Member magazine

Roundtable

Brought to you by It Takes A Village • Autumn 2026

INSIDE

Following their lead: How one service sparks curiosity through child-led learning

Thinking outside the square: How Childspace (NZ) shapes inspiring spaces for learning

+ FREE Child safe posters for your early years or OSHC service

We've got a new look!

Don't have time to read me?

Pop me in your staff room for others to enjoy!

It takes a village

Peak for early learning and OSHC

It Takes A Village acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Custodians 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. Sovereignty of these lands was never ceded. We support Treaty.

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If you like *Roundtable* and support our community-based ethos, we'd be delighted if you spread the word about us.

We thank Yorta Yorta and Gunnai artist Dixon Patten for creating the artwork on the previous page, which depicts our organisation's cultural learning journey.

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Have you got a story to tell?
Email **reception@itav.org.au** or call **(03) 9486 3455**.

ITAV staff contributors
Thank you to the following staff who contributed to this edition of *Roundtable:*

Laura Boehm – Editor, Aisha Grewal, Anthony Morris, Bryony Catlin, Caitlin Mason, Danae de Kretser, Daniela Kavoukas, Kylie Seadon, Narelle Lawton and Samantha Allemann.

Roundtable is published by ITAV – formerly known as Community Child Care Association (CCC).

What's news?

Roundtable has a new look!

Have you noticed? To celebrate our recent brand and name change, *Roundtable* has had a cover-to-cover refresh. We may look different, but this magazine is – as always – packed with top education and care updates and stories from our beloved community.

Children's Services Award changes to address gender undervaluation

At the end of 2025, the Fair Work Commission released its decision on increased minimum rates of pay to address gender undervaluation in the Children's Services Award.

This decision recognises that educators have not been valued for their essential work and aims to improve workforce retention and equity across our sector.

It Takes A Village (ITAV) has been actively engaged in this process, representing community providers in the proceedings. ITAV continues to lobby the Australian Government to ensure there is no impact on families' fees.

Using the NEW child safe posters

On pages 25 and 26, you'll find child safe posters to use at your service. Display them as part of your commitment to child safety.

Poster 1: Message for families

Fill in the name of your child safety person and display this poster somewhere visible to families. Before using this poster, make sure child safe practices are embedded in your service. If not, reach out to us for support to implement these practices.

Poster 2: Message for children

Fill in the name of your service and your child safety person. Display this poster somewhere children can see it. This poster helps children identify trusted people they can talk to for support.

Tip: Add a photo of the child safety person so children of all ages can easily identify them.

If you have questions about implementing child safety practices in your organisation, call us on **(03) 9486 3455.**

Dr Anne Kennedy recognised in 2026 Order of Australia awards

We are so proud to congratulate dear friend of ITAV, Dr Anne Kennedy, on her recent appointment as a 2026 Member of the Order of Australia for her significant service to education and care spanning decades of research, practice, and professional learning.

Anne joined the ITAV (then CCC) board in 2004 and was appointed chairperson in 2005. She served as chairperson for 12 years, strongly advocating for inclusion and access to education and care, and to improve the conditions and recognition of educators.

Following their lead:

How one service sparks curiosity through child-led learning

Park Street Early Learning is a non-profit community early learning centre in Brunswick, Victoria. Rated Exceeding the National Quality Standards (NQS) across all areas, they deliver a high-quality program where inclusion, diversity and children's voices are front and centre.

We spoke with Assistant Director Simone Franzoni about how Park Street co-create a supportive learning environment where children, their families, and staff can contribute and thrive.

Simone Franzoni, now Assistant Director at Park Street Early Learning Co-operative (Park Street), began her journey in the service almost 22 years ago as an educator in the kindergarten room. Although not on the floor as often now, Simone values using her position to support staff and families, and champion the service's commitment to inclusion.

Being able to make a difference in the lives of children and families gives Simone a real sense of purpose.

'Guiding the team to collaborate, learn and grow is special,' she says.

'But seeing children feeling safe and included and having a hand in laying the foundations for their learning journey for the rest of their lives, is extremely rewarding.'

Inclusion first

The service is proud to have educators, teachers and a leadership team that are passionate about supporting every child, an ethos deeply

Continued on next page >

embedded at Park Street. Simone believes her philosophy of inclusion is shaped by her own personal experiences.

