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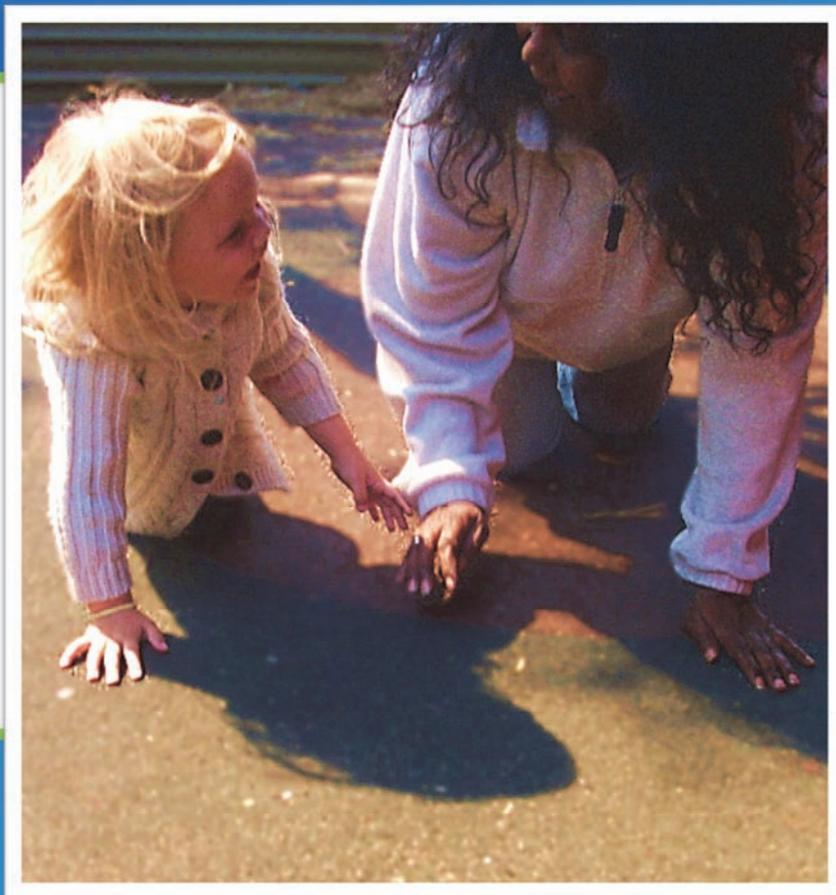
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Kids matter in early childhood

Photo stories from the Flinders University
KidsMatter Early Childhood Evaluation

G Skrzypiec, R Murray-Harvey, S Krieg, KL Dix,
H Askeell-Williams, M Lawson & PT Slee



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KidsMatter
Australian Early Childhood
Mental Health Initiative

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Acknowledgements: We would like to give thanks to the photographers and the services that contributed to the photos and stories reproduced in this book, and also to Karina Skrzypiec for her assistance in preparing the book.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this document may contain images of people who have since passed away.

KidsMatter: the Australian Early Childhood Service Mental Health Initiative is developed in collaboration by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue*, the Australian Psychological Society, and Early Childhood Australia. KidsMatter information and resources (including electronic copies of this report) are available from www.kidsmatter.edu.au.

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Foreword

The photographs in this book are not the work of professional photographers. They were taken by parents and staff from early childhood services around Australia in response to an invitation by the KidsMatter Early Childhood evaluation team. Families were invited to take snapshots of moments in children's lives that demonstrated social and emotional learning and competence, while staff were asked to share how KidsMatter had impacted on them.

The photographs are precious. They provide evidence of parent and staff perceptions about what constitutes young children's social and emotional competence; they also provide glimpses into the social and cultural worlds of diverse Australian children. The photos tell stories of Australian children at home, at play and at early childhood services.

As you turn the pages of the book, you will notice that the activities the children are participating in are diverse. Some are unique to the Australian context. For example, some outdoor activities relate to the local geography and climate. Some could be taken in other parts of the world. However, as we look at the children flying a kite, fishing, reading, swimming, riding and interacting with others, we are reminded that children's learning and development always occurs in a socio-cultural environment.

As the photographs illustrate so powerfully, the children's social and emotional learning and development demonstrated here, is culturally embedded in the activities, tools, tasks, language and expectations made available in their particular worlds. In this sense, the book contributes to a picture of young children as actively participating in their social worlds, not just

Girls and boys doing a floor puzzle together

I'm very proud of how they have become really social beings ... language of co-operation; the turn taking; acceptance of those you would not usually choose to spend time with.



relationships 7



Good mates

It is important to give all children a supportive caring environment in which to grow emotionally, socially and physically – making friendships that could last through to adulthood – along with a high quality education.

