

JIGSAW

THE MAGAZINE OF FAMILY DAY CARE AUSTRALIA



**Marketing
Made Simple**

**2025 FDCA National
Conference Wrap Up**

**2025 Excellence in
Family Day Care Awards**

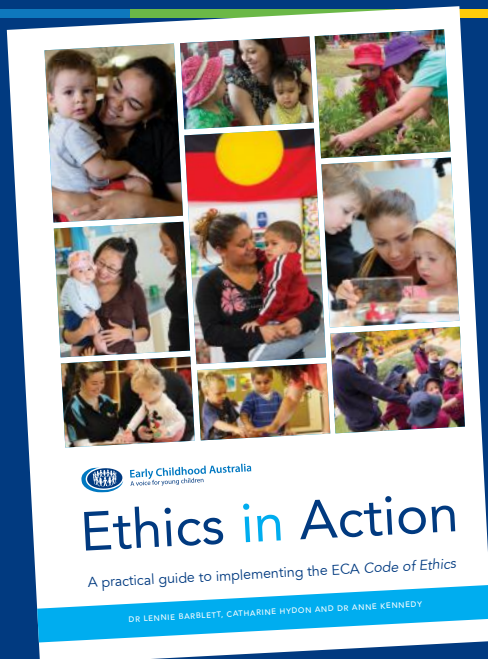
**Inclusive
Environments**

Meet the Team * Vale Cathy Bavage * Family Day Care Capability Trial * DGFC Resources * Christmas Card Exchange
Educators and Belonging: A Research Project * BMA Initiative * Business Insights * Jeans for Genes * Fun with FDCA
Member Spotlight * Leadership Through the Lens of Educator Wellbeing * Dollars and Sense



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

ON OFFER FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA



ETHICS IN ACTION

A practical guide to implementing the ECA Code of Ethics

This essential guide helps educators, managers, leaders and childhood professionals caring for children bring the ECA *Code of Ethics* to life in everyday practice. With case studies, scenarios and practical tools, this resource is designed to make ethics a natural part of your decision-making process.

**GET
YOUR
COPY**



ECA PUBLICATIONS

Elevate your professional learning with the ECA Digital Library

Your cherished sector titles are now more accessible than ever. Subscribe to the ECA Digital Library to receive new books including the much-loved *Everyday Learning* and *Research in Practice Series* titles over a 12-month subscription period, as well as access to a back catalogue of over 88 titles and accompanying resources. Get the latest in quality-assured and sector reviewed titles at the click of a button.



**SUBSCRIBE
TODAY**



ECA PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Empowering educators anywhere, anytime

100+ courses & 70,000 learners across Australia and beyond

The ECA Learning Hub delivers online courses that are accessible, affordable and contemporary for professionals at any stage in their career.

The ECA *Management Fundamentals Program* is designed for directors and managers, leaders and aspiring managers. Develop your knowledge and capabilities across key management areas including:

- governance, legal and regulatory frameworks
- financial management
- human resource management
- business and strategic planning, and more!

**FIND
OUT
MORE**



Published by Family Day Care Australia Limited (FDCA)
 PO Box 571 Gosford NSW 2250
 ABN: 93 094 436 021
 Telephone: 1800 658 699
 Insurance and Membership Services: 1800 658 699
 Email: enquiries@fdca.com.au
 Web: www.familydaycareaustralia.com.au
 Editor: Hannah Kennedy
 Advertising: FDCA Marketing
 Printer: Kwik Kopy Gosford
 ISSN 13263528

Editorial Policy

The material published in the magazine will aim to be inclusive of all participants of the Australian family day care program (including children) wherever they live, regardless of their gender, class, culture or nature of any disability. The magazine will not publish material which runs counter to the wellbeing and equal valuing of all children, their families and those who work with them. All unattributed articles will reflect FDCA's broad policy. As far as possible the language will be non technical. The final decision about inclusion of any article will be made by the Editorial Board. As there are differing descriptors used for the direct service provider, the generic term 'educator' will be substituted in every case.

Advertising Policy

FDCA will publish advertisements which seek to positively support the wellbeing of children, their families, the early childhood profession and the maintenance and growth of the family day care program. For advertising rates and copy deadlines please contact the FDCA Marketing Department JiGSAW, PO Box 571 Gosford NSW 2250. Phone 1800 658 699. Email marketing@fdca.com.au.

FDCA Disclaimer

The views expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and not necessarily those of FDCA. The Editor reserves the right to shorten/edit submitted material. The Publisher reserves the right to alter or omit any article or advertisement submitted and requires indemnity from the advertisers and contributors against damages or liabilities that may arise from material published. Acceptance of advertisements for JiGSAW does not constitute FDCA's endorsement of the product. Copyright © no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission of the Publisher.

Membership fees and JiGSAW subscription

Individual Membership	\$49.90
Service Membership	\$349.00
Organisational Membership	\$349.00
JiGSAW Subscription (free to members)	\$35.00

All prices quoted include GST

Products available include:

- Public Liability Insurance
- Personal Accident and Sickness Insurance for Educators
- Personal Accident Insurance for Children
- Management Liability Insurance
- Home and Contents Insurance
- Motor Vehicle Insurance
- Travel Insurance
- Family Day Care Legal Services
- Commercial Legal Expenses Cover

Freecall 1800 658 699 for more information.

Cover image:

2025 Excellence in Family Day Care National Winners: Communities at Work Family Day Care, Christina Lee, Annette Hutt.

Family Day Care Australia Limited (FDCA) ABN 93 094 436 021 is a licensed general insurance broker (AFSL 329 616). Throughout this issue we advertise various insurance products and we receive commission and/or fees for arranging these insurances. For full details see our Financial Services Guide (FSG). The information we provide is general in nature only. You should consider your needs and read the relevant Product Disclosure Statement (PDS) or Policy Wording (PW) before making a decision to buy insurance. Please call us on 1800 658 699 for a copy of the FSG and PDS/PW.



A word from the CEO

Welcome to Edition 109 of JiGSAW Magazine!

As we enter the final weeks of 2025, I reflect on the year gone by and what a year it has been! It is evident that change is the constant, but I cannot remember a time in the last decade where the early childhood education and care sector has faced the scale and speed of reform that we have seen in 2025. It has been an exhausting year but we've seen a few wins along the way and I'm sure, like me, you are looking forward to catching your breath over the Christmas break, ready to launch into 2026 with renewed vigour.

A highlight of 2025 was without doubt our 2025 FDCA National Conference hosted this year in Melbourne. The post-conference survey results speak volumes, with attendees reporting a 94% satisfaction rate. From my perspective, it was an inspiring weekend filled with rich content, engaging keynote presentations and most importantly, meaningful connection. Educators, services and sector stakeholders came together to learn, network, reconnect with familiar faces and enjoy a well-deserved weekend of professional learning. You can read our full wrap-up of the 2025 FDCA National Conference on pages 18–20.

While we were in Melbourne, we also had the privilege of hosting the 2025 Excellence in Family Day Care Awards National Presentation, an evening dedicated to celebrating the remarkable nominees and announcing this year's national winners across the educator, service and coordinator categories. Turn to page 11 to discover who took home the top honours and to relive the highlights of a truly memorable night.

We pay tribute to one of the true pioneers of our sector in Cathy Bavage. I was fortunate enough to not only work with Cathy on various levels but was also able to call her a friend. Inside, you'll find a wonderful tribute to Cathy on pages 5-6.

This edition of JiGSAW also brings together a collection of member contributions and sector insights. Highlights include *Marketing Made Simple* by Kirsty Thomas on pages 23–24, offering practical, accessible tips for strengthening your social media presence, and *Inclusive Environments* by Josephine Mesiti on pages 25–26, which explores how to create welcoming, inclusive spaces for all children. You'll also find a feature on Jeans for Genes Day by Michelle Klass, page 30, and a timely inclusion from Kaylene Milligan about a Christmas card swap Facebook group for educators, page 10.

Additionally, we share a range of sector-focused articles, including an update on the BMA Family Day Care Initiative by FDCA's Recruitment Manager, Damon Somerfield on pages 27–28, and an insightful piece from Professor Andrea Nolan of Deakin University on a current research project exploring *Belonging as an Early Childhood Professional* on pages 21–22. In addition, our Advocacy and Engagement team provides two important updates on the Capability Trial and resources to support the ongoing transition to Direct Gap Fee Collection.

As always, you will also find our regular features from Be You, Dollars and Sense by Ben Mueller, Business Insights, Member Spotlight, Fun with FDCA, and, returning for its second appearance, Meet the FDCA Team.

I hope you enjoy this edition of JiGSAW and wish you and your family a safe and happy holiday season.

Andrew Paterson
Chief Executive Officer
Family Day Care Australia

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY:

We at Family Day Care Australia acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, the Darkinjung People, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuous connection to Country, and celebrate their traditions and living cultures.



PAGE 26

contents

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| 4
Meet the Team | 11
2025 Excellence in Family Day Care Awards | 27
BMA Family Day Care Initiative | 35
Leadership Through the Lens of Educator Wellbeing |
| 5
Vale Cathy Bavage | 18
2025 FDCA National Conference | 29
Business Insights | 37
Dollars and Sense |
| 7
Family Day Care Capability Trial | 21
Educators and Belonging, A Professional Research Project | 30
Jeans for Genes | |
| 9
Direct Gap Fee Collection Resources | 23
Marketing Made Simple | 31
Member Spotlight | |
| 10
Christmas Card Exchange with Kaylene | 25
Inclusive Environments | 34
Fun with FDCA | |

THANK YOU

A special thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition of JiGSAW.

Meet the FDCA Team

Get to know the people behind the scenes at FDCA. In this section, we'll introduce the dedicated team members whose passion, experience and drive, work for you every day!



Vicky

Insurance Services Coordinator

How long have you been with FDCA? Four years

What's does your role involve?

In my role as Insurance Services Coordinator, I provide support, feedback, training and guidance to our member liaison team. I also oversee all Insurance enquiries for service providers.

Tell us about your previous roles within or outside of FDCA

I previously worked in private health insurance, and was also a supervisor at a research firm.

What's one of your favourite parts of your role?

Connecting with educators and services where I can provide assistance and make a difference.

What's your favourite food?

My comfort food is lasagna, but I would never turn down chocolate.

What do you like to do when you're not working?

Spending time with my vivacious 6-year-old girl. She makes her presence known wherever we go and certainly makes life fun and spontaneous. I also love being with my family, going to markets, and hanging out at many of my local beaches.

What's your favourite podcast?

I listen to a lot of true crime and enjoy the podcasts Criminal and My Favourite Murder.

What's your favourite activity?

I love to go to the beach, eat some delicious fish and chips and read a good book.

What's your favourite book?

Reading the Harry Potter book series always brings me a bit of nostalgia.

How long have you been with FDCA?

Joined FDCA in 2021 to set up and launch the national recruitment program for educators in family day care.

What's does your role involve?

My role was created off the back of member feedback to support educator recruitment. I head up the national educator recruitment program, this involves attracting and supporting educators who are interested in becoming family day care educators and then referring them onto services members as a pre-screened application for services to engage with and approve, this also includes special recruitment projects namely with BHP and the Capability Trial.

Tell us about your previous roles within or outside of FDCA.

I've worked in recruitment for over 20 years now. Previously I was the Head of Talent Acquisition for Greencross Pet Care Company.

What's one of your favourite parts of your role?

The best part is talking to an educator who has just started, celebrating this achievement and hearing the excitement and enthusiasm is amazing.

What do you like to do when you're not working?

Enjoying time with family, my wife and I have a 6-year-old daughter who is loving Kindie, Gymnastics and Swimming, and a 9-year-old Labradoodle Ralph who enjoys 1-2 days a week in the FDCA office with

the team. I also volunteer at my local surf lifesaving clubs at Umina SLSC and Bondi SBLSC.

What's your favourite food?

I will literally eat anything, but anything with lamb in it will be a hit with me.



