



Build your capabilities and connections at **The Leadership Conference 2026**

EVENT DETAILS

Wednesday 26 August 2026

9.30am–4.00pm

The Novotel Melbourne, Preston VIC

Registrations open from 8.45am

REGISTER NOW!



**See the full
program inside!**



Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

It Takes A Village acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work. We recognise their continuing connection to culture, land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the strength of family connection and kinship within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their ongoing dedication to educating and caring for children. The sovereignty of these lands was never ceded. We support Treaty.

We would like to thank Yorta Yorta and Gunnai artist Dixon Patten for creating this artwork which depicts our organisation's cultural learning journey.

Conference program



8.45am–9.30am REGISTRATIONS OPEN

Tea and coffee available on arrival.

9.30am CONFERENCE COMMENCES

Welcome to Country

An Elder from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation will begin the conference with a Welcome to Country. Together, we'll take a moment to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet.

Introduction

Daniela Kavoukas

CEO, It Takes A Village

9.45am KEYNOTE: Leading on the edge

Rachael Robertson

Antarctic expedition leader, leadership and teamwork expert and best-selling author

Imagine living in months of darkness, the temperature hovering around minus 35 degrees and you're stuck inside with no escape from your workplace or staff. There's no way in, and no way out.

Antarctic expedition leader, Rachael Robertson, reveals how she kept her team inspired and productive through Antarctica's long, dark winter. She explains why 'respect trumps harmony' and how she built a culture of collaboration, integrity and trust with a diverse group of complete strangers.

Not just an entertaining story, Rachael's experience includes key takeaways and simple tools that you can implement back at your service right away.

10.45am MORNING TEA



11.15am

**PANEL: Is it better to be loved or feared?
An age-old question for leaders**

FACILITATOR

Catharine Hydon

Director, Hydon Consulting

PANEL

Tarryn Holland

Coordinator, St Kilda and Balaclava Kindergarten

Narelle Lawton

Acting Services Manager, It Takes A Village

Oliver Leigh

Operations Manager, Kensington Community Children's Co-operative

Annie Mok

*Manager, Family and Children's Services, La Trobe University Community
Children's Centre*

Anthony Morris

Professional Support Consultant, It Takes A Village

Join Catharine Hydon and a panel of expert guests for a 'leadership rumble' – an exchange of ideas, experiences, and perspectives on leadership – where sharing diverse viewpoints is encouraged!

Catharine poses the question: Is it better to be seen as one of the team or establish a distance that maintains authority and compliance?

Panellists bring their unique perspectives on when it is most effective to lead with professional distance versus sharing personal struggles and failures to build trust in a high-stress environment.

Plus: Have your say in the Q&A at the end of the session!

12.00pm

STRETCH BREAK



12.10pm

PRESENTATION: Leading through conflict: Practical tools for difficult conversations

Kylie Thomas

Founder and Managing Director, DreamStoneHR

Conflict is a normal part of leading people, but that doesn't mean it's easy! In this practical session, Kylie shares simple tools to help you handle difficult conversations with more confidence and less avoidance. She explores how to spot tension early, respond to pushback constructively and keep conversations focused, respectful and productive.

Rather than seeing conflict as something to fear, learn how to use it as an opportunity to create clarity, strengthen relationships and move teams forward. Leave with practical strategies and language you can apply in real workplace conversations straight away.

12.30pm

LUNCH BREAK

1.15pm

KEYNOTE: Strong leaders build smarter teams

Kathy Walker OAM

Award-winning teaching and learning expert, and author

We each bring a unique body of knowledge and expertise to our role as leaders. Kathy motivates you to draw on this knowledge to lead with confidence and build a cohesive team.

Learn practical strategies to promote consistency and professionalism across your service – because when you build stronger leaders and smarter teams, children and families will thrive.

2.15pm

STRETCH BREAK



2.20pm

WORKSHOP: Workplace culture: Where should we begin?

Bryony Catlin and Kylie Seadon

Professional Support Consultants, It Takes A Village

Your organisational climate is the foundation for educator wellbeing and professionalism. In this interactive (and fun!) workshop, examine how shared values and communication styles shape the daily environment for staff and, ultimately, the quality of education and care provided to children.

Move beyond surface-level interactions to focus on the relational intelligence required for a sustainable workplace. Bryony and Kylie invite you to join a lively discussion on how fostering trust, autonomy and mutual support creates a collaborative culture that improves educator retention and professionalism.

3.15pm

SERVICE SHOWCASE: Leadership, capacity building and educator retention in challenging times

Linda Davison

Coordinator, Clarendon Children's Centre

Career progression can be limited in small, stand-alone children's services. Professionally ambitious educators may feel they need to leave the families, children and colleagues they love, to seek new challenges and career advancement.

