Lunchbox, Harold Growth Chart and Fridge Magnet.
- Nourish Whole Kids organic food pack containing: apple juice, sea salt popcorn, Manuka honey popcorn, sultanas, apple & sultana and apricot & Manuka honey fruit-filled bars.

### Every Child: Have your say

In order to win a pack all you have to do is submit a letter to the editor, voicing your opinion about the latest *Every Child* or any other issue facing the early childhood field. Your name will be placed into a random draw. Entries will be accepted until COB July 14. The best letters will be published in upcoming issues of *Every Child* and winners announced in our next issue.

In response to an article published in *Every Child*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2006, Holli Tonyan writes:

24 April 2006

Congratulations to *Every Child* for publishing your piece on signing among young children! At the very end of her article, Ms. Teitzel suggests that signing 'has great potential to strengthen relationships in early childhood through improved communication.' I wholeheartedly agree and point to my own research into mother-infant interaction around distress as part of how young children learn to regulate their emotions. In addition to the many benefits listed in Tania Teitzel's article, my own research suggests that communicating information in non-verbal ways (including gestures and signs) can set up a cycle of supportive interaction around children's distress. This helps mothers feel more comfortable responding to their children's distress which, in turn, helps both to find adaptive ways to cope with distress. Despite the fact that this article was published under the heading 'Parents' Page', I hope that early childhood professionals as well as parents will consider the ways in which recognising and honouring gestures and other forms of non-verbal communication can not only help children learn to communicate, but also facilitates interactions and relationships overall.

**Holli Tonyan**

Lecturer, Early Childhood Education, Monash University

In this letter, early childhood student Luke Donnelly discusses the value of *Every Child* as a resource, particularly the article 'Learning literacy with everyday texts', published in Vol. 11, No. 4, 2005:

26 April 2006

Dear *Every Child*,

I am a third year undergraduate studying my early childhood degree at the University of Canberra. When commencing my studies I found it difficult to source relevant, current and Australian resources on early childhood education. I attended an annual meeting for the ACT division of ECA and was introduced to *Every Child* magazine. I recently used an article to assist in taking an early childhood perspective on differentiated curriculum. I have also found *Every Child* to be valuable for analysing my own practices within the preschool environment. For instance, I am currently working on a folder of everyday texts with the children; this was inspired by the article 'Learning literacy with everyday texts'. I look forward to future editions of *Every Child* in order to enhance my studies, better my practice and improve my overall knowledge of the early childhood profession.

Yours sincerely,

**Luke Donnelly**

Congratulations to Holli Tonyan, Luke Donnelly and Angela Freeman who each win a Lee-Beau oven guard, valued between \$110 and \$150!

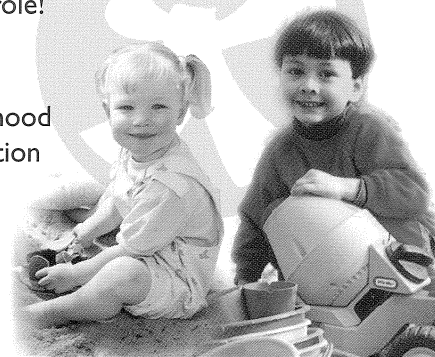
## Please help us give a child their preschool year

KPV established the Early Childhood Education Foundation to address concerns that many Victorian families were not accessing preschool. Due to financial hardships and other factors many children are not experiencing this vital year of development.

Please make a donation\* to assist the Foundation in this important role!

Send donations to:

KPV - Early Childhood Education Foundation  
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Northcote 3070



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