Damon

National Recruitment Manager



Vale Cathy Bavage

An Australian Family Day Care Champion

Rhonda Livingstone, ACECQA
Professor Sue Irvine, Queensland
University of Technology

Our colleague and friend Cathy Bavage was a visionary and transformational leader who has shaped the provision of high-quality family day care in Australia.

Cathy began her career in child protection before moving into family day care. Driven by a deep commitment to social justice and equity, Cathy's leadership skills were evident early in her career, initially as a coordinator at Lady Gowrie Family Day Care in Brisbane in the 1980s, and then as Team Leader at Wynnum Family Day Care. At Wynnum, Cathy led the team to achieve the *Excellent* rating for six consecutive years.

As a leader, Cathy was an early adopter and advocate of distributed leadership. She promoted a shared approach to leadership, that spanned all members of the family day care team, and leveraged individual interests and strengths. For Cathy, leadership was about the enactment of leadership principles and practices by coordinators and educators in their everyday work, for the shared benefit of children, families and the team.

Cathy was also a strong supporter of research and evidence-based practice in family day care. As a partner on the *Challenge, Change and Opportunities: Distributed Leadership in Family Day Care* study (Irvine et al. 2022), funded by the Queensland Department of Education, Cathy shared her views on effective leadership. She talked about the need for 'inclusive leadership approaches', 'professional autonomy', 'enabling different ways of working to meet



quality standards' and 'ensuring educators are being consulted and heard'. By all reports, Cathy walked the talk. Summing up the views of many, one Wynnum educator noted, 'From Day 1, Cathy always said this is a partnership'. Another recalled continuing conversations with educators, 'Here's the direction we are thinking of going next year.

What do you think, mate?' Others remembered Cathy's unwavering dedication to and advocacy for educators, as well as her passion for mentoring and empowering educators to succeed in their business.

Cathy proactively identified needs in her community and worked

Across every industry, there are those whose vision and determination light the way for others; individuals who navigate times of change and growth with courage, leaving lasting legacies that shape the future. In the family day care sector, Cathy Bavage was one such leader. On Sunday, 21 September 2025, the sector lost not just a pioneer, but one of its true giants.



Cathy Bavage

collaboratively with local colleagues and organisations to ensure children, families and educators had access to important services and supports. This became the Link Program, providing access to services such as speech therapy, and reducing delays between identification, assessment, diagnosis, and intervention for children with developmental delays.

She embraced funding and reputational challenges faced by the family day care sector with positivity, bravery and optimism, the same qualities she brought to her personal health challenges. Not only did she steer her own service through challenges, she supported other schemes to embrace change and explore strategies to maintain and strengthen viability and quality.

Cathy's leadership skills and knowledge were widely recognised and valued. She served on the Boards of Family Day Care Queensland and Family Day Care Australia, making a significant and positive contribution. She shared her deep knowledge and wisdom generously and widely, and was sought out for her practical insights and solutions to emerging issues. Her contributions are reflected across many ACECQA resources, including the [Risk Assessment Management Tool](#), the [Educational Leader Resource Addendum for Family Day Care](#) and the [We Hear You Blog](#).

Cathy leaves a strong and positive legacy. Her advocacy for the family day care sector in Australia, spanning more than 30 years, is unrivalled. There is a saying, 'Leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders' (Tom Peters, n.d). This is Cathy's contribution and legacy in family day care. Let's all work together to take this forward.

Vale Cathy Bavage.

Reference

Irvine, S., Lunn, J., Thorpe, K., Beane, L., Sullivan, V., Bavage, C., Bourne, J., Farrell, M., Gordon, J., Shield, P., Tuckey, D., Peterson, K., & Dunne, J. (2022, May). Distributed leadership in family day care: Challenge, change, and opportunities. Summary report from the Interactive Policy and Practice Workshop, Brisbane, Queensland. Available at: https://eprints.qut.edu.au/234928/1/FDC_Report_Distributed_Leadership_FINAL_20220819_002_.pdf

A personal message from Family Day Care Australia CEO Andrew Paterson

With the passing of Cathy Bavage early on the morning of Sunday 21 September 2025, our sector lost one of its pioneers; a true leader and advocate, and to many including me, a colleague, mentor, and friend.

I first met Cathy back in late 2010. On the advice of many, a visit to meet Cathy Bavage and her Wynnum team was the logical first step in my induction (or indoctrination) to family day care.

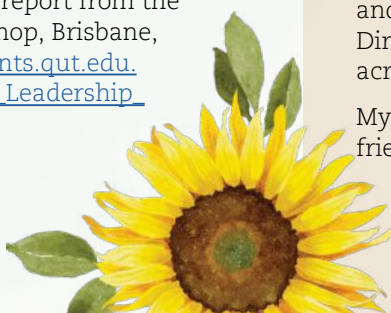
Those who knew and loved Cathy can probably picture that first meeting, it's one I will never forget – a little abrupt, challenging but inquisitive, and delivered with a classic tongue in cheek raise of the eyebrows and a generosity of spirit to share her knowledge and her wisdom, of which she had in spades.

From that day forward, through my 15 years and numerous roles with FDCA, including as CEO, Cathy was always a trusted confidant, even though, for much of that time, she referred to me as 'kiddo'. Not many weeks went by without a call from Cathy with questions, ideas, suggestions, or just to say hi.

Cathy had a long and illustrious career in family day care. For close to four decades, she led the team at Wynnum Family Day Care, and in doing so, left a lasting legacy for children, families, her community, her team, and the sector. Wynnum was the first, and one of only a handful of family day care Services to achieve ACECQA's Excellent Rating and was the inaugural winner of 'Service of the Year' in the FDCA Excellence in Family Day Care Awards. Throughout her time at Wynnum, Cathy was a mentor to countless Service colleagues that leaned on her insights in navigating the ever-changing and often challenging sector landscape. Cathy prided herself on her data driven management of the 'business' of family day care, but she never lost sight of her passion and motivation; a safe place for children, quality early education for a better future, and strong relationships, all of which she saw at the core of family day care.

Cathy was proudly innovative, often collaborating with stakeholders including academics, governments and agencies, peaks, and colleagues on projects and initiatives that explored distributed leadership, organisational change, business viability, quality, and technology. She was, among others, also a driver in the establishment of FDCA, and ultimately, after some persuasion, a Board Director where she provided invaluable insights across practice, policy, governance, and strategy.

My most sincere condolences to Cathy's family and friends. She will be deeply missed by us all.



Stories of Community Connection and Educator Success from the Family Day Care Capability Trial

Across Australia, family day care services are finding new ways to meet the changing needs of children and families in their local communities.

The model not only meets local demand but also reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community it serves – offering families a familiar, trusted environment that helps children develop a strong sense of belonging and connection.

Through the Family Day Care Capability Trial, supported by the Australian Government Department of Education, services have been sharing different approaches to strengthen access to care and support new educators to enter the sector.

In-venue family day care in regional communities

In Western Australia, Willi Wagtails Family Day Care has implemented an in-venue model across several small rural and remote towns. The approach makes use of existing community buildings – such as former kindergartens, recreation centres and community halls – to provide safe, approved environments for educators to deliver care.

For small towns that cannot sustain long day care, this model has made an enormous difference.

Families were leaving towns because they couldn't access care. Now they have reliable options close to home, and educators can work in professional environments.

- Sharon, Willi Wag Tails Family Day Care

Each venue operates in partnership with the local shire, which helps to identify demand, locate suitable facilities and, in some cases, contribute to upgrades or maintenance. Venues are typically provided through low-cost leases, reflecting the strong community value placed on retaining child care locally.

This model has enabled qualified educators in small communities to build their careers while staying close to home, and helped local businesses, health professionals and families remain in their communities.

In New South Wales, Coffs Coast Family Care also operates an in-venue model from a church crèche, led by an educator from the Burmese community. The educator offers before and after-school care, weekend care and vacation programs from this venue, supporting families working non-standard hours.

They are quite a tight-knit community. The families really appreciate her – how she has them on the weekend and vacation care, and how she picks them up so they can go to work.

Brooke, Coffs Coast Family Care

Building the next generation of educators

In Queensland, Busy Butterflies Family Day Care is supporting new educators through traineeships that blend on-the-job learning with formal study. Trainees complete their formal qualifications while working alongside an experienced educator who mentors and guides them through reflective practice.

"I have one educator that has taken on both trainees. She's been in family day care for a long time. She's one of our best educators and the advantage for the trainees is that she's always asking them

questions about ‘why did you do it this way?’ and ‘what benefit is there for the children?’

- Sharon, Busy Butterflies Family Day Care

Sharon’s son, one of the service’s first trainees, has since completed his qualification and opened his own family day care, providing much-needed places for families in their local community. Another trainee continues to work toward her qualification, supported by an experienced educator and the service coordination team.

This approach demonstrates how mentorship and practical experience can help grow a confident, skilled workforce within family day care.

Turning passion into practice

The Capability Trial has also supported educators to overcome barriers and start their own practice.

In Victoria, Jess returned to early childhood education after two

decades in another career. Inspired by her children’s experiences in family day care, she decided to open her own service.

Like many new educators, Jess faced significant setup costs, including fencing and safety upgrades. Through the trial, she received practical and financial support, allowing her to focus on creating a compliant learning environment.

“

When the Capability Trial came along, I thought ‘perfect!’ It doesn’t matter the money that I’ve had to use to make the environment compliant. I can get that back and then use that to buy resources and materials and create the perfect learning environment.

Jess (VIC)

For Miriam, the opportunity came after raising her four children and travelling around Australia. Returning to her hometown, she renovated her parents’ old house into a safe, welcoming space for children.

“We spent weeks cleaning, sanding, painting, fixing glass and fencing. Having that support and funding made all the difference. It meant we could focus on quality and still set ourselves up financially.”

- Miriam (VIC)

Now fully booked most weeks, Miriam describes her service as an extension of her own family.

A shared commitment to community

From in-venue care and traineeships to educators finding their feet, the Capability Trial continues to show how family day care can adapt to meet community needs while staying true to its strengths – strong relationships, flexibility and quality.



DIRECT GAP FEE COLLECTION RESOURCES

Resources and support for services and educators implementing the new CCS gap fee requirements



From January 1, 2026, all family day care services will be required under Family Assistance Law to collect Child Care Subsidy (CCS) gap fee payments directly from families. This is known as Direct Gap Fee Collection (DGFC).

Across the sector, many services have already made the shift to DGFC, with feedback highlighting clear benefits such as greater transparency, easier record keeping, audit readiness and stronger relationships between services, educators and families.

FDCA has developed a suite of resources and can provide support to assist services and educators in transitioning to DGFC - no matter where you are in the transition. Whether you are reviewing current practices or refining existing systems, these tools can help you strengthen your approach to DGFC and ongoing fee management.

New Debt Management Resources

When DGFC first began rolling out, some services revealed that they didn't have a clear debt management policy or wanted to improve how they managed late or missed payments. Based on that feedback, FDCA has developed several new debt management

resources that can either inform new practices or strengthen existing methods. Available on the FDCA website these resources include:

- **Debt Management Best Practice Guide**

A practical guide to help services implement or strengthen debt management processes, including tips and reflection points to use in staff discussions.

- **FDCA Policy Guidelines: Payment of Fees and Debt Management**

A starting point to assist services in developing or reviewing a Payment of Fees and Debt Management policy. Includes prompts and examples to ensure DGFC requirements are embedded.

- **Debt Management Payment Process Chart**

A visual step-by-step example of good practice payment and debt management processes that supports services to design and refine their own.

- **Educator Care Agreement Template**

A template agreement between educators and families that

sets out expectations, fees, responsibilities and payment arrangements, including non-payment processes.

Need more help?

FDCA's Sector Support team is here to help – whether you are a service, a coordinator or an educator. We can provide phone and email support to answer your questions

- Assistance in resolving concerns and challenges as they arise
- Tailored advice on updating contracts, policies and fee structures



Contact FDCA's sector support team on 1800 658 699 or enquiries@fdca.com.au.