Positive relationships form the base of everything we do. The strong sense of community, the valuing of and respect for every person, the friendships formed and the development of positive social skills and strategies to deal with others provide our children with the best start we can give them. We are all working towards happy, healthy lives.



8 relationships

The importance of family input from a very young age



To actually have that time with dad is really good, because dad is usually away working at this time of year.



When we invite families to come into the Centre to interact...we are connecting with family. I look at the visitation ... the joy within him and that sense of belonging that comes out in his body language is quite touching, for him and also for all of us as educators. To me that says a lot. When you know where you come from, you begin to know where you're going and eventually you know who you are.

relationships ,



I can help you

He couldn't do his shoes and the other boy goes "I can help you with them" and he just bent down and started undoing his shoes. It was one of those moments where you nearly want to weep. To just think "you have so got it". It was just that gesture of connection with him and his classmate.

He's showing that you've got to slice; you've got to see it like this. He's teaching him how to do it. He's put his arm around him saying "you do it this way". The cooperation that's happening in there is really lovely - just that whole sharing experience.



I belong



The children have a strong sense of belonging. They are looking for all the children that belong in their group. They have found their photos and are looking for their friends.

Many of the children regularly wear their shirts to preschool. The aim is to help build the sense of belonging – develop that sense of community and develop a sense of belonging in the children. They were all delighted the first day they wore their preschool shirts together.



feelings "



I feel safe

He was a very alone child. He couldn't sit near children and he used to be really scared. We've helped him along his emotional state. Now he can interact with other children and he's sitting quite closely. For him it's "look at me now. I can associate with, interact with other children. I'm not scared".

This little girl with the rainbow hat had arrived at preschool and had been standing on the porch with her mother for quite some time. They were running a bit late so I think that just put her off kilter a bit. We were all outside. She was very unsure about coming outside and so the little girl in the yellow hat had noticed this and she said "hold my hand and I'll bring you outside with me". The little girl with the rainbow hat just lit up, her face just lit up and said "okay then, I'll come out with you" and then they skipped down together.





I feel strong

I watched this little girl. She was climbing up over that tunnel and the other little boy in the picture, was actually showing her how to climb over the tunnel. She wanted to jump; to climb over to the tyres and then jump down, but she was scared. She couldn't do it to start off with, but he was helping her and he was holding her hand. It's a great example of how he nurtured her and helped her through that risk taking. He would hold her hand to get onto the tyres and then hold

her hand while she jumped down. He was really caring. She did that over and over and over, she would have done that about 12 times, until in the end she had climbed over there all by herself. She had that resilience to keep on trying and keep on trying and she knew, really, if she kept trying that she could do it, or if she didn't know it, she discovered it. She discovered if she kept trying she could do it. In the future this is something she can draw on when things are difficult.

I feel calm

Learning about myself and others, I have developed an understanding of how important it is to have moments and special places to share with others or to take time for solitude and reflection.

Here the kids can hide under the weeping mulberry and have special moments to share with friends or time for solitude and reflection.



Swimming at the pool



He happily participates in lessons, following instructions, waiting his turn, singing and playing next to his friends, showing resilience when he can't demonstrate a required skill and then celebrating his successes once he masters it. After the lesson he plays in the water, joining in with other children, or enjoying his own company. He is confident and happy.

Preparing dinner



We consider the overall general wellbeing, happiness and involvement of children through activities with family and friends. We consider everyday things such as food prep to be normal learning experiences. All family are involved (and neighbours as well!)

First experience in snow



He said 'look how soft it looks', when we pulled up in the car. It looks so fluffy he said to his sister. When he got out and started feeling it, it was hard and crunchy and he just started feeling the different textures of it. He worked out that it can be fun as well.

learning and playing 15

Learning through new experiences



Flying a kite:

I see her learning to be aware of flying a kite in close proximity of other people. She is happy and also learning about the co-ordination of which way to turn each time the wind takes the kite in a different direction.



Gone fishing:

Learning to be patient...

16 *learning and playing*

Playing football with his Dad and sister

It is an activity which he enjoys and teaches him so many skills, not just the physical skills of playing football, but also social skills such as taking turns and having fun while not being too rough. It also teaches him coping skills when Dad occasionally wins.

He is forming an ever-increasing and priceless bond with his dad and siblings. It is a special time that he spends with his Dad which he looks forward to every day.



learning and playing 17

Look Mum, I'm a big girl too

My younger daughter watches her sister ride her bike in the park often with friends and she wants to join in. She is gaining confidence through her sister supporting her. She reminds her sister to wear a helmet and to always keep her hands on the handlebars. In this photo her sister was explaining "turn your feet, pedal your feet, don't stop, keep going, keep going. Head up. Look where you're going. Watch what you're doing!" So now she feels like a 'big girl'.



