



The Children's Day: A Child's Life

**The Northern Districts Education Centre (Sydney) Churchill Fellowship
to explore best practice models of out of school hours care in Australia**

Report by Jenni Hutchins, 2022 Churchill Fellow



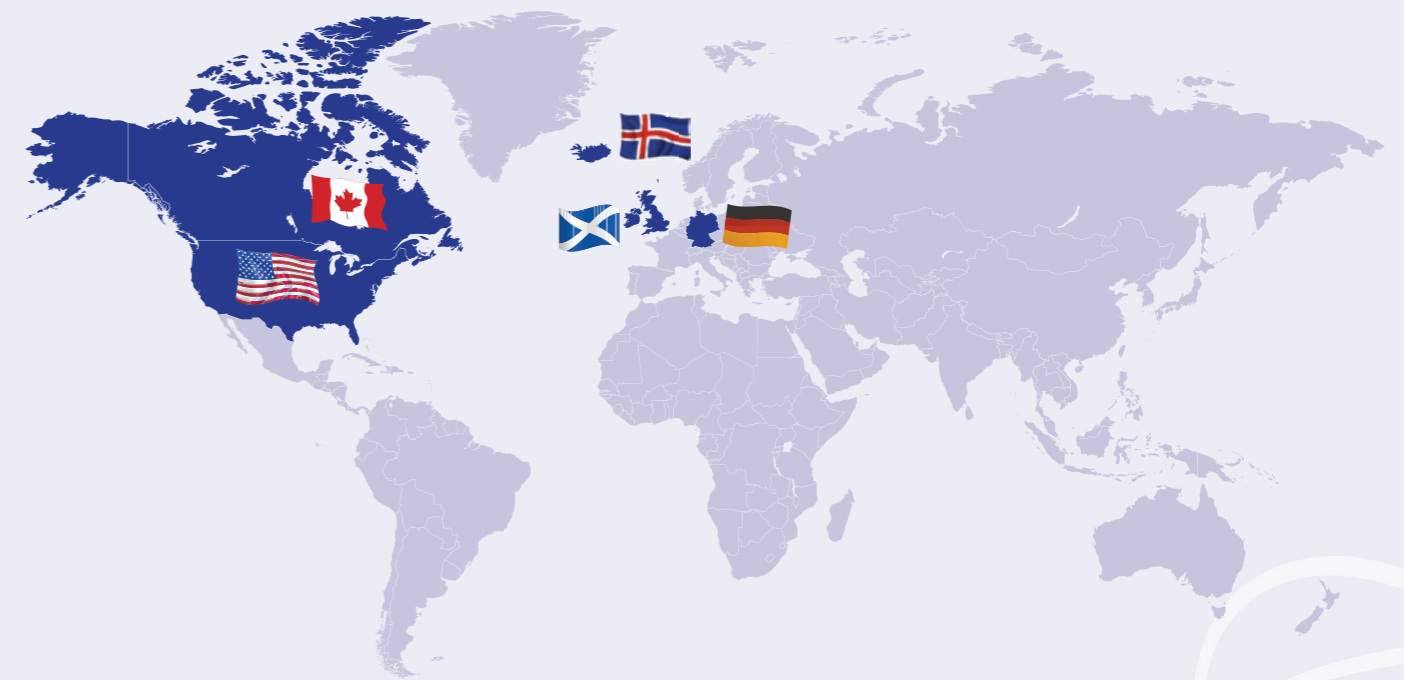
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Introduction

The Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in Australia. It is disparate, has multiple risks and is operated separate to schools. I examined best-practice models which reflect changing social norms and where children are actively engaged; developing and thriving in the OSHC environment. I also explored how to reduce risk and balance the needs of children, community and parents/carers whilst partnering with schools for children's outcomes.

I visited countries including Canada, the USA, UK, Germany, and Iceland, with a high utilisation of OSHC to understand their approach and policy strictures to consider how to translate learnings to enable innovation in the Australian operational and policy context.

This report is a synopsis of my Churchill Fellowship and includes an executive summary and report recommendations.



Indemnity

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST The Children's Day: A Child's Life,

Report by Jenni Hutchins, the 2022 Churchill Fellow and sponsorship recipient of The Northern Districts Education Centre (Sydney) Churchill Fellowship to explore best practice models of out of school hours care for Australia

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Contact: This Fellow can be contacted directly via their page on the Churchill website here: <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/jennifer-hutchins-nsw-2022/>

My full report can be found as a blog website here:
[Churchill Fellowship Out of School Hours Care | Centre Of Focus](#)

Executive Summary

I felt completely privileged to travel the well-worn path of other Fellows and traipse overseas to bring learnings back to Australia. There were many learnings – sometimes what to do and sometimes what not to do.

I firstly want to shout our accolades for our Australian system. I do believe our National Quality Framework and regulatory system is one of the best in the world. I also believe that Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority does a sterling job at oversight and managing the tension of national framework and jurisdictional regulation.

Do I think things could be better? Absolutely! There is always room for continuous improvement, for stopping to pause and reflect, to consider the next generation's needs to assist society and its civilians to move through certain periods of time and adjust. To listen to the challenges of children and families and adjust in a relatable way. To innovate, take courage and consider alternatives and options.

We can improve through insight and introspection.

Internationally, I have concluded that staff in Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) are not highly valued. There is an interspersed of qualification-bias, language-use (are they pedagogues, play workers, educators, teachers?), pay and work-type. Generally, a discrimination based on lower qualifications, lower pay and poorer hours contribute to the bias. What isn't considered in this dialogue is the strong, important, and valuable role these workers play in the life of children whilst parent is at work or study. I would actively recommend that we all lean in and discuss the valuable contributions these roles play and, with increased respect and recognition, the interwoven possibilities which can be created.

Further, the allocation of space to OSHC contributes to children's sense of value and that of the educators' too. Where children are regulated to unused or unappreciated spaces, or indeed set-up/pack-up spaces or shared spaces with inhibiting factors, the child's experience is impacting, the joy of working is reduced, and the overall success of the program is reduced.