Visit the [Direct Gap Fee Collection section](#) on the FDCA website to download all resources.

Ho Ho Ho

and Merry Christmas to all Family Day Care Educators!

My name is Kaylene and I'm the founder of the Facebook group "Christmas for FDC".

By Kaylene Milligan,
Collective Family Day Care

Christmas for FDC is a Christmas card exchange with fellow educators across Australia with a couple of overseas friends in Minnesota.

I started the group during Covid under another name as I, like others, was feeling a little isolated due to the restrictions placed on us all. I wondered how to connect with fellow educators and remembered the overseas postcard exchange I'd participated in a few years back. I thought, as Christmas was coming up, a card exchange might be a great idea, so I put the idea out through an educator group on Facebook. The response was amazing, and whilst I can't remember the exact number that joined, the group continued to grow yearly.

Three years ago, the amazing Gry Powers joined me as an admin and the group name changed to "Christmas for FDC". At present we have over 80 educators in our group which is growing daily, with 59 educators participating this year. Educators are required to send a Christmas card to all participating members. These cards can be home made or store bought - it's up to

you. The children love decorating their cards and eagerly check the mailbox daily for one in return. There have been some beautiful cards received over the years.

Over the years we've seen educators come and go but the group number continues to grow. Late July I post in the group reminding everyone that it's that time again and ask who will be participating. The lovely Gry and I monitor the chat, and I update the master list daily. We close the list for the year in October then post the list for all participants to begin card preparation with all cards to be posted by early December. Educators can join the group after closing but will need to wait to participate until the following year.



If you'd like to be part of this amazing experience, find us on Facebook "Christmas for FDC". To join our group there are three questions that are required to be answered before you can be admitted so if you wish to join, please make sure you answer them.



Winners Announced

EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY DAY CARE AWARDS 2025

FDCA was proud to announce the winners of the 2025 Excellence in Family Day Care Awards at the National Conference Gala Dinner this October at the Pullman in Albert Park, Victoria.

After nearly 5,000 nominations in this year's awards program, the winners were selected from a stellar line up of national finalists who all made their way to Melbourne for a Gala Dinner to remember.

In front of over 270 family day care educators, service staff, coordinators and guests, FDCA Chief Executive Office addressed attendees and spoke to the incredible achievements of this year's winners, and all those who were nominated.



"The Awards are of course, by design, a vitally important part of our work in raising the image and profile of family day care. But they are also so much more. They are an opportunity for us to professionally recognise our colleagues and our sector. They have also played an important role in identifying and inspiring new leaders in our sector."

Tonight you represent your family day care friends, workmates, and colleagues in shining a light on the invaluable contribution of our sector in supporting children, families and communities across Australia. When I look to the value of family day care, nowhere is it more evident than in the passionate, heartfelt and very personal stories that are shared with us through this Awards program nominations, of which there have been over 46, 000 since the awards inception.

Good luck and regardless the result, rest assured you have made your mark as being among the very best in the country for your leadership, innovation and excellence."

THANK YOU

FDCA would like to thank all the families, coordinators, educators, services and staff who got involved in the 2025 Excellence in Family Day Care Awards. We congratulate everyone that was nominated in the awards, and those who were named as winners. We would also like to thank our sponsors, Early Childhood Australia, without your generous support these awards would not be possible.

2025 NATIONAL WINNERS



COORDINATOR OF THE YEAR Christina Lee, QLD

With over a decade of experience in the family day care sector, Christina Lee is a Coordinator from We Belong Family Day Care in Queensland.

Christina primarily supports educators whose first language is not English, having seen how language barriers can affect their confidence, professional growth, and overall wellbeing. Supporting these educators in their family day care journey is a professional goal of Christina's that she undertakes with pride.

As a bilingual family day care coordinator, Christina supports educators in critical reflection, continuous learning and quality improvement. She encourages educators to participate in their communities and will often attend events on their behalf to ensure they don't miss out on valuable information.

When she reflects on the past 12 months, Christina is particularly proud of the way she has supported educators by drawing on her deep understanding of their cultural backgrounds, personalities, and working styles—as well as the backgrounds and individual characteristics of the families and children in their care.

This insight has allowed her to provide personalised and culturally responsive guidance when educators face challenges in building strong relationships with families or managing complex situations with children.

Christina is described as a bright and positive person who uplifts everyone around her.



EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR Annette Hutt, SA

In 2025, Annette Hutt celebrates her 30th year as a family day care educator.

Registered with The Department of Education Far North Scheme in South Australia and selected as the regional winner for the Whyalla and Eyre Peninsula in South Australia,

She has been described as incredibly reliable, flexible and committed to assisting her families and the children in her care, with nominations about Annette, saying that her community would be lost without her.

Annette draws inspiration for her program from observing, listening and following the children's interests. She considers the interests, ages and abilities of the children and chooses resources that encourage curiosity and exploration.

Annette's program is flexible, allowing children to guide their own learning and learn at their own pace. Her set ups are meaningful and engaging, following the excitement and curiosity of the children in her care.

When asked about her proudest moment Annette said, there is no greater moment than seeing a child's face light up when that child, who finds a task difficult at first, persists and then experiences the satisfaction of achievement.

The excitement on their faces and wanting to share that special moment with their peers is so precious to see, a proud moment for the child, and Annette.



SERVICE OF THE YEAR Communities At Work, ACT

Communities At Work Family Day Care, from the ACT has been described as playing a key role in helping their educators provide the best possible outcomes for children in their care.

Providing regular guidance, professional development opportunities and access to valuable resources that ensure staff and educators are up to date with current best practices and the Early Years Learning Framework.

One of Communities At Work Family Day Care's proudest achievements of late is the transition to an educational leadership model. This leadership transition was rooted in self-reflection, relationship-building, and a deep respect for the diverse experiences and teaching styles of educators.

Rather than imposing uniform practices, the Educational Leaders embraced a flexible, strength-based model that empowered educators to take ownership of their learning and program development. This has led to a more inclusive, innovative, and high-quality service.

Continuous improvement is embedded in every aspect of the Communities At Work service.

They are committed to supporting educators through tailored professional development, aligned with their individual goals and learning needs. Over the past 12 months they revised their service philosophy to reflect a commitment to creating a child-safe organisation.

Their philosophy reflects pillars such as growing together, kindness and respect, caring for our world, everybody belongs, and a safe and happy place for everybody.

2025 COORDINATOR



NATIONAL FINALISTS



Kristy Elks, NSW

Kristy Elks is a Coordinator and Educational Leader with Northern Rivers Family Day Care in New South Wales.

Having once worked as an educator herself, Kristy believes this unique blend of lived experience gives her a deeper connection with the educators she supports and ultimately strengthens the quality of care being provided to children and families.

With a strong understanding of the role of an educator, Kristy's work as a coordinator has strong emphasis on educator wellbeing, in particular the time and dedication it takes to run a family day care business.

One of her proudest achievements is developing and delivering a self-care workshop for her educators. From this she developed a wellbeing committee that plans simple, meaningful wellbeing experiences for her team.

Kristy strongly believes that when we take care of ourselves, we're in a better place to support others, and that includes the educators she visits and works with each day.

Kristy has been described as calm, kind and professional, going above and beyond in her role, with a willingness to support however she can.

She believes that building relationships based on trust and open communication lays the foundation for strong, collaborative partnerships - and this naturally supports quality improvement in practice.



Hannah Griffiths, SA

Hannah Griffiths is a Family Day Care Coordinator with Southern Vales Family Day Care Scheme in South Australia and is described as professional and passionate, with a deep commitment to the family day care program.

Hannah builds strong, trusting relationships with educators, allowing her to provide meaningful mentoring and support.

Over the past 12 months Hannah has worked to deepen her understanding of the Kaurna Culture and language and has used this knowledge to support educators in embedding aboriginal perspectives meaningfully into their programs. She is particularly proud of this as it has helped bridge cultural understanding and fostered respectful relationships with Aboriginal culture.

Hannah brings a proactive and reflective approach to her role, consistently seeking opportunities to enhance her practices and contribute to improved outcomes for children, families, and educators.

She makes a particular effort to engage with the children during her visits, taking part in activities that have been set up and is always strongly advocating for both educators and the program, consistently demonstrating leadership and often serving as a collective voice for the team.

Hannah has a natural ability to foster genuine connections and is a highly valued member of her team.



Julie Metselaar, VIC

Julie Metselaar, who commenced her journey in the family day care sector in 1993, is a coordinator at Baw Baw Shire Family Day Care in Victoria.

Julie says that at the heart of her practice is a deep commitment to building meaningful, lasting relationships with her educators; relationships founded on trust, transparency, and mutual respect. These values guide her daily interactions and shape the supportive culture she strives to uphold.

Julie strongly believes in encouraging and supporting educators and staff to represent Baw Baw Shire Family Day Care at community expos, events, and professional development opportunities. She believes these moments are more than just promotional, they are fabulous opportunities to strengthen community connections, raise awareness about the unique benefits of family day care, and highlight the rewarding experience of being an educator.

In nominations about Julie, it is said that she consistently demonstrates exceptional commitment to supporting and uplifting educators within her family day care network. She goes above and beyond in fostering professional development, encouraging collaborative practices, and helping to strengthen the community of educators around her. Julie works tirelessly to support her team and ensure her service is always compliant and exceeding the National Quality Standards.

Julie's professionalism, commitment and guidance is truly appreciated by her colleagues and educators.

2025 EDUCATOR



NATIONAL FINALISTS



Natasha Rebuck, NSW

Chosen as the winner of the CBD, Inner West & Eastern Suburbs regional in New South Wales, Natasha Rebuck runs LeafBud Montessori and is registered with Collective Family Day Care.

Natasha's Family Day Care is based in the Montessori method of teaching, focussing on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play.

Natasha prepares environments with intention, offering open-ended play materials that connect the children's wonder with real-world concepts, encouraging inquiry, vocabulary development, and peer collaboration.

Commencing her family day care journey in 2018, Natasha's aim is to create a unique, responsive & educational program that reflects the needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds of the children in her care.

At Leafbud, children observe the changes in their environment and celebrate the cultural traditions of their families, nurturing a place of calm, peace, and wonder.

Believing that education is the key to social change, Natasha has welcomed local Aboriginal owned nursery IndigiGrow to share plant knowledge, connection to country and establish a bush tucker garden.

Her program is thoughtfully woven around nature play, wellbeing, cooking, music & the arts, sustainability, and cultural inclusion, all within a mixed-age family day care homely environment.



Christina Jane, QLD

Beginning her family day care journey in 2023, Christina Jane runs Shine Family Day Care in Queensland and is registered with Choices Family Day Care.

Christina was chosen as the Toowoomba, Darling Downs, Somerset and Lockyer regional winner in Queensland and aims to create spaces for the children that attend her family day care to lead and support their developing voices.

Christina empowers children to take responsibility for their interactions and choices, contributing meaningfully to their social and emotional growth.

When asked about her environment, Christina has said she designs experiences that reflect the children's interests, seasonal changes, and significant events in their world, allowing them to learn in meaningful and engaging ways.

Each part of the Shine Family Day Care program is intentionally planned but remains flexible enough to follow the children's curiosity and needs.

Christina is described as a warm person who is very professional, positive and caring in nature. She shows understanding and support to all the children who visit her family day care and is truly proud to be part of the early learning journey for many children.



Angela Mammone, VIC

Selected as the regional educator winner for the CBD and Inner Suburbs of Victoria, Angela Mammone has been a family day care educator for 25 years and is registered with Foundations Family Day Care.

When asked about family day care, Angela has said that children are the cornerstones of what she does, and she is passionate about teaching them life skills to take care of our world.

Angela is proud of her Italian background, and over the years has woven it into her service, sharing some of her traditional language through activities and routines, singing songs and counting in Italian daily.

While she has been an educator for many years, Angela is always eager to learn and critically reflect, ensuring the children at her service have an educator who is continuously working to grow.