Clarendon Children's Centre (CCC), has found that 'distributed leadership' is an effective way to address this common workforce issue.

Enacted progressively, their approach has resulted in a stable and highly effective team who demonstrate leadership both within CCC and the wider education and care sector. Linda explores their leadership model in detail, provides examples of how distributed leadership is supported and gives practical suggestions for encouraging active leadership in small teams.

3.50pm

WRAP-UP AND CLOSE

Keynote speakers



Rachael Robertson (she/her)

Expedition leader, leadership and teamwork expert, and best-selling author

Rachael led the Australian expedition to Davis Station, Antarctica – the second female to lead a team at the Station and the youngest ever leader. She managed a team of 18 people through the long, dark Antarctic winter, and through trial and error built a resilient and highly successful team based on the foundation that ‘respect trumps harmony.’

Since returning, Rachael has completed her MBA, written 2 best-selling books, *Leading on the Edge* and *Respect Trumps Harmony*, and has presented at over 2000 events around the world.



Kathy Walker OAM (she/her)

Consultant and author

Kathy is a leading curriculum, teaching and learning expert in personalised and play-based learning, with her experience spanning more than 30 years.

Kathy has been granted several awards, including a Fellowship from the Australian Council for Educational Leaders for her extensive contributions to the improvement of student outcomes as a teacher, lecturer and consultant. She was also awarded an OAM for her extensive work with educators and families. She continues to work with parents, educators and leaders.

Speaker bios



Annie Mok (she/her)

Manager, Family and Children's Services, La Trobe University Community Children's Centre

Annie has been involved in early childhood education leadership roles for 30 years, predominantly in university settings. This includes at Swinburne Prahara Community Children's Centre Co-Operative (now Windsor Community Children's Centre), the University of Melbourne Early Childhood Education Services, and currently the La Trobe University Community Children's Centre. Annie is particularly passionate about social justice and ensuring that all children, their families and staff have a centre they can thrive in.



Anthony Morris (he/him)

Professional Support Consultant, It Takes A Village

Anthony's 20-year journey from educator to director of a community not-for-profit children's centre has shaped his passion for children's play and connection with nature. He has been organising and volunteering on nature play-focused projects for over a decade. With a Diploma in Children's Services and wide sector experience, Anthony brings expertise in leadership and governance. Anthony has a knack for supporting services to build strong community relationships and develop innovative curriculum that engages all children.



Bryony Catlin (she/her)

Professional Support Consultant, It Takes A Village

Bryony has an array of early childhood teaching experience and qualifications, including a Graduate Certificate of Developmental Trauma and a Graduate Diploma of Therapeutic Play. This background helps her guide educators and leaders to understand and include children who have had adverse early childhood experiences.

Bryony is passionate about relational pedagogy and social justice for children and families experiencing disadvantage. Bryony's work advocates for places where children have a voice and their sense of choice and agency is promoted.

Speaker bios *Continued*



Catharine Hydon (she/her)

Director, Hydon Consulting

Catharine is a praxis enthusiast and leader with over 30 years' experience in early childhood education. Catharine's work centres on supporting professionals to bridge theory and practice, fostering transformational change through collaboration and deep reflection. With a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education, she champions principled leadership, effective governance, and ethical decision-making in education and care settings.



Daniela Kavoukas (she/her)

CEO, It Takes A Village

Daniela is a tenacious leader and passionate advocate. She brings a deep understanding of the sector to her role, drawing on her experience as a multi-award-winning educator and strategic leader in community-based early education and care services for over 20 years.

Now serving as It Takes A Village CEO, Daniela is honoured to provide a voice for service directors and educators on the issues that matter to them. She is driven by a strong belief that children must be at the heart of all decision-making.



Kylie Seadon (she/her)

Professional Support Consultant, It Takes A Village

Kylie has had a 30+ year career in early childhood education. Before arriving at It Takes A Village, Kylie spent 14 years as a children's service director – including at Perry Street Childcare Centre where she maintained an Exceeding rating.

A registered mentor for early childhood educators, Kylie is passionate about supporting early childhood educators, teachers and leaders to overcome challenges so they can thrive in their jobs.



Kylie Thomas (she/her)

Founder and Managing Director, DreamStoneHR

Kylie is the founder and Managing Director of DreamStoneHR and has more than 20 years' experience helping businesses navigate people, performance and workplace issues. She works across HR strategy, workplace relations, leadership support, investigations and building practical people frameworks that work in the real world.