Finally, prior to documenting the findings what I appreciated in Germany in particular, was the enablement of children. Whilst in Australia, the desire to supervise strongly is ever-present, with the often-provided reasons of the 'regulations and law'. In Germany and Iceland, I saw and heard the enablement and building the competent child dialogue and loved it. In these countries, they encouraged independence, they encouraged shared play, they had dedicated spaces which the children and educators owned.

OSHC Schooling Model

Following a trip to Sweden, I developed a model for a more integrated OSHC schooling model in partnership with colleagues, and this was continually refined. The basic premise was to address the weak points and risks at transition, addressing the split shift issues, the transient nature of staffing and improve professional identity and pathways for staff. The goal was to leverage the strengths of the Swedish model I had observed, including:

- leverage the skill sets of OSHC educators at breaks
- provide more consistency for children
- enable smoother transition points
- enable growth and development in the staff in the sector; and
- provide opportunities for teaching students.

Post the development of this model and after showcasing it to many people including the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, the NSW Department of Education and Teachers and Directors of education, I read the Grattan Institute Report highlighting the challenges of teachers and the impact of their workload. Further, they recommended alternate staff provide supervision at breakfast and lunch. I contacted them immediately and held a meeting to walk through our new model and thinking. There are endless opportunities here to consider differences and explore alternate models.

Finally, one of the common complaints of children is their 'boredom'. Notwithstanding the fact that boredom isn't bad for children – in fact it can be beneficial to their imagination – what is also

an opportunity is building an approach to their specialised interests through engaging staff with the same interests. There are examples of this in Scotland, the USA and Germany in providing tuition in areas of interest (one to one tuition costs), and providing experiences in football, dance, poetry, writing and more. In my previous role we called this our Guru Strategy. Imagine, if we could network OSHC services and develop specialized OSHC services for areas of interest for children? It could be for a fortnight, a month, a term or permanent. If networked close enough, the children could rotate through the services or the 'gurus' could come to them. Building skills, building interests and addressing out of school activity access. Wouldn't that just be brilliant?

Professional Love

In Scotland, Professional Love was a concept I fell head over heels in love with where I saw this concept embraced and embedded into the thinking in OSHC and I carried this through the rest of my travels. Professional love (Agape) talks about the importance of an emotional connection and deep engagement with children. It provides permission to engage and connect at a deeper level. It is a recognition of a worker's investment in children's social and emotional development and provides for an opportunity for children to be connected, cared for, known by name and loved.

Finally, a note of caution. In the USA I attended a tired OSHC service. I met with two dedicated workers who were very focused on their young people, worked with very minimal indoor and outdoor space and worked with high parent expectations on homework. On one occasion, they were teaching k-pop to the children. The children were developing their own k-pop songs, and one child's song went something like this:

Oh my God, why is there so much work, OMG, why is there so much work OMG. What about the children?

The workers were emotional and poignantly speaking about the hours of the day the children are in OSHC and school and they could see this reflected in the children. They questioned whether we were contributing to challenges for children and families or assisting them. They noted that families had to work otherwise it would be subsistence living. The cautionary note here is how much time should children be in institutional care. Is there a right and wrong volume of time? What is the role of homework for children who do access OSHC for long hours and then need to tend to homework duties?





Recommendations

Community-based

1. Based on Scotland's approach to play, develop a whole-of-family play program for one day each school holidays (or on a weekend) to assist families in building their play skills and increase active positive engagement in families.
 - a. Link to your OSHC program
2. To aid family connections, programs which provide a mix of holiday (vacation care) and family time would enable families to enjoy the company of their children in a 'holiday environment', head to work during the day whilst educators cared for the children. At my previous organisation, there were a couple of out-of-school care directors who were quite innovative. Providing services on a holiday coast provided the opportunity to partner with a caravan park. They would book some cabins and ran the vacation care from there. When the parents returned, they would do group marshmallow cooking and sing songs around the fire even though the children were in the parents' care and control in the evening. It was immensely popular, but required skilled staff who knew the children, the community, and parents.
3. Consider the barriers to engagement in OSHC and explore opportunities to reimagine and reinspire the OSHC scene by considering the needs of children with different needs and address barriers for access.
4. For communities, and particularly rural communities to survive, they need service delivery. Some service delivery is critical to the ongoing success and sustainability of the community at hand. In Scotland, there was an argument for communities, in particular councils, to consider OSHC, Aged Care and early learning as infrastructure as they are required for a community to work, survive and thrive.

Language

5. The different titles of educators:
 - a. Pedagogues
 - b. Playworkers
 - c. Play Educators

Are the Educators, educators? Are they Playworkers with discrete skills who teach children through a social and emotional development lens? Does the language

of Educators work within the Australian context, or should it be changed to reflect goals and outcomes of OSHC?

6. Continue to build a professional identity of OSHC, and establish a sector review of language used to describe it. Consider some of the language used overseas to describe Australian OSHC, such as extended care, educare or social pedagogy.

Design

7. The competent child. Whilst not a new concept, it is a concept which needs constant review. In the community we have an ongoing dialogue about 'helicopter parents'; however in OSHC services we replicate this. Children often reference the difference between school 'rules' and OSHC 'rules'. I recommend we interrogate research, conversations, discussions and co-design opportunities of building programs and approaches based on the competent child. This may mean adjusting individual services risk appetites or indeed having services which target age groups. Children in Berlin and Iceland make their own way home on public transport or bikes. Whilst I am not recommending this, I believe we should test our thinking and consider how we build and enable the competent child through our approaches at OSHC.
8. Whilst not OSHC, adventure playground concepts are well honed internationally, but not so deeply defined or broadly available in Australia. Considering the playground's role in a child and family's development, it would be positive for the Australian context and would continue to pursue the 'competent child' concept. In doing so, the children could be engaged in design and decision-making.
9. It would be prudent, as children and families rely more and more on OSHC to consider design principles. Examples of strong design integration was demonstrated in Germany and good design principles for-standalone buildings. I would encourage a review of Iceland.
10. As part of designing areas in OSHC, and juxtaposed against the set-up pack-up concept, chill-out areas are critical to the successful environment of children with certain diagnoses who may be prone to becoming overwhelmed. The design in children's spaces would be beneficial to children.
11. Gurus. Imagine if we could network OSHC services and develop specialized OSHC services for areas of interest for children? It could be for

a fortnight, a month, a term or permanent. If networked close enough, the children could rotate through the services or the 'gurus' could rotate through the services. Building skills, building interests, addressing out of school activity access, and children could be bussed to the different centres. Ideas include STEM, sport or drama and would be an interests-based approach to OSHC. Engineering students could lead on STEM, dietician students could lead on food/cooking, and social work students could lead on social emotional development. The opportunities are endless.