'My child has bilateral hearing loss, and I saw the benefits of early intervention when they were young. We had access to so much support, and the value of that was immeasurable,' Simone says. 'You see firsthand what early intervention can do.'

Inclusive practices have been shaped by observing other services, drawing on ideas from families and experiences caring for children with diverse needs and bringing in specialist support through grant funding.

Simone recalls a successful funding application that secured support for a boy with Down syndrome by engaging an occupational therapist and a speech pathologist. This kicked off a multidisciplinary approach where professionals are encouraged to work alongside the team.

'There was a shift in the way we saw what inclusion looks like and what it means,' she says.

When the funding ended, the Park Street leadership team decided it would be invaluable to continue the connection with the specialists through their own budget.

'You can never know it all. But with [the specialists'] expertise, we've built our confidence and capacity so every child has access and can participate,' says Simone.

Turning curiosity into experiential learning

Park Street is committed to engaging all children meaningfully in experiences that foster their desire to learn, through a curriculum shaped by children's interests.

We look at the child from a holistic perspective and get to know them and their families to inform activities and programs.

'We know that children are more inclined to meaningfully participate when they're interested in what they're doing,' explains Simone.

A child's curiosity during a recent thunderstorm prompted the group to delve deeply into weather and storms. Educators brought in cotton balls, wet them and squeezed them out to recreate clouds and rain. That learning topic continued for weeks and went down different avenues, like seasons, stemming from one child's reaction to thunder.

> **Use what you've got around you,' says Simone. 'And when children show you that they're interested in something, you just go with it.**

This often means the children spend significant time outdoors. Luckily, the service is located across the road from the Royal Park gardens, where children can easily access and explore nature as part of the bush kinder program.

'We started little by little, and each week the groups return and continue building their teepees and bush huts,' explains Simone.

'We do it in all weather – off they go in their gumboots and their wet weather gear. The children adore it.'

Big learnings from small beginnings

There was a child at the service who showed a keen interest in vehicles but was nervous about the sounds they made. They had a condition that meant they had no vision or light perception, so the team began by bringing in [toy] trucks for them to touch and discussed the different parts of trucks, particularly the horn.

Park Street Assistant directors Pauline Mesiti and Simone Franzoni with ITAV CEO Daniela Kavoukas.

'We made the sound of the trucks and then used technology to expose them to the horn,' says Simone.

'One of our educator's dad's a truck driver, who we now call "Truck driver Jim." After weeks of preparation with the children, we invited him to drive his huge semi-trailer truck over and park it across the road.'

The team worked closely with the child's mobility specialist, so by the time they walked across the road, all the children had learnt about the pram ramps and tactile tiles the child would use to access the vehicle.

'The child got to climb into the cab of the truck,' Simone says with pride. 'We prepared them for the sound of the horn. After they heard it, they said "that was really loud", but they experienced it.'

'Sometimes you follow these little things, and it turns into a big learning opportunity. There's learning, and there's also personal achievements for the children,' says Simone.

Part of the family

Park Street is proactive in involving families in children's programs, recognising the importance of a strong connection between home and the learning environment.

'Families come to cook with the children or read a book,' explains Simone. 'A father who is a karate instructor led sessions for three- and four-year-olds. We've had parents play guitar or just come and sit and listen to a story with their child.'

Park Street prides itself on being 'a home away from home' for everybody in the community – the team, children and their families.

'We want families to know how important their presence is in their child's learning space,' says Simone. 'This is a space they're welcomed and included in.'

Empowering staff to include diverse perspectives

Many educators at Park Street, like Simone, have been part of the team for many years. Simone puts this down to the supportive workplace culture that gives staff autonomy, a voice and opportunities for growth.

Embedding Indigenous culture, traditions, and histories into the service environment was identified as a priority by the team, and they have dedicated time to listening and learning together.

The team regularly engage with the Wurundjeri Council and Senior Early Educator and Wurundjeri Woman, Rebecca Axford, to build educator capacity, promote Aboriginal perspectives in programming – and recently, incorporate Indigenous plants into their gardens.

Park Street has integrated local Aboriginal knowledge and design into the planning of a major backyard renewal project.

'We knew we wanted a yarning circle in the front and the back,' says Simone. 'Children and families have also shared their ideas and wishes for the space.'

