



Aboriginal Children's Services Meeting – Whyalla 23-24 June 2011

The Aboriginal Resource & Management Support Unit (Indigenous Professional Support Unit) (IPSU) of South Australia convened the Aboriginal Children's Services Meeting held in Whyalla from the 23-24 June. The services that come together are from Childcare, Creche, Outside School Hours Care and Mobile Services. The services meet three times a year to provide support to each other, have

peer discussions, share ideas, listen to guest speakers and be provided with relevant professional development.

In the past year, the services have looked at the new curriculum documents, Early Years Learning Framework and My Time Our Place from several perspectives. Services decided that this time they would like to focus on 'What Makes Us Unique'. There was a lot to celebrate!

"Attending the Aboriginal Services Meetings has given me the confidence to share with everyone our opinions and we are always valued and we are listened to."
Director, Rural Aboriginal Child Care Service.

We saw great examples of identity webs using photos and families' comments, mob maps and trees from Kura Yerlo Children's Centre and Wynbring Jida, and heard about the ways in which the centres have involved families in these projects.

We had a presentation about the vegetable and flower gardens at Port Lincoln Children's Centre, planted, cared for and harvested by the children (all under 5) and staff.

Later in the afternoon we all visited Wynbring Jida Children's Centre for a field trip to see and listen to stories from the centre staff on the great things happening at the service and to also look at their vegetable garden and hear how they involve the children.

Both centres are encouraging parent and family involvement in the gardens too.

The Early Years Learning Framework was reflected at Wynbring Jida Children's Centre by photos and documentation on display. Children and families are involved in this process through regular discussions.

We learned about the Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Mobile Service which visits Communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands, and the difficult environmental conditions faced in both travelling to some of these Communities and having to often work out in the open with minimal resources to support children and staff.

The Minya Porlar Crèche (Murray Bridge) staff spoke about family connections and how important they are to the service, staff, children and the community. People often comment to the team that Minya Porlar has a wonderful warm family feel.

Staff from the Gerard Crèche presented a picture story about themselves and their programs and the challenges faced working in a very small service. They also commented that families feel comfortable and supported by the staff due to their understanding of community needs.

Staff from other services shared wisdom and funny stories from their daily work as carers and educators.

Support agencies were invited to the meeting to listen to and be involved in the sharing of stories. Two representatives from the State Department of Education and

Children's Services (DECS) were present. They were eager to attend and listen to more about the importance of identity and culture as a result of meetings with ARMSU IPSUSA regarding the implementation of the National Quality Agenda in South Australia. Being part of the meeting was an experience they "thoroughly enjoyed ... a wonderful learning experience".

There were also representatives from SA's two Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs), Novita Children's Services and Inclusive Directions where the Inclusion Support Facilitators (ISFs) gave a very informative overview of the range of support options they offer in order to support services with the inclusion of all children. This was seen as an important step by the ISAs and ARMSU to show how we can continue to provide support to services in a collaborative way.

An Occupational Therapist from Novita's Regional Services Therapy Team also attended so that participants could receive information on the therapy support that can be received for children with physical disabilities in rural and remote SA.

ARMSU and Network SA discussed budgets, how to read financial reports and gave information on the new resources available for loan from the ARMSU Resource Centre.

Everyone, regardless of their position or qualifications, brings valuable experience and knowledge to the meetings and as was evident all take home renewed enthusiasm and new ideas.

At Aboriginal Children's Services Meetings we challenge ourselves and support each other. We learn, we talk (a lot!), we keep motivated and we have fun too!

"It's great to come together as Aboriginal Services to share stories, be inspired and know we are all working for our Aboriginal children in early childhood. We have many dedicated Early Childhood Educators." Director, Remote Aboriginal Child Care Service.

Sharolyn Talbot
ARMSU IPSUSA Coordinator