Concepts

12. Talk more about 'professional love' – develop a standard, consider a philosophy, engage around the philosophy, understand what it means. Use it to the benefit of children. As leaders in care and education sectors, leading with a mantra of professional love and a framework of humanitarian leadership encourages all educators to be 'Professors of Humanity' providing for a child-centered, focused approach to service delivery.
13. Iceland provide 3-6 months free OSHC for all new immigrants to enable the children to mix, socialize and improve their language skills. Play is a primary language, so socialization and acceptance can occur, reducing loneliness and isolation.
14. Play must be a supported and aided concept for all OSHC services. Whilst skills are important, developing skills through play is crucial to a child's success.

Intergenerational Practices

15. Consider the purchase and pilot of the anti-ageism training from Generations Working Together to roll out across New South Wales.
16. Set up an Intergenerational Working Group in the community to consider opportunities to connect across age groups. Engage council, Aged Care services, schools, pre-schools, and universities.
17. In England, there is a 'wishing washing line' at the local supermarket. Older people put up chores or interest areas which are taken down and addressed by a local community member. It is a lovely opportunity for purposeful engagement.
18. Undertake a program between older people in their homes and local OSHC services (similar to the pot plant idea in Culbokie, Scotland). In summary, there is a note from a child with the child's first name and age. An older person writes back to the

child, and through this process a network afternoon tea is established with older people and children to reduce isolation for older people and build community.

19. In the early stages of Intergenerational Practice, it is important to incorporate soft skills and infrastructure opportunities – to start with success in mind.
20. The importance of curriculum attention cannot be underestimated. Choice in process and approach is critical. Neighborhoods are a way of healing, support and engagement.

Staffing

21. OSHC quality is built on the longevity of staff. Nurturing staff, their education, their engagement, leads to a higher quality program. Additionally, considering succession planning opportunities to retain high caliber staff.
22. Engage and develop focus groups to explore tenure in key roles. Build an active plan to increase tenure in the OSHC services.
23. Consider the introduction of a qualification for OSHC. In doing so, provide the registrant with five years to complete the qualification. It is noted in OSHC that reflective practice is so critical to the qualification and skills being embedded. This is a pathway to formalizing qualifications in Scotland.
24. Qualification in OSHC and 'childcare' give educators long term life skills for the future.

School

25. Use play as a skill and concept around reducing behaviors in schools. Children's demeanor and behaviour are often the first two indicators of something not being quite right. Unintentionally, children can be punished for expressing themselves through behaviour when words fail them – or indeed the world fails them. St Mirin's in Scotland provided some rich data of using play-based approaches to minimise behavioural outburst and negative behaviours in school environments. These 'play-out' opportunities provide children with the opportunity to play-out their concerns, issues and worries and provide them with skills to regulate in the future. Their data highlighting their rich outcomes, indicates the positive impact purposeful play and deep, positive connections have on children. Work with, plan and integrate more with schools to provide.

26. Consider training Principals and School Executives on OSHC, its role, purpose, regulations, national law, curriculum, and National Quality Framework. Across all countries, principals were regarded as critical to the program's success. Where this wasn't apparent, it was harder for the OSHC to be successful.

Data

27. 'Boston Beyond' developed measures to improve services - not comply with regulations. These cross-agency statistics help a continual improvement approach to quality and outcomes. Develop dashboards through organisations' own data (compared with others) to build quality through measurements from students, families, and staff. Requires a data analyst and architect who can make the reports readable and accessible and useful.

Funding

28. In Canada, they are considering funding for not for profits (NFP) only, to encourage and sustain NFP service delivery in the provinces.
29. I noted all transit is free for children until they finish their qualification in university. Imagine the vastly improved usage of public transport if that were to be the case here in Australia. It also builds in public transport concepts early in young people.
30. Research split shifts in the Australian context and consider alternatives.
31. Develop and fund alternative models/pilots.





*I was awarded a Churchill Fellowship - **The Northern Districts Education Centre Churchill Fellowship - The Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)** sector is one of the fastest growing sectors in Australia. It is disparate, has multiple risks and is operated separate to schools. I will examine best-practice models which reflect changing social norms and where children are actively engaged; developing and thriving in the OSHC environment. I will explore how to reduce risk and balance the needs of children, community and parents/carers whilst partnering with schools for children's outcomes. I will visit countries with a high utilisation of OSHC to understand their approach and policy strictures so I can consider how to translate learnings to enable innovation in the Australian operational and policy context.*



Who am I and why should you follow me?

My name is Jenni Hutchins

I am a Chief Executive Officer, Leader, Passionate Advocate for children and families and a Child and Family Psychologist.

Scaffolding children for success through education, inclusion and enablement is key to my philosophy. My work in not for profits (NFP) has centred on working within communities to create positive change and meet the needs of children and families. I believe that partnerships and collaboration are central to improving outcomes for children. Throughout my career, I have operated hundreds of out of school hours care services and intends to enhance this environment for all children in Australia.

My leadership strengths lie in advocacy, partnerships and relationships and a focus on evidence-informed practices to create resilient communities. I have previously led the commencement of one of Australia's first Social Benefit Bonds and has a passion for all organisations to be Child Safe.