'We're a third of the way into the development and it's looking stunning,' Simone shares. 'I want to get out there and play and pump the water pump. It's a beautiful space to explore.'

Watch this space
Park Street are keen to share the completed outdoor areas with *Roundtable* in future!

Thinking outside the square:

How Childspace (NZ) shapes inspiring spaces for learning

It Takes A Village (ITAV) consultants Bryony, Caitlin and Kylie, together with Acting Services Manager Narelle, experienced a fresh approach to learning spaces and leadership during a jam-packed (and self-funded) study tour in Wellington, Aotearoa.

Here, they share their highlights from visits to Childspace Early Learning Centres, bringing their unique perspectives as former directors and professionals in Australian education and care.

Learning in the great outdoors

The Childspace team have carved a name for themselves with their custom design-and-build furnishings, playgrounds, and learning spaces often made with upcycled and recovered materials, with an emphasis on functionality.

Our ITAV consultants agreed that the most memorable experience during the study tour was a visit to what Childspace call their 'Dopamine Forest'.

'In a real forest on a block of land they own, they've built this imaginative space where Kinder children from each Childspace service visit one day a week,' explains Narelle. 'They had a teepee as their classroom.'

The study tour participants were encouraged to explore the large outdoor purpose-built space like children.

> **"We climbed and swung off trees, slid down the slide, and jumped on a massive trampoline. We had so much fun."**

'I thought, "this is exactly what childhood should be about, and it's what we, as adults, should be about as well,"' Narelle says. 'We all need more of that in our lives.'

Bryony explained that their visit to the Dopamine Forest followed Robin's workshop on playground development, risk assessment and construction, which looked at research on risky play and functional outdoor spaces.

About Childspace Institute

Childspace Institute was established in 1993 by Toni and Robin Christie in Wellington, Aotearoa (New Zealand), to improve professional practice and inspire high-quality education and care.

Childspace Institute uses its four early learning centres in Wellington to fully immerse educators with practical professional development (PD), values-based programming and functional design. Participants explore niche topics such as environmental design, rituals, ukulele, nurture in nature, Zentangle, and more.

‘They emphasised using what you’ve got and being creative. We learnt how movable parts are very sustainable,’ Bryony says.

Doing some theory and then experiencing what they had learnt firsthand in the forest really helped it sink in, Bryony shares. ‘I think the other study tour delegates who work directly with children were also very inspired.’

Leadership that centres educators

Kylie observed that Childspace founders, Toni and Robin Christie, set an inspiring example of a leadership style that fosters clear trust and pride within their team.

Something that really struck Kylie was when teachers turned up on a Saturday to show the group their service. ‘They were quite happy and proud to do that,’ she recalls. ‘It demonstrated the kind of leadership approach they have that their staff want to do those things.’

> **The way they approach high-quality and leadership in their services isn’t about looking amazing,’ says Kylie. ‘It was about building trust and feeling safe and being sustainable… those core human values.**

Narelle agrees. ‘Their ethos is about creating great environments for children – and educators,’ she says. ‘Lots of environments focus on children, but don’t think about the educator as well.’

‘Each space was so purposefully planned to engage children that the educators benefited too and could have more focused quality interactions during play,’ explains Narelle.

Caitlin, Bryony and Narelle in the Dopamine Forest.

A simple morning ritual

‘Toni and Robin talked a lot about the importance of ritual,’ says Narelle. ‘Something interesting they do is start their day with a tea ritual by making a pot and giving everybody (educators and children) a teacup.

She explains that every morning they would have a piece of toast and a cup of tea, sit down to chat, then begin the day.

‘It was lovely to be so intentional about it. Mealtimes can be rushed and hurried. It seemed really relaxed and said to the children, “I trust you with this ceramic cup.”’

‘They made it very clear that educating children means encouraging them to be the best they can be – and be really capable, competent learners,’ Narelle shares.

A bilingual welcome sign for study tour delegates.

Set up for a tea ceremony.

Continued on next page >

Some functional outdoor spaces.

Spaces with purpose

The intentional indoor environments were another highlight of their visit to the Childspace services.