She is committed to building connections with her colleagues and community, with special mention to her work with her local indigenous mob, learning the language, songs, stories and more to then be woven through her services teachings and experiences.

Angela is described as humble and committed, gentle and kind, making sure each child feels safe, valued and encouraged to explore and grow.



We Belong Family Day Care, QLD

At We Belong Family Day Care in Queensland, quality outcomes for children are at the heart of everything they do, with strong, respectful relationships central to their identity as a family day care service.

We Belong Family Day Care is described as supportive, committed and respectful, prioritising connection and collaboration for their educators. They show genuine interest of the wellbeing and growth of their educators, going over and above to ensure they feel supported, offering advice and a willingness to share expertise.

Over the past 12 months We Belong is particularly proud of the implementation of their Educator of the Month Awards program. This award was not created as a token reward but as a meaningful, reflective process that aligns closely with their values of recognition, relational practice, quality improvement and as a means of uplifting and affirming educator professional practice.

At We Belong, educators are celebrated for their strengths and supported to share what they learn with others, leading to a more connected team and a shared vision for all educators.

Transparency and responsiveness are a large focus for the team at We Belong and they have found that this has resulted in stakeholders feeling more supported and understood.



Willi Wag Tails Family Day Care, WA

Willi Wag Tails Family Day Care Service, based in Williams in Western Australia, has a vision to provide sustainable child care in communities located in rural and remote Western Australia.

They believe every child living in regional Western Australia should have access to the same quality early education that their city counterparts do and that these children should feel a sense of belonging to their community, regardless of their geographic location.

Willi Wag Tails has many venues located across Western Australia that are each specific to the needs of their community, not one is the same. Incorporating a sense of belonging within their communities Willi Wag Tail educators are encouraged to attend community events as part of their curriculum and to involve the children where they can.

In helping to facilitate these venues, Willi Wag Tails assists to keep parents and guardians in the workforce, strengthening mental health and feelings of wellbeing. They feel passionately about getting women back into the workforce to forge rewarding careers.

Known for their deep ties to remote regions across the vastness of Western Australian, Willi Wag Tails are most proud of their advocacy work to bring awareness to the positive ways family day care can be used in remote areas of the country and that no child should miss out on quality education.



Greater Dandenong Family Day Care, VIC

For over 50 years, Greater Dandenong Family Day Care has operated in Victoria and are described as professional and approachable, with a deep care for their educator's wellbeing and professional development.

Over the past 12 months, Greater Dandenong is most proud of the playgroup mentoring program that is run for their educators and facilitated by their coordination unit. The premise of the program is to allow educators to meet up with fellow educators and network, while sharing ideas for their family day cares and giving the children in their care a sense of community and belonging, while they play.

In nominations for Greater Dandenong, it is said the scheme is highly invested in recognition and acknowledgment for their staff and educators, as well as providing high levels of professional development for them.

At Greater Dandenong, strong and supportive relationships are at the heart of everything they do. They believe in connection, collaboration and engagement between staff, educators, families and the wider community and include continuous quality improvement into every aspect of the service.

Standing the test of time, adapting and evolving with the many changes in the early childhood education and care industry, Greater Dandenong Family Day Care continues to work as a team with their staff and educators to provide quality care for many children in their community.

NATIONAL FINALISTS

EDUCATORS

Natasha Rebuck, Collective Family Day Care, NSW
Christina Jane, Choices Family Day Care, QLD
Annette Hutt, Far North Family Day Care Scheme, SA
Angela Mammone, Foundations Family Day Care, VIC

COORDINATORS

Kristy Elks, Northern Rivers Family Day Care, NSW
Christina Lee, We Belong Family Day Care, QLD
Hannah Griffiths, Southern Vales Family Day Care Scheme, SA
Julie Metslaar, Baw Baw Shire Family Day Care, VIC

SERVICES

Communities@Work Family Day Care, ACT
We Belong Family Day Care, QLD
Willi Wag Tails Family Day Care, WA
Greater Dandenong Family Day Care, VIC



STAR AWARD WINNERS

EMERGING STARS

Educator Natasha Coates, Camden Family Day Care
Coordinator Carly Barwick, Southern Vales Family Day Care Scheme
Service Foundations Family Day Care



PERPETUAL STARS

Educator Colleen Chinnery, Nature Alliance Family Day Care
Coordinator Carolynne Le Page, Baw Baw Shire Family Day Care
Service Cassandra Alderson, Hills Murraylands Family Day Care Scheme



EDUCATOR REGIONAL WINNERS

Name	Surname	Region	Service name	STATE
Kathryn	Howie	North Canberra	Communities@Work Family Day Care and In-Home Care	ACT
Rupa	Sivalingam	South Canberra	Genesis Family Day Care Services	ACT
Kristen	Tobias	Albury Wodonga & Murray	Greater Hume Children Services	NSW
Rebecca	Setter	Blue Mountains & Central West	Bathurst Family Day Care	NSW
Natasha	Rebuck	CBD, Inner West & Eastern Suburbs	Collective Family Day Care	NSW
Kelly	Zelvis	Coffs Harbour & North Coast	Mid Coast Family Day Care	NSW
Jocelyn	Mckay	Dubbo & Central	Dubbo Family Day Care	NSW
Jo-Anne	Warhurst	Far West & Central North	Far West Family Day Care Services	NSW
Breanna	Mottlee	Gosford & Central Coast	Thrive Kids Family Day Care	NSW
Leah	Uttley	Goulburn & Southern Tablelands	Communities@Work Family Day Care and In-Home Care	NSW
Elise	Spina	Lismore & Far North West	Northern Rivers Family Day Care	NSW
Patricia	Cayo Reinoso	Newcastle, Maitland & Hunter	24/7 Family Day Care	NSW
Yasuko	Kinoshita	North Shore & Northern Beaches	Northern Beaches Family Day Care	NSW
Afroza	Yasmin	North West & Hills District	Baulkham Hills Family Day Care	NSW
Anju	Dewangan	Parramatta & Western Suburbs	Baulkham Hills Family Day Care	NSW
Brooke	Garlinge	Port Macquarie & Mid North Coast	Nambucca Valley Family Day Care	NSW
Sonia	Jaswal	Richmond & Hawkesbury	Little Star FDC Scheme	NSW
Azita	Afzali	Ryde & Macquarie Park	CCA Family Day Care	NSW
Sarbjeet	Chaudhary	South West & M5 Corridor	Camden Family Day Care	NSW
Jillian	Critchley	Southern Suburbs & Sutherland Shire	Collective Family Day Care	NSW
Valerie	Hume	Tamworth & North West	Armidale and District Family Day Care	NSW
Samantha	King	Tumut, Southern Highlands & Snowy	Natural Choice Family Day Care	NSW
Claire	Knewstub	Wagga Wagga & Riverina	Early Years Care	NSW
Hayley	Walton	Wollongong, Illawarra & South Coast	Northern Illawarra Family Day Care Scheme	NSW
Narieta	Tinaikulabu	Alice Springs	Alice Springs Family Day Care	NT



EDUCATOR REGIONAL WINNERS



Name	Surname	Region	Service name	STATE
Haydee	Forte	Darwin	Kentish Community Services Limited	NT
Colleen	Hourigan	Brisbane North/Sunshine Coast	Uniting Family Day Care Bramble Bay	QLD
Yunhao	Zhang	Brisbane South	Excellence In Care Family Day Care Scheme	QLD
Danielle	Cramond	Brisbane West/Ipswich/Boonah	Building Futures Care	QLD
Lois	Toms	Cairns & Far North	North QLD Family Day Care	QLD
Bharti	Dhillon	Logan/Redlands/Gold Coast	Beaucare Family Day Care	QLD
Katherine	Beil	Mount Isa/Western Qld	Holistic Approach Family Day Care Scheme	QLD
Kristy	Mcconnell	Rockhampton/Central Qld	Kanda Family Day Care	QLD
Christina	Jane	Toowoomba/Darling Downs/Somerset/Lockyer	Choices Family Day Care	QLD
Vanessa	Chambel	Townsville/Northern Qld	Townsville Family Day Care Scheme	QLD
Nikita-Maree	Halpin	Wide Bay/Hervey Bay/Maryborough	Kanda Family Day Care	QLD
Maryann	Zammit	Adelaide	Foundations Family Day Care	SA
Annette	Gosden	Adelaide Hills & Barossa	Country Central Family Day Care Scheme	SA
Belinda	Cox	Mt Gambier & Limestone Coast	Foundations Family Day Care	SA
Donna	Richter	Riverland & Murray Mallee	Foundations Family Day Care	SA
Annette	Hutt	Whyalla & Eyre Peninsula	Far North Family Day Care Scheme	SA
Huan	Li	Yorke Peninsula & Clare Valley	Foundations Family Day Care	SA
Carlene	Darby	Devonport & North West	Family Day Care Tasmania	TAS
Kate	Rolf	Hobart & South	Clarence Family Day Care Scheme	TAS
Svitlana	Brasher	Launceston & North	Family Day Care Tasmania	TAS
Martha	Smith	Bairnsdale & Gippsland	Baw Baw Shire Family Day Care	VIC
Joanne	Bell	Ballarat & Central Highlands	Wyndham Early Learning Family Day Care	VIC
Vyvette	Mackelvie	Bayside & South Eastern Suburbs	First Idea Family Day Care Services	VIC
Wendy	Whelan	Bendigo, Goldfields & Macedon Ranges	Bendigo Family Day Care	VIC
Angela	Mammone	CBD & Inner Suburbs	Foundations Family Day Care	VIC
Sarah	Bevis	Eastern Suburbs	Lets Go Family Day Care	VIC
Denene	Nowell	Geelong & Great Ocean Road	City Of Greater Geelong Family Day Care Service	VIC
Sarah	Miles	Horsham & Grampians	Uniting Family Day Care - Wimmera	VIC
Michelle	Oellermann	Mildura & Murray	Intereach Family Day Care	VIC
Jessica	Stagoll	Mornington Peninsula & Bass Coast	Foundations Family Day Care	VIC
Shamanpreet	Kaur	Northern Suburbs	Choice Family Day Care Scheme	VIC
Ho Geok	Tan	Shepparton & Goulburn Valley	Holistic Approach Family Day Care Scheme	VIC
Megan	Dunks	Traralgon & La Trobe Valley	Baw Baw Shire Family Day Care	VIC
Debbie	Macleod	Western Suburbs	Wyndham Early Learning Family Day Care	VIC
Danielle	Kennedy	Yarra Valley & High Country	Kids Individual Daycare Solutions	VIC
Elspeth	Smith	Albany & Great Southern	White Gum Family Day Care Service	WA
Elizabeth	Stanger	Broome & Kimberley	Nature Alliance Family Day Care Service	WA
Jacquelin	Sims	Bunbury & South West	YMCA Family Day Care Service	WA
Rebecca	Beattie	CBD, Inner & Western Suburbs	Nature Alliance Family Day Care Service	WA
Jalpa	Sathavara	Eastern Suburbs	Nectar Family Day Care Service	WA
Shahrabano	Ahmad Ali	Eastern Suburbs	Rightway Learning Family Day Care	WA
Aparna	Anugrah	Fremantle & Southern Suburbs	Excell Academy	WA
Margot	Ramsay	Geraldton, Gascoyne & Midwest	Elite Family Day Care	WA
Narelle	Thomas	Kalgoorlie, Goldfields & Esperance	Elite Family Day Care	WA
Danica	Harrison	Mandurah & Peel	Elite Family Day Care	WA
Paula	Whittington	Northam & Wheatbelt	Elite Family Day Care	WA
Maria	Barnes	Northern Suburbs & Joondalup	Koolanga Family Day Care Service	WA
Adelina	Kersting	Port Hedland, Karratha & Pilbara	Elite Family Day Care	WA
Taneka	Gehlhaar	Rockingham & Kwinana	Garden Play Family Day Care Service	WA



FDCA 2025 NATIONAL CONFERENCE WRAP



The FDCA 2025 National Conference took place October 23rd – 25th at the Pullman Albert Park in Victoria, bringing together over 300 delegates that included family day care educators, coordinators, service staff and early childhood education professionals for three days of powerful keynote and plenary sessions, workshops, networking and celebrating.