I am the Chief Executive Officer of an amazing Aged Care Organisation (Warrigal.com.au) an innovative, values-led Organisation, focussed on community. Previous to this I was the CEO of Big Fat Smile, a Not For Profit (NFP) organisation providing quality early learning and care and out of school hours care children birth-12, as well as national and state wide inclusion and community services.

I am an advocate who engages with Federal and State governments, Ministers, Members of Parliament and key stakeholders to inform and influence social and sector policies and regulations, particularly those that govern the Early Education sector to enhance and improve children's landscapes in today's changing environments. I have, until recently been the Co-chair of the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia which works to promote the value of quality early learning and care for children and their families as well as their Educators.

My formal training is as a psychologist specialising in supporting families with complex needs. I have worked in child protection, out of home care, mental health, domestic violence and therapeutic services. I have extensive background in the broader child, family and ageing sector, governance, service delivery, executive leadership and management and financial management.

Overwhelmed and about to leave! Glasgow here we come!

Gosh leaving for 10 weeks racks up emotions - worried, overwhelmed, excited and scared - all at once.

The **worry** emotion is - have I done as much as possible - as well as: have I locked in too many appointments and not left room for agility, opportunity and adaption.

Overwhelmed - the tick box on the to do list grows and changes, and I am talking about the small fry instead of focussing on the big issues.

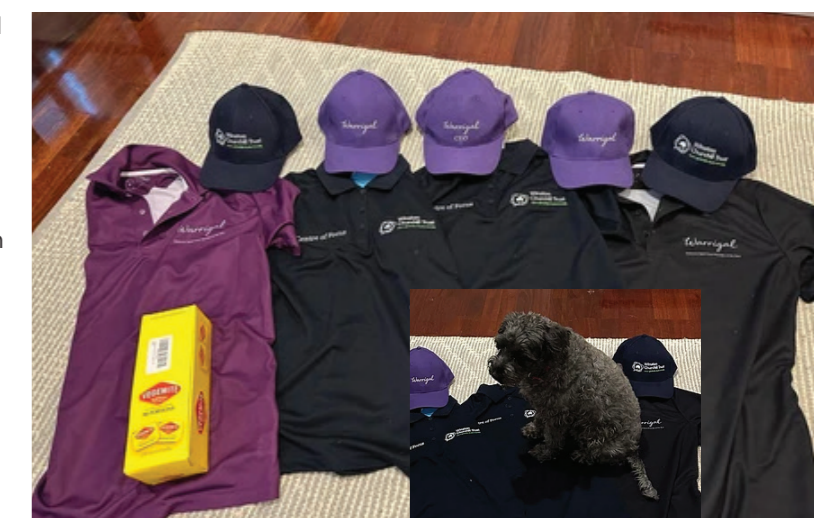
EXCITED! How lucky am I? I have the opportunity to represent the Churchill Trust and indeed Australia on an issue I am keenly interested in - Out of School Hours Care. And I am able to ponder the role older people can play in the lives of children.

Scared? I am a terrible flier! What if something goes wrong, what about if I have forgotten to book accommodation, transfers, cars. What if I forget to attend an appointment? What if I overbook.

What if I overthink? What if I don't create change when I return?

So much to consider. I head off tomorrow, with my husband, Brett as my assistant. Glasgow is first and then Iceland. I will upload writings and videos, photos and images. I will provide information and share advice.

Two photos to kick us off: one of some gifts I am taking (100 caps and vegemite pods, along with some Australian Coin sets) and the other of my dog wishing I wouldn't go.





Chapter 1: Scotland

Gorgeous Glasgow - Exploring Out of School Hours Care in Europe

George Square and Glorious Weather
Date: June 3, 2023

Greetings from Glasgow! It's a pleasure to have you join me on this adventure as I explore Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) and Intergenerational Practices around the world. Today, I want to share my first impressions of this vibrant city as I begin my journey here in Scotland.

Whilst things will and do go wrong on a trip of this size, I am committed to holding a focus of strength and positivity. By the time we turned the key in the lock on our Air Bnb we had been travelling for 33 hours: 2 flights, 1 train and 2 busses.

As soon as I landed in Glasgow, I was immediately struck by the warm hospitality and the glorious

weather that greeted me. The sun was shining brightly, casting a golden glow over the city, creating the perfect ambiance for exploration. I couldn't have asked for a better start to my trip!

My accommodation is conveniently located near George Square, a bustling hub in the heart of Glasgow. George Square is known for its historical significance, adorned with statues, monuments, and beautiful architecture that tells stories of Scotland's rich past. As I strolled through the square, I marveled at the grandeur of the buildings and took in the vibrant atmosphere.

In my research on Out of School Hours Care, I aim to learn how Scotland is making significant strides in providing quality after-school programs for children. These programs aim to offer a safe and enriching environment where children can engage in a variety of activities, including arts and crafts, sports, and academic support. I am eager to delve deeper into the Scottish approach and understand how they incorporate intergenerational practices into their OSHC programs.



During my time here, I plan to visit local OSHC centres, speak with educators, and interact with both children and seniors who participate in intergenerational activities. By immersing myself in these experiences, I hope to gain valuable insights into the benefits of intergenerational connections and the positive impact they have on children's development.

As I look forward to the days ahead, I am excited to embark on this journey and learn from the different approaches to Out of School Hours Care and Intergenerational Practices across Europe. Join me as I explore the fascinating world of childcare in Glasgow and beyond, sharing stories, experiences, and lessons along the way.

Stay tuned for the next entry as I dive deeper into the Scottish OSHC system and the intergenerational initiatives that make it truly special.

Until then, I will keep enjoying the sunshine and keep exploring! Photos to follow.

Exploring Glasgow: Embracing the Spirit of Glasgow, Scotland and the Legacy of Winston Churchill



Introduction

Welcome to my blog post about my visit to Scotland and the captivating city of Glasgow. While my Churchill fellowship focuses on out-of-school care and intergenerational practices, I would like to take a moment to shed light on the origins of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and their philosophy of promoting cultural understanding. Join me as we delve into the rich history, vibrant culture, and remarkable attractions of Glasgow.