'Rather than babies change rooms being in cold, sterile bathrooms, they built a cubby within the room,' Narelle shares. 'They had beautiful doors on it, so you could close that area and maintain the children's dignity and rights.' She describes one area where the babies could crawl up a ladder, along a ledge and onto the change table without being lifted. 'It's like an adventure to get your nappy changed!' She marvels at the thoughtfulness behind the design.

'[Their approach] was about respect and simplicity without being flashy,' adds Kylie. She could see their environments didn't require a huge amount of money and showed in a realistic way what people can achieve. 'You looked at [Childspace services], and you said, "yeah, I could do that,"' she says.

'They talked a lot about fixed mindset versus growth mindset,' Bryony adds. 'A growth mindset looks at "what can we do". They're very innovative. There's a lot of critical thinking around the spaces,' she says. 'They know their values, and they really live them. It's very evident in everything that they do.'

'They work with what they've got, and they wouldn't compromise those values when developing their learning environments.'

Narelle agrees, suggesting that lots of the elements they saw, using natural and reused materials, could be implemented easily in an everyday service.

'They were very creative with making the most of small spaces,' she says.

Resources were organised to be most effective and usable in any given area. A setup with two paint pots, brushes and flat rocks to be painted on clearly demonstrated that it was a space for two children to engage freely. Areas provided plenty of guidance but were arranged to allow children to assess the materials and decide how to use them.

Culture in curriculum

One purpose of the study tour was to learn about **Te Whāriki, Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural early learning curriculum**. *A whāriki* is an interwoven mat in Maori and provides a visual of how culture is intertwined within curriculum. The Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is loosely based on the New Zealand early learning curriculum.

Services use many language resources to connect educators, children and families with *te reo Māori* or other Pacific languages.

There are significant differences in First Nations cultures and histories between Australia and New Zealand. The impacts of colonisation continue to influence how culture and language are acknowledged and integrated in each country today. Taking this into account, services in Australia can learn from the values of *Te Whāriki* and consider how to respectfully embed First Nations culture into their own practice.

Study tours: unforgettable (and achievable!) training

Narelle strongly encourages every educator to immerse themselves in a study tour if they can, 'You'll be reinspired. Come back fresh and realise, "This is why I work with children,"' she says.

'It just filled my cup. I don't think you can put a price on reigniting your passion.'

Think a study tour is out of reach for you or your team? It's not!

There are many ways you can enhance your professional practice by learning from others. Organise your own study tour close to home or abroad, connect with service providers from another area and set up a visit – and always keep an eye out for grants to fund the trip.

Reach out to our friendly ITAV consultants for support in tracking down the perfect study tour for you or your team to meet your learning goals.

Since you asked...

Question: Is it okay to use AI in our education and care planning and programming?

Answer: Assistive AI tools can be useful when tackling administrative tasks as educators. It's critical that any AI tool we use supports, not replaces, our work. We also need to be aware of how to use these tools responsibly to keep the children in our care safe.

It's important that we take the time to understand how AI works, its privacy risks, and its potential benefits before using it in our work as educators.

Assistive AI helps people refine their own content and is increasingly used by time-poor educators to edit documentation, check spelling and grammar and simplify wording.

Generative AI creates entirely new content and ideas and can offer program suggestions or inspiration based on a learning topic.

Remember that there is always a risk that any data you put into an AI tool could be hacked or misused, violating children's right to privacy – so always de-identify!

Ultimately, if choosing to use AI tools, you want the content to remain authentically yours. Trust your professional judgement and knowledge of the children – and make sure that shines through.

To make sure we use AI tools safely and ethically, we can follow these steps:

- Never use Generative AI to write your work from scratch. Instead, create a draft in your own words first and use Assistive AI to refine if needed.
- Never include personal information, particularly people's names or the service name.
- Never upload photos or documentation that could identify individuals.
- Double-check that the AI response provided is accurate and relevant.
- Review and edit the content before it is added to children's documentation or shared with families. *Did you capture the unique context of your service? Does it sound like you?*

You can find more guidance on the use of AI in your planning and programming on the ACECQA website: acecqa.gov.au/latest-news/use-artificial-intelligence-ai-education-and-care-services

Aisha Grewal
Consultant, It Takes A Village

We can support your educator team to understand the benefits and risks of using AI in their planning and programming. Call **(03) 9486 3455** to talk to an experienced consultant.

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Is it okay to use AI in education and care planning and programming?

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