Thursday 23rd October

Everything kicked off early on the Thursday morning with the exhibition hall and plenary room a bustle of Pullman and FDCA staff, exhibitors and external companies building, from the ground up, what would become the FDCA National Conference for 2025. Exhibitors from across the early childhood education and care sector flew in from around the country to make up the exhibition hall, allowing attendees to learn, purchase and explore products, resources and software to better their family day care businesses.

From 2.30pm registration opened, where delegates signed in and received their welcome packs and from 6pm the official Welcome Function kicked off, bringing all of those who have made the trip to the Pullman in Albert Park, together to excitedly begin what would be a wonderful conference.

Amongst celebratory drinks, canapes and plenty of networking, FDCA CEO Andrew Paterson welcomed delegates to the events and officially kick off proceedings.

Friday 24th October

Friday morning began with Uncle Tony Garvey who delivered a warm and enthusiastic welcome, followed by Andrew Paterson who officially opened the conference. The opening keynote address from Neuroscience Educator, Nathan Wallis, *Understand your Brain: The First 1,000 Days*, captivated attendees. In his presentation, Nathan spoke about the importance of consistent relationships and closeness for children, entwining beautifully with the model of family day care.



After a short morning tea break, delegates dispersed into the workshops of their choosing. Each session block offered five diverse workshops running concurrently for an hour, giving participants the opportunity to tailor the day to their interests. A brief pause followed before attendees moved into their second workshop selection. Across the first day alone, delegates had an impressive ten workshops to choose from, each one offering valuable insights and practical learnings.



Following a delicious lunch, attendees returned to the plenary room for a highly anticipated workshop with Nathan Wallis. His captivating storytelling and thought-provoking content held family day care educators, service staff, and coordinators fully engaged for the entire ninety minutes, leaving many discussing his presentation for days to come.

We were privileged to close the day with a keynote address from Meena Singh, Acting Principal Commissioner and Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in Victoria, an inspiring and impactful way to round out day one of the conference.



Saturday 25th October

Day two opened with an inspiring keynote address from Dr Jana Pittman, Dual Olympian, doctor and powerful storyteller. Delegates were captivated by her remarkable journey and the resilience she has shown in overcoming life's challenges. Jana offered a deep dive into her "hardship mindset," equipping attendees with practical ways to reframe adversity and, as she describes it, "change the beat of their drum."

Morning tea followed before the program transitioned seamlessly into another round of workshop sessions. As on day one, delegates had ten workshops to choose from and the opportunity to attend two. After lunch, National Children's Commissioner, Anne Hollands, delivered the closing keynote





As the biggest event on the FDCA calendar, it was an enormous privilege for FDCA Staff to spend time with members in person and hear first-hand the positive impacts delivered each day by family day care educators, coordinators and services.



address officially drawing the conference program to a close after two days of learning, connection and professional growth.

Delegates then enjoyed a short break to refresh before what many consider the highlight of the weekend; the 2025 Gala Dinner. Winners of the 2025 Excellence in Family Day Care Awards were celebrated on stage before an audience of more than 270 attendees. Between a delicious three-course meal and an outstanding live band, the national winners were announced, and the night concluded with plenty of well-deserved celebrations on the dancefloor.





Belonging as an Early Childhood Professional Research Project

By Andrea Nolan,
Professor of Early
Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce initiatives link quality service provision with improved child outcomes, achieved through skilled and competent early childhood educators (COAG 2009).

The Australian ECEC workforce is diverse in qualifications, experience, workforce profiles, ethnicity and positions within organisational workplace structures. While this makes for a diverse and dynamic workforce (Education Services Australia 2021), there is a lack of research involving Family Day Care Educators (FDC), and even less relating to their professional identity and feelings of connectedness and belonging to the early childhood sector. Therefore, a study was launched by Professor Andrea Nolan (Deakin University) to capture the experiences and

voices of Family Day Care Educators exploring what it means to be a professional working in Family Day Care. The project consisted of a national survey that attracted 200 responses from all states across Australia with representation from metropolitan (37%), regional (38%) and rural/remote (25%) locations, supplemented by 19 interviews with Family day care Educators who volunteered to take part.

Survey participants were highly qualified holding Diploma (54%), Certificate III (28%), Degree (10%), Advanced Diploma (6%), and Master (1%) qualifications. Most survey

respondents had 11 to 15 years' experience working in Family day care in Australia (16%), with those with 3-5 years' experience (14%) and 16-20 years' experience (14%) coming in second. Family day care Educators age ranged from the 18-24 years bracket to over 60 years, with the most responses from Family day care Educators aged 51-55 years (18%), followed closely by the over 60 age group (17%), and the 56-60-year-olds (16%).

What has become apparent in the analysis of the data so far is the professional attitude of Family day care Educators.



“They hold high standards for themselves as professionals and see their work as important for not only the children they work with but also the families.”

This gives them pride in what they achieve and the relationships they build over time. What is less noticeable is a sense of belonging to the early childhood sector more broadly, outside of their families or schemes.

The belief is that Family day care while offering a high-quality, viable option to centre-based education and care, is not as well-known and subsequently not as recognised or valued. This influences how Family day care Educators believe they are viewed in the wider community and early childhood sector.

A snapshot of some data

In this study, Family day care Educators were asked to consider The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia V2.0 (AGDE, 2022), and how it positions belonging, being and becoming as important for children, then to think if these also apply to Family day care Educators. Overwhelmingly, the feeling was that yes, they do (92%). Following are the voices of Family day care Educators as they reflected on this.

“Belonging, being and becoming are also very important with how we educators see ourselves, how we relate to others, and grow professionally and personally.”

“They also offer a powerful lens through which to reflect on the professional identity, wellbeing, and growth of educators.”

“Everyone has the right to feel they

belong to a community, be able to extend their knowledge and to be accepted for themselves, not be compared to other educators.”

“We work in an isolated sector belonging is crucial for our mental health. Being defines us as educators, what we believe, our values our philosophy, and becoming as we are guided by the children, families, personal development.”

Amongst the many positive experiences of Family day care Educators feeling connected to other Family day care Educators through formal or informal support networks, there are deep feelings of not belonging and being “looked down upon”, considered as the “poor cousin” even though Family day care operates under the same regulations as other early childhood services, or being seen as the same as centre-based care which does not recognise the uniqueness of the service. As one Educator wrote “We need to feel like we belong in our roles and that we are valued for the work that we do. We also need to feel safe in order to truly flourish in our roles as educators.”

Data analysis continues and there will be more to share over time, but for now perhaps you would like to reflect on your sense of belonging, being and becoming as a Family day care Educator.

If you would like to be part of this project, then please contact Professor Andrea Nolan (Deakin University) – a.nolan@deakin.edu.au

References

- Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE] (2022). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (V2.0)*. Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council
- Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (2009). *Investing in the Early Years: A national early childhood development strategy – An initiative of the Council of Australian Governments*. Australian Government, Canberra.
- Education Services Australia (2021). *Shaping our future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children’s education and care workforce 2022-2031*. National Children’s Education and Care Workforce Strategy, Australian Government, Canberra.

MARKETING

made simple.

How Family Day Care Educators Can Stand Out

By Kirsty Thomas, Intereach Family Day Care

Marketing isn't about selling its about connection. If the idea of marketing makes you feel overwhelmed, you're not alone.

Many family day care educators know marketing is important but worry about finding the time, money, or confidence. The good news is it doesn't have to be complicated. In this article I've broken marketing down into six simple sections, each with practical tips to help educators build visibility in ways that feel manageable and authentic.

Shift Your Mindset: Marketing Is Connection

Marketing often feels like a big, scary word. But at its core, it's not about flashy ads or social media trends, it's about connection. Families want to know your values, approach, and what makes your service unique.

Marketing also helps educate families about the benefits of family day care: smaller groups, consistent care and a nurturing home environment. When you focus on connection rather than selling, marketing becomes natural and authentic.

Tip Start with one small story. Share why you love what you do, a special routine you offer, or a meaningful learning moment. Connection begins with sharing something genuine.



Know Your Audience

Strong marketing starts with understanding who your service best supports. Think about what makes your family day care stand out, such as loose part play, outdoor learning, strong community ties or high-quality learning resources.

Knowing what matters to families helps you show them why your service is a great fit. It's not about choosing families, but helping the right families see why your service is right for them.

You can learn a lot by listening. What do families ask about most? Which posts get the most engagement? Where do new families say they found you? This understanding ensures your marketing is focused, meaningful and effective.

Tip Show your strengths in action. If nature play is central to your program, post photos of outdoor exploration and explain how it supports learning. Keep posts visual and authentic.



Consistency Beats Perfection

One of the biggest marketing challenges is feeling like you need to do everything perfectly and be everywhere at once. Many educators worry about multiple platforms or flawless content, but this approach is overwhelming and rarely sustainable.

What matters most is consistency. Families don't expect daily posts or mastery of every platform. They want to see that your service is reliable, professional and actively sharing what makes it special. Small, consistent actions build trust and recognition over time.

Start by choosing one or two platforms where your target families are most active, such as Facebook or Instagram. Decide on a realistic rhythm, like one post per week, and stick to it. Over time, those small, regular updates build a recognisable presence.

Consistency also applies to messaging and branding. Use the same tone, style and themes in posts and materials so families immediately recognise your service. If outdoor learning is a strength, highlight it consistently in posts, videos and flyers. This helps families see what you do well and reinforces your unique offerings.

Tip Create a simple content calendar for the month ahead. Plan one post per week, decide on key topics to highlight, and schedule them in advance. Showing up regularly, even in small ways, builds recognition, trust and connection.

Tell Your Story

Families connect with stories, not sale pitches. Your story is what makes your service memorable. It's your 'why'.

Why did you choose Family Day Care? What values guide you? What do you want children to experience each day? Sharing snippets of your journey helps families see the heart behind your service.

Storytelling can be as simple as sharing your weekly setup, a favourite play space, or a parent testimonial with persimmon. Each story builds trust and shows your program is thoughtful, professional and grounded in care.

Tip Share updates that reflect your values, whether its community involvement, creative play or family partnerships. Over time, your story becomes your strongest marketing tool.



Maximise What You Already Have

Great marketing doesn't have to cost anything. Start by valuing the resources and relationships you already have.

Happy families are your best advocates. Word-of-mouth referrals are the most powerful form of marketing in early childhood education. Encourage families to share their experiences or ask if they would provide a short testimonial.

Your local community is another untapped free resource. Display children's artwork at the local library, contribute to community newsletters, or participate in local community events. Every local connection that you make strengthens your reputation.

You can also use free tools like Canva for creating simple graphics, or scheduling apps to plan posts in advance. Everyday moments, such as photos of play, learning and relationships, are ready made marketing content.

Tip Ask one current or past family if they would share a brief testimonial that you can share. A real story from a satisfied parent is more persuasive than any advertisement.

Measure, Learn, Adjust

Good marketing isn't a one-time effort, it's an ongoing process of reflection and growth.

Keep an eye on what's working. Which posts get the most like or comments? Which flyers or community connections brought new enquires? Ask every new family how they found you; their answers show where your efforts are paying off.

Don't be afraid to experiment. Try a new kind of post, join a local parenting group online, or share behind-the-scenes updates. Each marketing effort teaches you something valuable.

Tip Once a month, take ten minutes to review your activity. Note what connected with families, what didn't, and what you would like to try next. These small reflections keep your marketing effective and stress free.

i

Marketing your family day care doesn't have to feel daunting. It begins with small, consistent actions that highlight the care, quality and connection at the heart of what you do. Every post, conversation or flyer is a chance to share your story and invite families to discover the warm, trusted environment you've created.

When you market with authenticity, you're not just promoting your service, you're building relationships, strengthening your reputation, and creating opportunities for growth. Each effort you make to connect with families is an investment in the visibility and long-term success of your business.