The Legacy of Winston Churchill



The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust was established in 1965 as a tribute to the late Winston Churchill, one of history's most influential leaders. Following his funeral, an ambitious door-knock appeal, known as "Operation G," was launched, resulting in the most successful fundraising campaign in Australian history at the time. Millions of dollars were raised, laying the foundation for the trust's mission.

Since its inception, the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust has funded over 4,500 fellowships for Australians to travel the world and study areas of interest that positively impact Australia. These fellowships aim to encourage a deep understanding of the countries visited, recognizing that exploring diverse cultures contributes to the fellows' knowledge and personal growth. I found a statue of Winston Churchill at the Kelvingrove Museum and gave him a kiss as a thank you!

Embracing the People of Glasgow

As we explored the city of Glasgow, it became evident why the slogan “People Make Glasgow” resonates so deeply with its residents. This slogan originated during the Commonwealth Games in 2014 when Glaswegians were asked about their city’s essence. Their overwhelming response highlighted the importance of the people—their engagement, creativity, social policies, style, passion, and love for Glasgow. Everywhere we looked, vibrant pink banners bearing this powerful slogan adorned the city streets, serving as a constant reminder of the city’s unique spirit.

Kelvingrove Museum and Art

No visit to Glasgow would be complete without a visit to the renowned Kelvingrove Museum. While my fellowship’s focus lies outside the realm of art, I couldn’t help but immerse myself in the diverse arts and cultural exhibitions of Scotland. The museum houses an impressive collection, including works by renowned artists such as Rembrandt, Vincent van Gogh, Monet, and Scottish artists. Exploring this museum was a truly enriching experience that deepened my appreciation for Scotland’s artistic heritage.

Glasgow’s Rich History and Landmarks



Glasgow Cathedral, dating back to 1197, stands as a testament to the city’s deep history. Housing the tomb of Saint Mungo, the patron saint of Glasgow, the cathedral serves as a spiritual and historical landmark. Nearby, the Glasgow Park, gifted to the locals in 1457, holds a unique historical significance as a place where communities once gathered to wash their clothes, reinforcing the city’s sense of community and shared history.

Glasgow’s commitment to cultural heritage is further exemplified by the presence of street art throughout the city. Notably, Australian artist Sam Bates, known as “Smog,” has contributed captivating murals to Glasgow’s urban landscape. From an impression of Saint Mungo to depictions of the Commonwealth Olympic Games held in 2014, these art installations add vibrancy and storytelling to the city streets.

The Philosophy of Cultural Understanding

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust’s philosophy of encouraging fellows to deeply understand the countries they visit aligns perfectly with the essence of exploring Glasgow. By immersing ourselves in the city’s history, arts, and cultural landmarks, we gain valuable insights into the diverse tapestry of Scottish society. Understanding the people and their way of life is a key component of the fellowship experience and allows us to forge connections and share knowledge across borders.

Conclusion

As my journey through Glasgow commences, I am beginning to understand a little bit about the Glaswegians. I look forward to building my insights into my Fellowship with what I have learnt today in mind. The warmth and spirit of the city’s residents is evident in the vibrant city culture.

Out of School Hours Care: Glasgow - Fair Work, Fair Play



Glasgow, Scotland, a city with a rich industrial history, owes much of its economic prosperity to the docks and shipping industry. However, as times change, so do the challenges faced by the workforce. As I made my way to the International Play Association Conference today, I encountered a sign that read, “**FAIR WORK, FAIR PAY, FAIR CONTRACTS.**” This powerful message resonated deeply with me, as it reminded me of the workforce issues prevalent in Out of School Hours Care (OSHC), an issue which has been reflected back to me by multiple people in multiple organisations, internationally. In OSHC, **PEOPLE MAKE QUALITY**, just like Glasgow’s slogan ‘People Make Glasgow’.

Glasgow’s industrial heritage dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries when it played a pivotal role in the global shipping and trade industry. The city’s docks were bustling with activity, and the workforce found employment opportunities in various industries, contributing to Glasgow’s economic growth. However, as the city transitioned into a post-industrial era, new challenges emerged, including workforce issues related to fair work, fair pay, and changing working environments.

In OSHC, a paramount need is to escalate the prominence of the developmental, social and educational work that Educators undertake within

a recreation and leisure framework. Work must be equitable, suitable and valued. Work environments must ensure workers are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness. This encompasses factors such as decent wages and opportunities for career progression, professional development opportunities and ensuring the overall well-being of workers.

The workforce challenges not only impact the well-being of OSHC workers but also have repercussions on the quality of care provided to children. Should we all be advocating for professional recognition based on the above factors? I think so, there is specialist knowledge and skill in Play Work, and in fact in many areas over here, the staff are called Play Workers, giving the prominence to the importance to play for children. I LOVE THAT!

By amplifying or Educators/Play Workers voices, advocating for policy changes, and promoting professional identity and development opportunities, these initiatives strive to create a more equitable and sustainable OSHC workforce and a better experience for our children.

Promoting Children’s Rights and Play in OSHC: A Path to Thriving Communities



Introduction

My strong belief is that every child has the right to flourish and thrive, regardless of their background, circumstances, or any societal barriers. As we consider

Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) in Australia, it is essential to reflect on how we can provide inclusive and accessible services without fear or favour. OSHC plays a vital role in the Australian landscape, but have we truly explored the central role of play in this context? This blog delves into the role of risky play, adventure playgrounds and street play in the Australian context - and provoking discussion about a rights-based approach to OSHC to access and enable play opportunities - a developmental space, an enabler, and a skill for all children, a skill which may be challenged and diminishing due to the allure and access to digital devices over access and engagement with natural environments.