Kylie is known for giving clear, commercial advice that helps leaders handle tricky situations with confidence. She is passionate about creating workplaces that are compliant, productive and genuinely supportive, and enjoys helping leaders build stronger teams, better culture and more confidence in difficult conversations.

Speaker bios *Continued*



Linda Davison (she/her)

Coordinator, Clarendon Children's Centre

Linda is a passionate advocate for the not-for-profit education and care sector in Australia. Her career has spanned a broad range of early education roles and settings. She has worked as a kindergarten teacher in rural Victoria, a nursery school director in North London and, for more than 38 years, as the Coordinator of Clarendon Children's Centre (CCC) in South Melbourne.

Under Linda's leadership, CCC was rated Excellent by ACECQA three times and awarded the inaugural Emeritus Professor Collette Tayler Excellence in Educational Leadership Award in the 2021 Victorian Early Years Awards.



Narelle Lawton (she/her)

Acting Services Manager, It Takes A Village

Narelle believes early education starts with a professional, dedicated and highly skilled workforce. As a former director of a much-loved Brunswick co-op, she understands the challenges of keeping the doors of a not-for-profit, community-owned service open. Narelle supports services to prioritise quality and put children at the core of their practice. She loves being in nature, and guides educators to appreciate the beauty and scope of what the natural environment has to offer children.



Oliver Leigh (he/him)

Operations Manager, Kensington Community Children's Co-operative (KCCC)

Oliver oversees the day-to-day running of the KCCC service, including staffing, family engagement, child safety, and workplace health and safety. He has around 9 years' experience in early childhood education, including 5 years in a large for-profit organisation before joining KCCC. Oliver focusses on keeping operations running smoothly and supporting the team to respond effectively to challenges. A career highlight was helping services safely reopen during COVID-19, and reconnecting families after extended closures. Oliver is passionate about collaboration, problem-solving and encouraging solution-focused thinking within the team.



Tarryn Holland (she/her)

Coordinator, St Kilda and Balaclava Kindergarten (SKBK)

Tarryn is the Coordinator at SKBK, where her career has come full circle after first completing a placement there over 20 years ago. That experience shaped the educator Tarryn is today. She's worked across the community sector in a range of roles, including as a consultant and teacher at Swinburne. She's passionate about ongoing learning, with a strong focus on social justice and reflecting on how her privilege shapes her perspectives in education. Outside of work, Tarryn is a committed disability advocate and a big basketball fan.



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Don't just take our word for it - hear from our 2025 attendees!

'A fabulous range of high-quality presenters.'

Kate, Director, South Melbourne Child Care Co-operative

'Renewed [my] passion to find different approaches to check-ins with staff.'

Stephanie, Assistant Director, Jindi Woraback Children's Centre

'The panel discussion provided a wide range of perspectives.'

Hannah, Lead educator, Castlemaine Childcare

At the conclusion of the 2025 Leadership Conference:



100%

of attendees said they were likely to share their learning with their teams!



98%

of attendees said they were likely to return to the next conference



98%

of attendees reported the conference experience was helpful for their workplace



95%

stated they were likely to try something new as result of what they had learnt*

*94% of attendees at The Leadership Conference 2025 responded to the survey



The Leadership Conference that offers something different:

- ✓ Not just information – transformation in how you think and lead
- ✓ A chance to engage with real challenges, not ideal scenarios
- ✓ Meaningful connection with peers – who get you and know where you're coming from
- ✓ A program that respects your time by being high-value, practical and engaging
- ✓ Speakers who understand that leadership in education and care is complex, human, and evolving

Join us for high-impact, engaging learning that combines inspiring insights, practical tools and human connection.

One-day in-person conference

Wednesday 26 August 2026
9.30am–4.00pm

Early bird ticket (before 17 July 2026)

\$329 – ITAV member ticket
\$429 – Non-member ticket

Standard ticket (from 18 July 2026)

\$379 – ITAV member ticket
\$479 – Non-member ticket

Lunch and morning tea provided.

BOOK NOW!

Please note: This program could be subject to change.



Established in 1971, It Takes A Village (formerly Community Child Care Association) is the national voice of community-based early childhood education and care services. As the Victorian peak body for OSHC and the state branch of the National Outside School Hours Services Alliance (NOSHSA), we've been at the forefront of advocating for and supporting the sector.

Building a strong sector is at the heart of what we do. We support and champion services, work with governments, and advocate for an Australia where every child has access to free, quality education and care. Nearly 800 member services rely on us for professional advice and practical support. Here to help services transform vision into practice, we provide expert training, coaching and consultancy across the sector. Join It Takes A Village or find out more at itav.org.au