18 *learning and playing*

Sandpit cooking

One of the students is relatively new to the class. Whenever we see her hovering or playing on her own we try to guide her into a game with another group of students. They'd actually done that themselves that day. The other children had approached her to sit down with them and play. It's just a lovely simple sharing moment. They've only got a couple of plates in front of them, but they were all talking and sharing and feeding off each other's input.



Working together as a cohesive group

They were working as a group and happily cooperating in a natural kind of play, rather than it being set up, directed. Many of the boys have learnt so much with the opportunity to play naturally, sort out their roles; letting others participate; work towards a common goal.

working together 19



Having fun with Nanna

The thing I like about this photo is we're actually smiling and laughing. We're having a bit of joke. It's just having that little bond that we have got.

Having a 'squeeze' and a giggle

Myself and a little boy in our Toddler Room at the Centre. We are having a

'squeeze' as he called it. It reiterates the importance of physical touch that young children and their carers need and respond to; the physical manifestation of joy and acceptance which is vital to the mental health of all people, but especially the young child.





Checking the broccoli plants for caterpillars

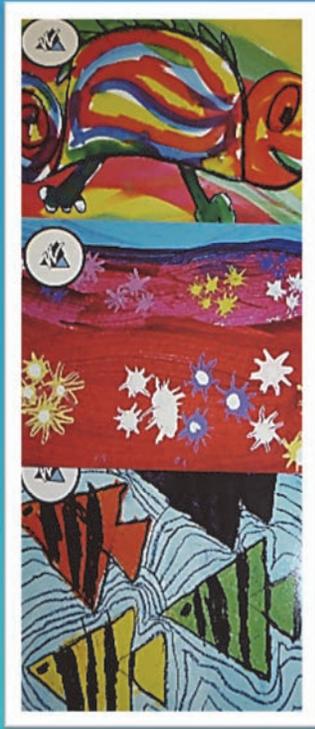
The community vegetable garden was a community building project, bringing children and families together. Many families came together to install the raised beds. This was a day for families to work alongside each other and to form friendships as we established the new garden. We finished up with a sausage sizzle. The children have enjoyed tasting some of the vegetables we have grown and have helped with watering and pest control

Working Bee

Children were encouraged to work alongside their parent/carer helpers, giving them a sense of ownership and responsibility of looking after their play spaces. Some of the fathers that were involved had not spent any time at school previously and would not ever have come along for “ordinary” classroom parent help. One dad even changed his lunch break so he could participate.



working together



We are all given an opportunity to shine

The school has produced post cards featuring children's art work for notes to families. These post cards have been introduced to help staff ensure that positive messages are sent home to all families throughout the year. The art work is from the children that have been created into postcards and the staff can then write on a post card to send it home.

The bond we have and the respect that we show between each other and the children is unbelievable. As a staff member we are aware of our children – we notice the littlest thing or big things. We all are given opportunities to shine.



The Photo Study

The photos and words reproduced in this book were taken from a collection of 162 images and stories provided by the parents and educators in 10 early childhood services as part of the larger evaluation of the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative, conducted in 111 early childhood services across Australia during 2010-2012 by researchers from Flinders University.

The selection of services for inclusion in this Photo Study aimed to provide a representation of the diversity of early childhood service provision in Australia. It included sites that varied in terms of location (metropolitan, rural, regional); size (small and large); type (preschool and long day care); and included sites with a proportionally high representation of culturally and linguistically diverse families and children identified as of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

The Photo Study aimed to gain insight into parents' perspectives about social and emotional dimensions of their children's lives, and staff depictions of the impact of KidsMatter on their practices. The researchers talked with parents and staff about their photos and these

conversations were transcribed and thematically analysed in NVivo. The analysis involved distinguishing and coding the main message or depiction of a photo or story text based upon the researchers' knowledge of literature in fields of early childhood, human development, and children's social and emotional wellbeing using a KidsMatter lens. Factors associated with barriers and facilitators of implementation, aspects of the components and social and emotional learning, as well as, changes in practice, formed some of the coded patterns, which were finally grouped into a small set of themes.

The four themes depicted in this book capture the key messages conveyed by parents and educators. For parents this involved depicting their children's social and emotional learning, and for educators, the photo stories showed how the KidsMatter journey had impacted on their practice. These four themes align well with the KidsMatter focus on: (1) creating a sense of community; (2) developing children's social and emotional skills; (3) working with parents and caregivers; and (4) helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