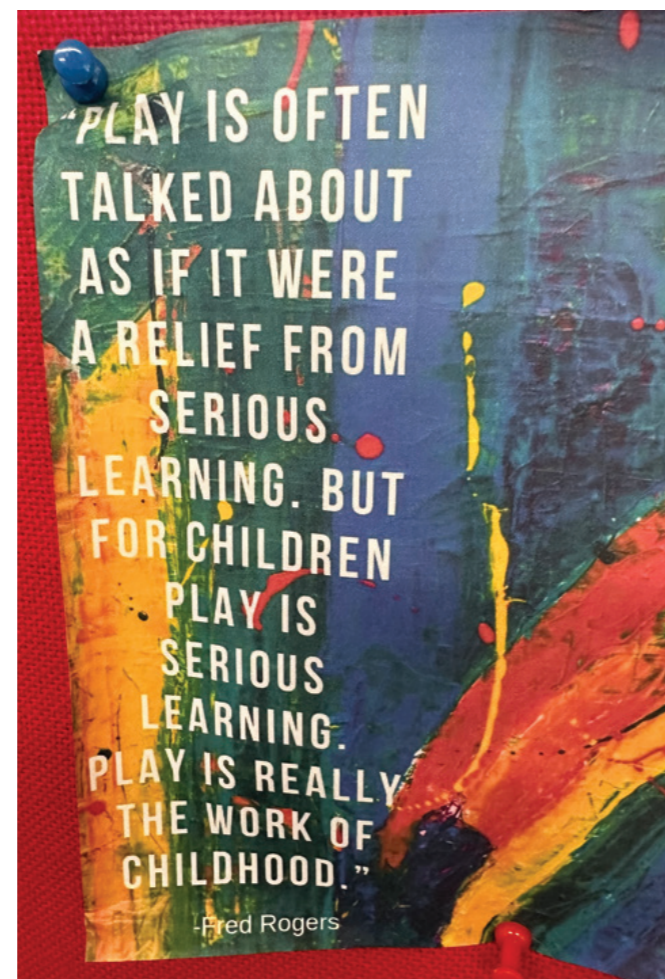
The Power of Play and Children's Rights

At the recent IPA conference, concerns were raised about children's diminishing ability to engage in free play and their limited access to natural environments. Presentations highlighted the importance of play and natural surroundings in a child's development and emphasized the responsibility of adults to enhance these opportunities. In light of this, I have been thinking about our approach to OSHC. How do we enhance children's access within a regulated environment? How do we navigate the barriers and strengthen the opportunities our curriculum framework provides us? Could we follow the Scottish Government's lead and develop a Charter of Children's Rights that guides governmental decision-making and provides a central framework for play in our decision making? This dialogue presents numerous opportunities to explore alternative approaches in our diverse Australian landscape.

Competition and Challenges in OSHC

One of the significant challenges faced by independent OSHC providers in the UK, that I have heard, is the competition from local authorities, who often receive greater government funding and resources, leading to superior wages and benefits for their staff. This competition intensifies the already complex staffing challenges in the sector. Additionally, managing children's behavior, fostering positive relationships, and navigating administrative complexities contribute to the demanding nature of operating OSHC facilities, not only here in the UK, but globally.

Integrating Play for Positive Outcomes



Amidst these challenges, we must acknowledge and harness the transformative power of play. Play has the ability to cultivate joy, engagement, and a sense of connection to the environment. Raymond Branton's organisation, Play Works, exemplifies this transformative potential through their community play days, such as Mankey Monday and Wet Wednesday, which bring together hundreds of children and families for activities that foster creativity, exploration, and happiness - building skill, imagination, community engagement and familial connectedness. This prompts us to consider how we can enhance the role of play in society and whether schools can play a more active role in promoting its importance. Could we employ Play Specialists in schools - instead of following a negative 'behavioural management' route, could we use play as a tool to develop and enhance a child's ability to engage both in school and in social relationships? I would be excited if we saw play skills in children as important as academic skills.



Conclusion

Reflecting on the IPA Conference and recent meetings, it is clear that attracting and retaining a competent workforce in the OSHC sector is a global challenge, not limited to a specific location. However, amid these challenges, there are dedicated individuals and organizations working tirelessly to promote play, not only as a concept, but as a right for children. Their commitment, in partnership with some Government's commitment improve conditions, and emphasize the significance of play in children's lives. I love the Scottish Government's commitment to advocating for children's rights, considering alternative play concepts like adventure playgrounds and street play, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders by testing and trialling different concepts in different environments with different dosages. By considering alternatives, by learning from other countries, we can consider what this means for Australia and our OSHC environments which are our most prominent organised play environments across the country. We know by continuing to consider and reflect on these environments we can support the holistic development of all children, where they can flourish and thrive, unrestricted by societal barriers.

Play: Transforming Out of School Hours Care through valuing, recognising and worshipping Play.



Introduction

In Scotland, the notion of "Hair or care" in the past, long influenced the career choices of young people leaving school. Those who weren't inclined towards academia often found themselves in the hair or care sectors. However, there is one area within the care sector that stands out for its direction and innovative approach to move away from this public sentiment - out of School Hours Care. Here in Scotland, play takes center stage in the lives of children, shaping their experiences and fostering their growth. This blog explores the significance of play in out of School Hours Care, highlighting the role of leadership and the creation of transformative environments for children to thrive. My personal and professional values were on fire today as I wondered around St Mirins and spoke to amazing professionals about OSHC.

The Power of Play

Play is not a taboo word within the realm of out of School Hours Care in Scotland. It serves as the driving force behind conversations, actions, and thoughts regarding children's needs. Professionals in this field prioritize children's choices and approaches, valuing the importance of following the lead of the child. The central role of play in fostering child development is both beautiful and transformative.

The Key to Staff Retention: Leadership

Margaret, the dedicated manager of Saint Mirin's After School Care, has been at the forefront of this field for an impressive 23 years. When asked about her secret to staff retention, she attributes it to effective leadership. Margaret focuses on creating an environment of learning, safety, and understanding for her staff. She constantly thinks ahead, considering the needs of the children, their traumas, and future opportunities. Through her leadership, she enables her team to excel in their roles and create a nurturing space for children to thrive.