Start small, keep it simple and stay consistent. Over time, your marketing won't just help to fill vacancies, it will also connect you with families who appreciate the unique approach of your service.



Inclusive Environments

Designing Spaces for All Abilities

Josephine Mesiti, Mulberry Kids FDC - Camden Council Family Day Care

When I was given the brief about inclusive environments and designing spaces for all abilities, I wasn't sure at first how to put my thoughts into words.

For me, inclusion is less about the physical environment and more about the culture we create within it.

While the physical space plays a role, true inclusion lives in our daily routines and relationships - in the way we create an environment where belonging isn't an add-on, but the starting point.

In my setting, inclusion is reflected in the way children settle into the space knowing there is a place for them - their interests represented, their cultures and identities celebrated, and their families welcomed as partners. It starts with small details: photos of the children displayed around the room, artwork that honours their individuality, and

a daily rhythm that allows every child to join at their own pace and on their own terms.

Inclusion is a shared way of being - a mindset and daily practice where, as a community, we respect each child and family as an essential part of who we are. Every child, every family, every story is valued here, and that belief shapes both the physical environment and the culture we share.

At the heart of my practice is a simple truth: Through knowledge comes acceptance. When children learn about one another's differences, they begin to see them not as barriers, but as a natural part of the world they share.

Making Inclusion Visible

My philosophy is inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach. The environment is often called the "third teacher", and in family day care this feels especially true. Our homes become learning spaces, and the choices we make about how they are set up quietly communicate belonging and respect for every child.

Inclusion isn't achieved by just adding diverse resources. While these are important, diversity is only the first layer - a starting point. True inclusion happens when children learn about, understand, and appreciate difference in everyday life.

It is important to look deeper - to think about how inclusion feels when it is truly embedded within your own service. By looking at inclusion through this lens, each individual child in your care is honoured.



For example, I provide care for a child who is profoundly deaf and fed via a PEG tube.

In our home corner, dolls include feeding tubes, allowing children to care for them and role-play tube feeding, just as they see me caring for one of their peers. The children have also learned how her feeding works and assist in this routine during meal times. They have learned basic signs to communicate with her and seek consent. Our group times always include Auslan, so signing is not something 'special' for one child, but a language all children can use with meaning.

These choices reflect the experiences of the children in my care and make difference familiar and meaningful. They help children see that everyone has their own ways of being, communicating, and participating - and that each child belongs exactly as they are.

When children understand difference, fear and judgement fade. They begin to approach one another with empathy, curiosity, and respect - and inclusion becomes embedded practice.

The Culture of Inclusion

Beyond the physical environment is something less visible but even more powerful: the culture of inclusion. This is what children and families experience not just when they enter the space, but in every interaction that follows.

By demystifying difference, children develop empathy and respect. They stop seeing difference as something unusual and instead see it as part of the rich fabric of their community.

Families are partners in building this culture. A recipe from home might inspire a cooking activity. A parent's suggestion might guide our next project. A child's language might become part of our group songs. These contributions aren't add-ons - they are the heartbeat of our environment.



Embedding Inclusion Through Practice

The truth is, environments don't include people - educators do.

As educators, we hold the privilege of creating these environments. We decide whether our spaces are just rooms filled with toys or whether they become living invitations to belong. Every choice we make - from the layout of the room to the way we respond to a child's question - communicates a message about belonging.

Being intentional means noticing when a child is on the edges of

play and finding ways to gently draw them in. It means adapting experiences so that everyone can take part meaningfully. It also means modelling respect, empathy, and curiosity so that children learn these qualities through lived experience.

I often remind myself that "inclusivity for the whole group" is the goal. It is not about making space for one child - it is about creating a culture where everyone feels they are an essential part of the group. When inclusion is embedded, no child is treated as the exception.

A Call to Belonging

An inclusive family day care environment is not created by accident. It grows from a deep belief that every child and family deserves to be seen, heard, and valued. It is felt in the rhythm of the day, in the resources chosen with care, in the way families are invited to shape the journey, and in the small but powerful acts of respect and empathy that fill each interaction.

When children have the opportunity to grow in places where their identities are celebrated, their voices heard, and their differences embraced, they carry that sense of belonging with them into the world.

That, I believe, is the heart of what inclusive practice is all about - not just diversity, but deep, lived inclusion.





BMA Family Day Care Initiative

In 2022 BHP Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) partnered with Family Day Care Australia (FDCA) to access high-quality early childhood education and care in the regional and remote areas of Moranbah and Dysart, Queensland.

The partnership, now in its third year, supports the establishment and training of new family day care educators to meet the growing child care needs of BMA families and the wider community. Fully funded by BMA and delivered under the professional guidance of FDCA,

the initiative provides accredited training, professional development, and ongoing mentoring to participants entering the sector.

Early in 2025, the program successfully approved two new educators who are now delivering family day care to more than fifteen local families.

Supporting Families in Dysart – Family Day Care with Karen & Jess

Karen provides family day care in Dysart, supporting 14 local families, eight of which include parents working at BMA sites. Her service offers care for children under school age, along with flexible options such

as overnight and weekend care to meet the demands of mining rosters.

Karen says the support of the funding from BMA eased the financial pressures of setting up her service and provided welcome support with early setup costs, helping her create a safe and welcoming environment.

“Being able to share in the joys of children’s early years, watch them grow and reach milestones, and support hardworking parents in our community is incredibly rewarding.”

Jess, a mother of two, is currently supporting 6 local families through her family day care business from 7am – 4pm, Monday to Thursday.

Jess says that the support she has received from BMA has greatly benefited both her and her family by allowing her to start her own home-based business.

“The support of BMA has enabled me to serve my community while also remaining present for my own family.”

“The initiative that BMA have going at the moment is amazing and supportive to anyone who is thinking about signing up to be an educator,” says Jess.

The program has also provided professional development funding for two experienced educators to attend FDCA’s 2025 National Conference in Melbourne, strengthening local sector capability and quality outcomes

through tailored professional development.

The program has contributed directly to increasing access to flexible, regulated home-based care in regional Queensland, supporting workforce participation, community stability, family wellbeing and improved learning and developmental outcomes for local children.

Looking ahead, FDCA is planning an additional recruitment drive in early 2026 to attract and support prospective more educators towards the continued growth of the educator network and sustainable childcare options for BMA communities.





BUSINESS INSIGHTS

Who's Involved in an Insurance Claim for Family Day Care Educators?

For family day care educators, dealing with an insurance claim can feel overwhelming, especially if you've never had to make one before. Knowing who does what, and where to turn for help, can give you peace of mind if something unexpected happens in your family day care environment.

Whether it's property damage, a liability issue, or another insured event, understanding the roles of everyone involved helps make the claims process clearer and less stressful.

The Broker: your first point of contact

Your insurance broker is usually your first call when a claim arises. They're your advocate - guiding you through the claims process and liaising with the insurer on your behalf. Their role is to help present your claim clearly and ensure you receive the full benefits of your policy.

Brokers also provide advice on how to document your loss, and the immediate steps you should take following an incident (for example, after a home accident or property damage in your family day care).

The Insurer: assessing and processing the claim

Once your broker has lodged the claim, the insurer steps in to assess it. Their role is to determine whether the incident is covered by your policy. This involves reviewing documentation, examining the circumstances, and calculating compensation.



An insurer's claims officer or adjuster may request information or visit your home (if relevant) to assess damage or verify details.

The Loss Assessor: independent support

In some cases, you may work with a loss assessor—an independent professional who acts on your behalf. They provide an unbiased assessment of your claim, which can be especially valuable in complex situations.

The Builder or Repairer: making things safe again

If physical damage has occurred (e.g. storm damage to your home used for family day care), approved builders or contractors may be engaged to complete repairs. Their role is to return your premises to its pre-incident condition, while meeting the insurer's requirements.

Other Specialists: tailored expertise

Depending on the nature of your claim, additional experts may be consulted. For example:

- **Medical specialists** in the event of an injury-related claim
- **Investigators** when there is information to be collected
- **Technical experts** if there are unusual circumstances (e.g. electrical or structural issues)

Key takeaway

Knowing who is involved in an insurance claim - and how they support you - can make the process less daunting. At **Family Day Care Australia**, we're here to guide you every step of the way and ensure your insurance works for you when you need it most.



Jeans For Genes

“Baking it Blue”

By Michelle Klass

On the 11th and 13th of August 2025, the children at Michelle’s Family Day Care proudly wore their jeans to day care and participated in two fun-filled “bake-it-blue” days of baking.

The event was held as part of the national Jeans for Genes Day campaign, a special initiative raising funds and awareness for children affected by genetic conditions.

For me, this fundraiser has a very personal meaning. Several years ago, I cared for a young boy with a rare genetic disease. Despite the many challenges he faced, he was full of courage and determination. Sadly, he passed away, but his memory continues to inspire me. Each year, I dedicate our Jeans for Genes fundraiser to him to honour his life and support other children facing similar struggles.

Jeans for Genes is a simple yet powerful idea - people wear jeans, donate, and raise awareness for medical research. Funds raised go to the [Children’s Medical Research Institute](#), which works to find better

treatments and cures for the 1 in 20 children born with a birth defect or genetic disease. What I love about this campaign is how easy it is to get involved - just by wearing jeans and giving what you can, you’re making a difference to children and families who truly need it.

In the lead-up to our baking days, the families at my family day care showed incredible support. Parents generously donated money, and I set up an online fundraising page through the Jeans for Genes website to make contributing even easier. Their kindness and willingness to get involved meant we could raise meaningful funds for such an important cause.

When the big days finally arrived, the children and I dressed in our denim and rolled up our sleeves for some hands-on fun in the kitchen. On Monday, we baked **blue cupcakes**, and on Wednesday, we made **blue biscuits**, ensuring that every child attending across the two days had a chance to join in. A professional chef, who is a close friend of mine, came along to lend a hand. Her expertise added a special touch, and the children loved learning from her.

The little ones threw themselves into the baking activities with enthusiasm. They measured

ingredients, took turns mixing, scooped cookie dough, rolled and flattened shapes, and decorated with sprinkles and blue M&Ms. The sense of teamwork, creativity, and excitement in the room was wonderful to see. Of course, the best part was enjoying the delicious treats afterwards and proudly taking them home to share with their families.

Altogether, our family day care raised an amazing **\$603** for Jeans for Genes. I couldn’t be prouder of the children and their families for their efforts. Not only did the children help make a positive difference in the world, but they also developed a variety of important skills - collaboration, fine motor development, and following instructions - all while having a fantastic time.

This year’s Jeans for Genes fundraiser was truly special. It showed the power of community, the joy of baking, and the importance of supporting life-changing research. Most of all, it was a heartfelt tribute to a little boy who continues to inspire us all.



Member Spotlight

● **Natasha Rebuck, Leafbud Montessori, Randwick NSW**

How long have you worked in family day care for and where are you located?

Leafbud Montessori first opened its doors in January 2018, and I'm so proud to say that each year has seen us grow from strength to strength. Our program runs from my family home in the coastal suburb of Randwick, just moments from the beautiful Coojee Beach. I feel incredibly fortunate to live and work in such a diverse and vibrant community, surrounded by nature, families, and the gentle rhythm of coastal life. Since moving back from Ireland with my partner I've had the joy of raising my own family here while supporting many wonderful local children through their early learning journeys

Can you tell us a little about your background in the early childhood sector?

Navigating young motherhood in a rural and foreign country (Ireland) encouraged me to seek parenting approaches that honoured both my child's individuality and my own personal growth. I was drawn to Montessori philosophy whose holistic respectful values inspired me to deepen my understanding and eventually attain my Montessori Diploma (0-6 years). I then went on to run a beloved community Montessori preschool. After moving back to Australia with my young family I explored complementary fields that deepened my understanding of holistic child development, training in

Homeopathy, Infant Massage, and as a Birth Doula. These experiences strengthened my belief in the importance of supporting families and the whole child; mind, body, and spirit. This journey eventually led me back to Early Childhood Education, where I worked as a Montessori Assistant and later in Learning Support at a Montessori Primary School. My years in education taught me the power of relationships and the importance of nurturing curiosity. With my family growing I dreamed of building a space that reflected those values—one that was rich in connection built on strong Montessori foundations enriched by nature and family day care offered the freedom for me to create this. I set about accumulating skills in Nature Play, Bush Kindy and Early Years Nature Connection further learning. This led me to registering with Collective Family Day Care and then opening Leafbud Montessori.