Transforming Neglected Spaces: The Woodlands

Margaret's visionary leadership extends beyond the confines of the center. She took an abandoned woodland area and turned it into a haven for the children of the school. By involving every class in the decision-making process, she ensured the space met the children's desires. The transformed Woodlands became a place for the children to forest bathe, connect with nature, and find solace from their individual challenges. Margaret's team, with their expertise in understanding children's needs, uses play as a tool to build resilience, skills, and a sense of belonging, enabling these children to embrace each day.

The Role of Premises: A Child's Safe Space

The significance of premises or a child's environment cannot be overstated. In out of School Hours Care, the premises must be child-focused and serve as a safe space for the children. Anne-Maree Macklin, who has been running a service for 12 years, emphasizes the impact of appropriate environments on the success of the center, staff attraction and retention, and children's enjoyment and engagement. When children have a space they can relate to, it enhances the overall service delivery.

Play as a Catalyst for Healing and Development

Scottish professionals firmly believe in the power of play as a means to develop children and facilitate healing. They understand that through play, children can navigate and cope with the potentially disaffecting world around them. This insight can serve as a valuable lesson for Australia and other countries, encouraging the integration of play into social policies and methodologies to help children understand their experiences. Leveraging the expertise in Out of School Hours Care, children can flourish and thrive throughout the day.

Conclusion

Play has become the cornerstone of out of School Hours Care in Scotland, revolutionizing the approach to children's needs and development. With visionary leaders like Margaret and passionate teams, play has transformed neglected spaces into nurturing environments. By recognizing the importance of premises and prioritizing child-focused spaces, the Scottish people have created an exemplary model for others to follow. It is through play that children not only develop but also heal, paving the way for a brighter future. I am happy.



Embracing Partnership and Listening: Inspiring Conversations for Change



In an Organisation where our values: integrity, respect, innovation, and compassion hold great importance, it is essential to foster conversations that transcend boundaries and create positive change. Yesterday, I had the pleasure of meeting Bella Kerr, a passionate advocate for a fairer Scotland for older people, at Generations Working Together. Bella's inspiring words and dedication to partnership and listening left a profound impact on me. In this work blog post (I'll also post on my website), I have explored the power of conversation and collaboration in transforming communities and bridging the gap between generations.

Reimagining Play: Breaking Age Barriers

Bella highlighted the need to reimagine play and playgrounds to include older people. Why should these spaces be limited to a specific age group? Bella stressed the importance of connection and engagement across all ages, emphasising that playgrounds can bring people together. Through partnerships and community involvement, we can create open and inclusive spaces where individuals of all ages feel connected and involved.

One Voice, Many Thoughts: The Power of Collective Action

Bella's quote, "One voice brings thought; many thoughts bring change," resonated deeply. She shared an inspiring example from Helensburgh, Scotland, where people from various age groups, including young children, older adults, parents, and youth, united to address issues in their community with cracked pavements. By working together and raising their collective voice with council, they successfully advocated for change and brought attention to the importance of inclusivity and collaboration.

Tackling Ageism: Listening, Learning, and Changing Perceptions

Bella shed light on ageism, a prevalent issue affecting both older and younger individuals. She emphasized the value of older people's life stories and the need for society to listen more attentively. Bella's efforts in writing resources and leading training sessions on ageism aim to challenge preconceived notions and foster understanding between generations. By acknowledging shared experiences and promoting empathy, we can combat ageism one conversation at a time.

Creating Intergenerational Connections: A Pathway to Change

Bella discussed the significance of intergenerational connections, particularly between aged care homes and primary schools. By incorporating questions that evoke nostalgic memories and encouraging conversations that bridge the generation gap, Bella seeks to foster a deeper understanding and connection between older and younger people. The power of reminiscing and storytelling can help both sides appreciate each other's experiences and perspectives. Two cheeky questions to older people was "when was the last time you snogged" and "what naughty things did you get up to in your youth?"

Embracing Joy and Connectedness: The Eden Project

The Eden Project, a UK initiative, aims to promote joy and connectedness through street lunches and small acts of kindness. Bella shared how little pots of plants called "pots of kindness" were distributed to older people in the community. Such initiatives create opportunities for neighbours to come together, fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening community bonds. Implementing similar projects in our home services can bring immense beauty to our communities.

Celebrating Life and Death: A Shift in Residential Care Homes

The conversation also touched upon the evolving approach to care in residential care homes. Moving beyond the social model, RCHs are now more reflective of a medical model with the age, complexity of health and life expectancy of older people as they move in. There is a growing need to train caregivers not only in providing everyday care but also in celebrating the last years of one's life. This shift acknowledges the importance of embracing the entire lifespan and creating meaningful experiences for older individuals.

Conclusion

Meeting Bella and engaging in conversations that spanned our pillars of strategic planning was an enlightening experience. Through her work at Generations Working Together, Bella champions partnership, listening, and breaking age barriers. By embracing these values and engaging in meaningful conversations, we can foster positive change in our communities. Let us strive to see people beyond their age, celebrate diversity, and build a future where every voice is heard, respected, and valued.

Thank you, Bella, and thank you, Generations Working Together, for your unwavering dedication and inspiring work. Together, we can make a difference and create a society that embraces the strength and wisdom of every generation.

Sunny Scotland: A Journey of Learning and Inspiration; fare the well my friends



pays system, it primarily consists of not-for-profit organisations, councils, and schools. The government is actively engaged in understanding children's needs and experiences, exemplified by the development of the children's charter and their exploration of funding and subsidies for vulnerable children in deprived communities. Scotland's OSHC system extends beyond traditional settings and encompasses Family Day Care and other environments, with ongoing discussions about qualifications to suit different contexts. What truly stood out to me was the emphasis placed on leadership in the sector, from government-level decision-making and theoretical frameworks to building leadership at a local level for service management and practical implementation, leadership was central to all discussions. Leadership, play and being child-led were the most prominent themes.