If you could provide only one answer to the question-why choose family day care-what would it be?

Family day care offers a warm home-based environment where strong responsive relationships are at the heart. With one dedicated educator and a small group of children, each child is truly known, valued, and supported to grow at their own pace. Strong partnerships with families ensure care and learning are consistent and meaningful, creating a sense

of trust and shared purpose. In this nurturing, family-like setting, children feel safe to explore, connect, and develop independence. It's an environment where child-centred relationships can flourish, and where every moment of the day becomes an opportunity for growth, belonging, and joy.



What has your family day care been up to lately?

At Leafbud Montessori, we've been delighting in the beauty of Spring and learning about Ngoonungi, the season of warmth and transformation on the D'harawal Seasonal Calendar. By slowing down and taking time to observe the changes around us,



the children have noticed magpies protecting their nests, our stingless bees dusted with yellow pollen, and the garden bursting with ripening vegetables and blossoming native flowers. Our explorations have led us to study the life cycles of bees, plants, and flowers, as well as to care for our silkworms, gathering mulberry leaves and sweet berries for some delicious dishes prepared and cooked together. As part of our music program, the children have been listening to the orchestra instruments in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. Through movement and play, they've been re-enacting the story's characters, each child choosing a role and helping to plan their costume. We look forward to sharing this joyful performance with families at our end-of-year picnic.

What would you say your family day care is best known for?

Leafbud Montessori is known as a warm, nurturing, and nature-rich learning environment where every child is deeply respected and supported to grow at their own pace. Families are drawn to the calm, welcoming home environment that beautifully blends Montessori philosophy with Nature connection. Leafbud Montessori has strong links with the wider Montessori school community, supporting a smooth and confident transition for children as they move into their next stage of education. Families often share how their children leave Leafbud as confident, self-assured young people who carry with them a genuine love of learning, a sense of independence, a love of the natural world, curiosity, capability and kindness. Parents have expressed deep gratitude for the care and time invested in developing relationships and shared learning goals. Our unique cooking and baking program are a cherished part of daily life.

Children are actively involved in preparing wholesome, seasonal meals; learning practical life skills, cooperation, and the joy of contributing to a shared table and family life. These experiences nurture not only independence but also a sense of belonging and pride. At its heart, Leafbud Montessori is known for authentic relationships, connection to nature,

and a deep respect for each child's individuality. I believe that it is a place where curiosity, community, and kindness grow side by side.

What do you like to do when you are not working?

When I'm not working, I love to spend as much time as possible in nature or creating with my hands. You'll often find me pottering in the garden, tending to plants and enjoying the simple rhythms of the seasons. I love spending quality time with my adult children swimming in ocean pools or having a forest walk. I enjoy weaving baskets from wild fibres and raffia and listening to music. At home, I'm happiest cooking or baking for my family laughing and reminiscing. I can never resist a visit to the local markets with a friend, where I always come home with a vintage find, fresh flowers and handmade candles to fill our home with warmth and beauty.

What is the best piece of advice you would give to a new educator?

My best piece of advice for a new educator is to bring humility, patience, passion, and a strong sense of ethics to everything you do. I believe being a family day care educator is about nurturing relationships, understanding each child and family's uniqueness and your ability to adapt to change. It's essential to reflect regularly on your own biases and limitations, and to approach your work with a mindset of continual growth. Strive for high ►



▶ standards in professionalism while remembering the importance of empathy, curiosity, and quality care. Above all, know your “why”, understand why you chose this path and let that purpose guide your decisions, your interactions, and your dedication to every child’s learning and wellbeing. If you are willing to reflect, collaborate with families, grow, and work hard, the rewards are incredible. Children are the most profound teachers if we are open and willing to learn from them, every day becomes an opportunity for insight, joy, and growth.

What is the biggest change you have seen during your time working in the sector?

Since I opened my service in 2018, changes in family day care and early childhood education have strengthened the way we work at Leafbud Montessori. The updated EYLF v2 has encouraged us to keep building on what we love; nature-based learning, sustainability, and deeper connections with families and community. There’s also a stronger focus on embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, which has inspired us to slow down, observe the seasons, and help children build a genuine respect and curiosity for Country and culture. Stronger child safety regulations and digital device guidelines have reinforced our commitment to providing a safe, secure, and trusting environment for every child. The growing emphasis on educator wellbeing and children’s mental and emotional health aligns perfectly with our wellbeing program, supporting both the children and me. I’ve also really noticed changes in the mental and emotional health of children and families. Life feels busier for everyone parents are juggling so much, and children often need a little more time, connection, and emotional support than before. That’s why having a calm, predictable environment matters

now more than ever. At Leafbud Montessori, our gentle daily rhythm, small group size, and strong relationships give children a real sense of safety and belonging. When they feel secure, their confidence and curiosity naturally shine. I’ve also seen how powerful nature is in helping to calm children’s nervous systems. Whether we’re gathering sticks to build our forts, tending the garden, or going on our weekly nature walks, these quiet moments outdoors help children slow down, breathe, and find balance again.

What is the best advice you have received yourself?

Over the years, I’ve been so fortunate to receive guidance that has shaped both my practice and my confidence as an educator from my Nominated supervisor and Educational Leader at Collective Family Day Care. In the early days, I was told, “Build it, and the families will come.” And they did, reminding me that trust in your vision is essential. In the early stages of running my own service Dale my Nominated Supervisor reassured me by saying “Every problem has a resolution, and together we can find it,” teaching me the value of collaboration and perseverance. When I faced some challenging behaviours with a child, I was encouraged by Di my Educational Leader to “Trust yourself as a professional. The fact that you asked the question means you already know the answer — you just need confidence.” Most recently, I was reminded, “Your passion, hard work, and dedication shine through in everything you do,” affirming the importance of authenticity and commitment in nurturing children and families. I am incredibly grateful for this advice and mentorship over the years from



my scheme as they have become guiding principles in my practice: to trust, reflect, collaborate, and let passion lead the way.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?

One of the greatest joys of my career has been building such strong, supportive relationships with our local Montessori school and the wider community. Over the years, I’ve grown in confidence, purpose, and passion as an educator, and I feel so proud of the rich, intentional program we’ve created at Leafbud Montessori. It’s a true privilege to offer a unique blend of authentic Montessori practice and Nature Play, all within the warmth of my own home! I absolutely treasure our Leafbud community and the wonderful, lasting friendships that have formed between families. Hearing from parents and teachers about how well children settle into school, how they become kind, capable, and confident leaders, or how much they love coming back to visit (especially to bake bread!) always fills me with joy. I even smile when parents tell me they wish they could “stay all day and have Leafbud for grown-ups!” I’m also deeply grateful for the opportunities that have supported my professional growth. Being encouraged early on to share my passion for intentional environments at our conference — and later being recognised as Regional Winner in 2020 and 2025, and a National Finalist has been such an honour. These moments remind me that with dedication, reflection, and heart, meaningful work always shines through.

FUN WITH FDCA

Competitions
close 31
January 2026



Riddle

Solve the riddle at right to win the incredible Masterkidz Gemstone Counting Bar!

Masterkidz Gemstone Counting Bars is an engaging educational tool designed to support early numeracy and fine motor development in young children. This hands-on resource features five wooden counting bars embedded with vibrant, acrylic gemstones in a range of colours. Children are encouraged to visually and tactilely explore the number of gemstones on each bar, providing opportunities to develop one-to-one correspondence, number recognition, and early addition and subtraction skills through play.

Valued at over \$140.

I can be quiet or noisy, fast or slow,

I help young minds learn and grow.

I teach sharing, patience, and play,

And can turn learning into
a fun-filled day.

From puzzles to snap, I come
in many names,

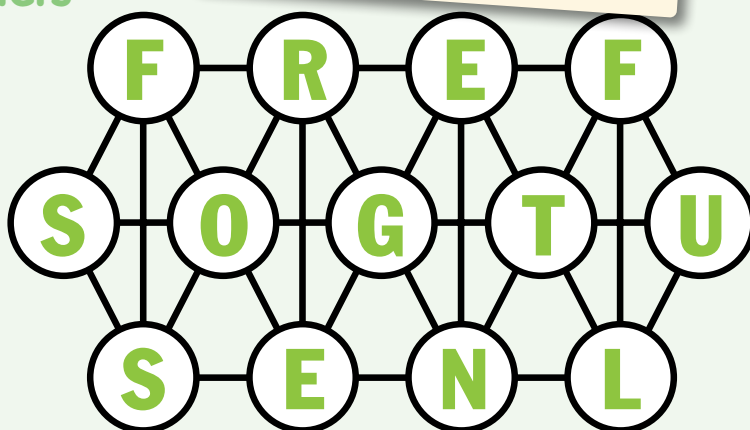
What am I that children love
and educators praise?



Chain Letters

Can you find the 13-letter word hiding in the chain? You must use all 13 letters once only and can move from circle to circle only where they are connected by lines.

Competition closes
31st January 2026



Red Star House

Find the Red Star House and you can win a families and children wooden people set, as well as a Village block set.

The Families and Children set includes 30 beautifully illustrated wooden people featuring different races, ages, and genders. The Village Blocks Set offers endless opportunities for imaginative play with 20 chunky, easy-to-grip wooden pieces. Featuring beautifully simple, silk screen printed illustrations of buildings, transport, signs, and trees, this set is designed to inspire creativity and storytelling in young children.

These sets promote social and emotional development through role play. They encourages understanding of diversity and cultural differences while developing fine motor skills through handling and stacking blocks. Valued at over \$190.



congratulations

...to the winners
from Issue 108

Find the Red Star House
Cheryl Richter, SA

Sudoku
Sarah Bevis, VIC

Chain Letters
Mikala Hutteroth, NSW

To enter the competitions, visit www.fdca.com.au/competitions



Leadership

Through the Lens of Educator Wellbeing

The wellbeing of early childhood educators is at the forefront of many broader discussions in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, and throughout mainstream media.

As Australia comes to understand and appreciate more deeply the complex work that educators do, and as policy makers increasingly position to recognise the value and unique nature of the profession, attention turns to an issue which sits at the heart of attraction and retention of the ECEC workforce – educator wellbeing.

For some time now the Be You initiative has guided and supported ECEC professionals to explore and engage more deeply in thinking about mental health and wellbeing, with consultants working in partnership with educators and leaders to identify needs, challenge assumptions and explore ways to address barriers, recognising that each learning community has its own construct and needs, along with ways of working.

Recognising and celebrating this uniqueness is especially important in a family day care context, where educators are often working in their own homes, without the benefit of another educator alongside them with whom they can decompress, talk issues through, or ask advice from.

In this space, having a supportive leadership voice, along with a team of professionals to support and guide educators, becomes even more essential.

Wellbeing remains in focus at 2025 Conference

Leaders and educators in many facets of the ECEC sector are seeking information, advice, and support in relation to wellbeing in 2025.

At the recent Family Day Care Australia Conference, held at the Pullman Melbourne Albert Park from 23-25 October 2025, Be You Consultant Trish Osgood responded to this need, presenting a session titled Supporting Leaders to Support

Educators: Creating Responsive Approaches to Educator Wellbeing.

“We know that educator wellbeing directly impacts the quality of care and learning that children receive,” Trish said.

“In the family day care sector, it is even more imperative that leaders are equipped to support educators in planning for and managing their wellbeing. Educators in this unique setting are in a position to provide quality home-based care for children and build meaningful relationships with families. However, working in often isolated settings can impact them,” she continued.

“Providing leadership, an opportunity to connect with other educators, and working toward action plans to address this barrier can benefit educators, children, and families. Having a whole of service approach ensures that family day care educators and teams feel more supported and to have a stronger sense of community.”

Planning for educator wellbeing

Trish's presentation centred around planning for educator wellbeing, which is one way that leaders in the family day care sector can help educators and support their mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

"Having a formalised whole service plan, developed in collaboration with a Be You Consultant, is one way to be responsive to educator wellbeing," she explained.

These plans are based on educators' needs and preferences and are developed by family day care scheme leaders to form part of a service approach to educator wellbeing planning.

Individualised plans help leaders to work with educators in their scheme to consider strategies and resources they can use to promote and protect their wellbeing in and outside work, or to manage any difficulties or disruptions at work, allowing them to identify strengths to continue to build upon as well as areas for improvement.

A considered approach

When it comes to embedding wellbeing Be You consultants work with teams to help them to understand that the 'how' of wellbeing is just as important as the 'what,' encouraging services to take the time to meaningfully plan for implementation.

Implementation refers to the processes and activities undertaken to ensure that changes to practice and ways of working are sustainable. Using an implementation cycle, Be You consultants help learning communities to clearly identify any


Having a plan – and the conversations around putting it together and ongoing monitoring of it – helps to normalise conversations about mental health and wellbeing and encourages help-seeking,

Trish Osgood

issues they are facing, define goals and success measures, and outline specific actions and timeframes.

"The Cycle provides a guide to explore the underlying needs and identify barriers and enablers to change and select strategies to effectively address them," Trish explained.

"It has been designed to guide planning around how you to implement actions to achieve wellbeing goals. Implementation is simply the series of steps you are employing to make your actions sustainable."

Next steps

Be You Consultants help learning communities – including family day care services – to improve wellbeing

by guiding them to implement a whole-community approach to mental health, using evidence-based resources and professional learning to enhance educators' skills in supporting children's wellbeing and managing stress.

They assist in developing positive, inclusive learning environments, connecting services with support networks, and preparing for critical incidents through strategic planning and tailored implementation tools, completely free of charge.

Want to learn more about the practical wellbeing tools and resources which can support Osgood leaders and educators to build the mental health, wellness and wellbeing of the children and young people in their care?

Visit the [wellbeing toolkits page](#) of the [Be You website](#) to learn more.





Dollars and Sense

Outdoor Areas and Tax:

What Family Day Care Educators Need to Know



Ben Mueller
from FDC Tax

Outdoor play is integral to the way children learn and grow - and likely one of the most regularly planned parts of your educational program. Fencing, sandpits, veggie patches, play equipment, and other outdoor features help create safe, engaging environments that support learning and development. In many cases, your scheme may require specific alterations or improvements to meet both learning and safety standards - sometimes as a condition of approval or continued operation.

While it's easy to assume these costs are tax-deductible, especially when they're required, ATO rules can be tricky. We'll now go over some of these rules and offer guidance on how to maximise your claims by separating your space, documenting exclusive use, and linking features to your educational program.

What Makes an Outdoor Expense Deductible

To claim outdoor expenses for family day care, the ATO looks at how the space is used - not just what it's used for. You're more likely to be eligible if the area is:

- Physically separated from the rest of your home (e.g., fence, hedge, garden edging, or other clear barrier).
- Used exclusively for family day care - without pets, family, or personal use.
- Directly related to earning your income.

Even if the area isn't fully separated, repairs - like fixing a gate used daily by children - may still be deductible if they relate directly to your business. Improvements, such as new fencing or soft-fall surfaces, follow more specific rules, which are outlined below.

Lawn Mowing and Garden Maintenance

Lawn mowing and garden maintenance are part of maintaining a safe and engaging outdoor space. While it's common to assume these costs are deductible - especially when the area is kept to a higher standard for children's safety or presentation - the ATO generally considers ground maintenance private unless the space is clearly separated and used only for children in care.

Costs for areas shared with pets or family may not qualify. However, fencing off or separating a dedicated play zone may allow you to apportion the expense based on its size and exclusive use.

TIP If you don't already have a separate area, consider installing a permanent or temporary child-safe fence, hedging, or garden edging to define a dedicated family day care zone. Measure the space (e.g., 50m² of a 200m² yard), note this in your tax records, and take photos. Include regular references to outdoor activities in your documented programs and observations to show how the space supports learning.

Fencing, Driveways, and Outdoor Structures

Fencing and outdoor structures - such as gates, pergolas, shade sails, or driveways - can play a further key role in creating a safe and functional care environment. These features may be required by your scheme or added to improve safety,

access, or learning opportunities. But whether they're deductible depends on how they're used and whether they're considered a repair or an improvement.

- **Repairs and Maintenance:** Fixing a broken gate, replacing a damaged section of fence, or resurfacing a worn driveway used daily by children may be deductible - even if the area is shared - provided the work directly relates to your service operations.
- **Improvements and Capital Works:** Installing a new fence, building a pergola, or laying a new driveway is generally considered a capital improvement. These costs may need to be claimed over time through depreciation or capital works deductions. If the structure is used exclusively for family day care, you may be able to claim the full cost over time. If it's shared with personal use, you'll need to apportion the expense.

TIP Keep records of the purpose and use of each structure. Take photos showing exclusive use, and document how the feature supports your learning environment (e.g., shaded play area, safe entry point, or outdoor learning zone).

Outdoor Learning Spaces: Vegetable Gardens and More

Outdoor learning spaces - like vegetable gardens, sensory paths, or nature play zones - can enrich your educational program and support children's development. These areas encourage exploration, responsibility, and connection to the environment, making them valuable additions to your setup.

Deductibility depends on how the space supports your program and whether it's used exclusively for family day care. If the garden is part of your educational programming and used only by children in care, related costs may be deductible or depreciated over time. This could include raised garden beds, child-safe tools, compost bins, or irrigation systems.

Shared Use Considerations: If the garden is also used by your family, pets, or for personal food production, you'll need to apportion the expense based on exclusive use. The clearer the separation - physically and in your documentation - the stronger your case.

TIP Document how the garden supports learning outcomes. Include photos, activity plans, and observations showing children planting, harvesting, or exploring the space. If you install features like raised beds or child-sized seating, note their purpose and exclusive use in your records.

Tips for Educators

Understanding what outdoor expenses you can claim - and how to document them - can make a big difference at tax time. Here are five practical tips to help you strengthen your claims and stay compliant:

1. Separate Your Space

Use fencing, garden edging, or other barriers to clearly define your dedicated care space. The more physically distinct the space is, the easier it is to demonstrate exclusive use.

2. Document Everything

Keep records of purchases, installation dates, and the purpose of each outdoor feature. Take photos showing how the space is used and include references in your daily programs and observations.

3. Apportion Shared Areas

If your outdoor space is shared with pets or family, measure the dedicated childcare portion and apportion expenses accordingly. Note the total area and the exclusive-use area in your records.

4. Repairs vs. Improvements

Repairs may be deductible immediately, while improvements often need to be depreciated. Keep receipts and note whether the work was a fix or a new installation.

5. Link to Learning

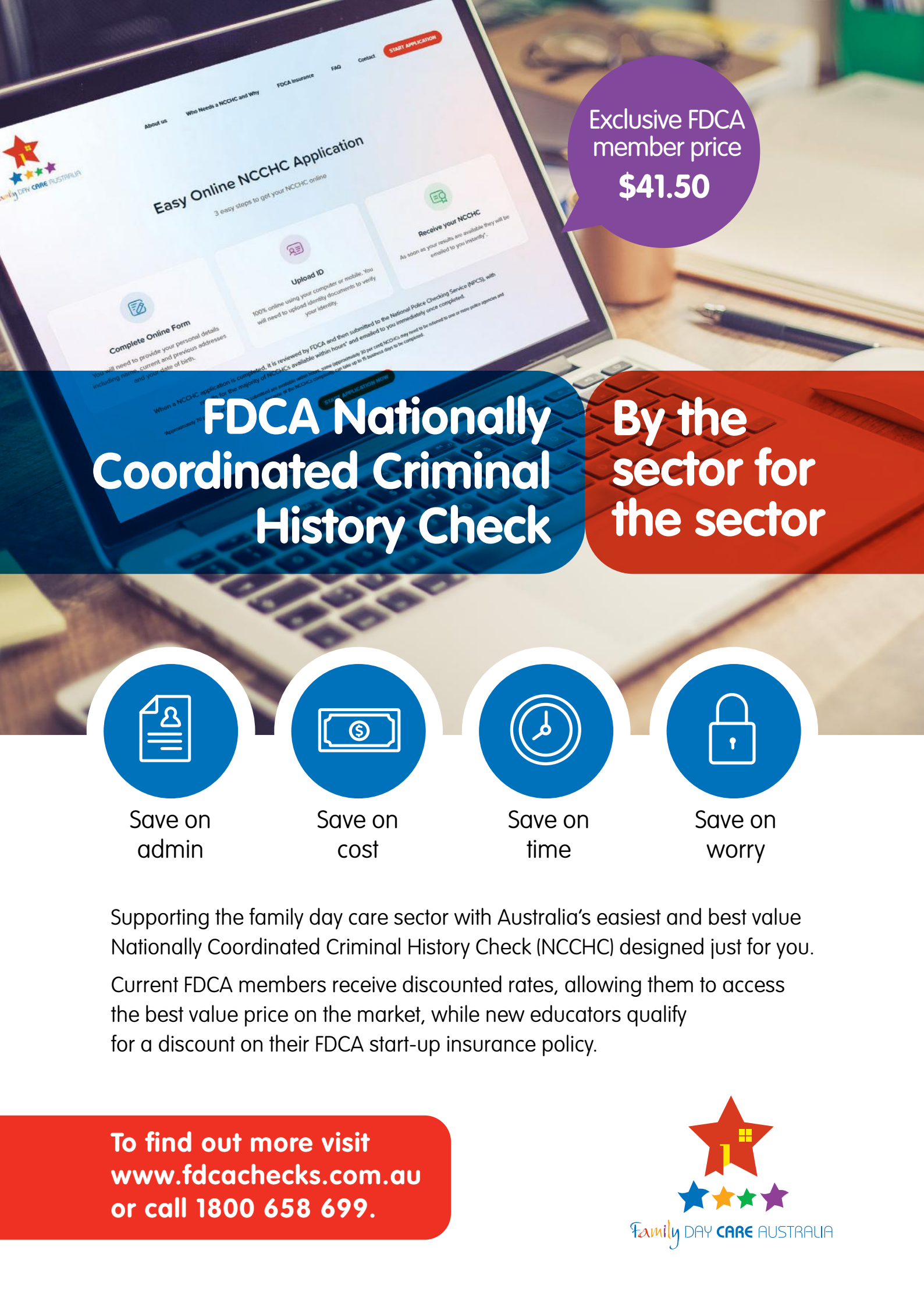
Show how outdoor features support your educational program. Whether it's a veggie patch, sandpit, or shaded play zone, link the space to learning outcomes in your documentation.

Final Thoughts

Outdoor upgrades can be more than just aesthetic - they're part of creating a safe, engaging learning space for children. But when it comes to tax, clarity matters. If you can show that a space is used exclusively for family day care and supports your educational program, you're in a stronger position to claim related expenses.

Instead of memorising rules, focus on documenting your setup, separating your space, and linking outdoor features to learning. That's what turns a garden bed or a fence into a legitimate business expense.





Exclusive FDCA
member price
\$41.50

FDCA Nationally Coordinated Criminal History Check

By the
sector for
the sector



Save on
admin



Save on
cost



Save on
time



Save on
worry

Supporting the family day care sector with Australia's easiest and best value Nationally Coordinated Criminal History Check (NCCHC) designed just for you.

Current FDCA members receive discounted rates, allowing them to access the best value price on the market, while new educators qualify for a discount on their FDCA start-up insurance policy.

To find out more visit
www.fdcachecks.com.au
or call 1800 658 699.