Quality Care in Rural Communities

During my travels, I had the privilege of meeting Jaci Douglas, CEO of Care and Learning Alliance, who shed light on the challenges faced by rural and remote communities in providing quality OSHC services. Jaci eloquently articulated the interdependencies of quality care, considering factors such as the needs of children and their families, hidden poverty in rural areas, community dynamics, and the expectations and guidelines surrounding OSHC. A visit to the rural town of Culbokie provided a firsthand glimpse of a dedicated OSHC service run by Lauren, who had been serving the community for an impressive ten years. I witnessed a group of children from different schools engaged in meaningful interactions, displaying a strong connection not only with each other but also with their leader. Lauren's approach emphasized child-led experiences, resulting in the children renaming their service as a "fun club" and even developing their own logo. While staffing remained a significant challenge, the genuine care and commitment demonstrated by Lauren were instrumental in creating a safe and enjoyable environment for the children.

Community Context and Interconnectivity

Jaci Douglas emphasised the importance of considering the unique shape and size of each community when designing OSHC services. In particular, she drew attention to the impact of tourism, such as the NC500, on rural areas. While some individuals may purchase houses in these regions, they often fail to contribute significantly to the local economy. Jaci's perspective on OSHC, early learning, and aged care - that they should be regarded as community infrastructure resonated deeply with me. She advocates for a qualification that allows

Introduction

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose.
- **Oh, The Places You Will Go!**

Sunny Scotland - the phrase might sound like an oxymoron, but during my recent Churchill Fellowship trip, it perfectly encapsulated the unexpected beauty and warmth I experienced. From the unexpected, beautiful sunny days and picturesque landscapes to the remarkable, warm, passionate and engaging people I met along the way, Scotland became a magical place where I explored key issues and discovered opportunities to make a difference in Australia. In this blog post, I want to share some of my encounters and insights. A lot of the conversations often centred around our value bases and how we used them as our moral compass in our work, and leveraged our values to lead, direct and advocate for our communities.

Progressive Thinking in OSHC

One of the highlights of my journey was the opportunity to meet Kate Smith, a passionate leader in the Scottish Government - leading the Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) section. The Scottish Government's progressive approach to OSHC is commendable, as they strive to meet the needs of children through contemporary and forward-thinking strategies, considering all contexts and settings. While the OSHC model in Scotland leans towards a user



professionals to work across different care settings, recognising that the first four modules of care training are the same for each qualification. By enabling staff to provide services across the community, economies can be strengthened, and individuals can build skills in both early learning and aged care. Jaci's collaboration with Highlands and Islands University exemplifies her commitment to building a robust workforce and tailoring care services to suit regional and rural contexts. Her thoughtful, respectful, and engaged approach ensures that communities' unique needs are met, ultimately contributing to their success and well-being.

Conclusion

My journey through sunny Scotland was nothing short of transformative. The people I encountered, the conversations I had, and the places I visited left an indelible mark on my perspective. I met warm, engaged and committed individuals, I met philosophically aligned and passionate professionals. Scotland's progressive thinking in the OSHC sector, coupled with its dedication to play as the centre of social policy and innovative thinking about quality care in rural communities, serves as an inspiration for making a difference in Australia.

You're on your own. And you know what you know. And you are the one who'll decide where to go. -

Oh, The Places You Will Go!

Iceland is next.



Chapter 2: Iceland



Exploring Out-of-School Hours Care in Iceland: Embracing Diversity, Freedom, and Fun

Fun Facts about Iceland

Icelanders have a unique sense of humor, often making jokes about their lack of trees and unpredictable weather.

- Iceland is known for its delicious hot dogs.
- The country experiences about 350 earthquakes every week.
- Iceland has the most Nobel prizes per capita.
- The population of Iceland is approximately 370,000.

- The Icelandic language has some interesting sayings rooted in Norse mythology.
- Crime rates in Iceland are exceptionally low, with only one murder every two years.
- Iceland has only one main road, known as Route 1.
- The volcanic eruption in 2010 led to the closure of air traffic across Europe.
- Rhubarb plants can be found in almost every Icelandic household.

Introduction

Iceland, a land of fire and ice, offers much more than its breathtaking landscapes and natural wonders. It's a country where warmth, friendliness, and a sense of humor thrive, even in the midst of the cold. During my visit to Iceland, I had the opportunity to explore the unique aspects of out-of-school hours care (OSHC) in the country. From their inclusive approach to



embracing diversity to their emphasis on child-led play and freedom of choice, Iceland's OSHC programs provide a valuable perspective on creating a nurturing and engaging environment for children.

Child-Centric Approach and Freedom of Choice

In Iceland, the values of community, engagement, connectedness, and love are central to their approach to education and care. These values transcend age groups, making them universal in the context of providing quality care. One striking aspect of Icelandic OSHC is their emphasis on all children. I continue to ponder, as I wander, the role of love in OSHC; the role of Professional Love. Whilst we often express love for objects and experiences, Gods and inanimate objects, it seems devoid in our work conversations, yet is critical to a sense of self and safety for children. This idea of "Professional Love" is gaining recognition, and it highlights the importance of emotional connection and affection in caregiving.

Diversity and Inclusion

Iceland takes great pride in its history and culture of embracing diversity. Primary schools in the country offer extensive training on various aspects of diversity, including gender, culture, and sexual preference. This commitment to inclusion is reflected in their OSHC programs, which are all rainbow-certified. Staff members undergo specific training to create safe and inclusive environments for children. Rainbow streets can be found in every city and town, serving as a symbol of respect for individual rights and uniqueness. Icelandic people firmly believe that every child is a unique individual who deserves acceptance and support.

Child-Led Play and Engagement

Play holds a significant place in Icelandic OSHC programs. Steinunn, who oversees OSHC services in Reykjavik, emphasized the importance of child-led play and the freedom it provides. Unlike constant surveillance, Icelandic OSHC programs focus on creating an environment where children feel safe and protected, allowing them to explore, engage, and have fun. The staff members actively engage with children in play activities, fostering a sense of happiness and fulfillment.

Structure and Availability of OSHC

In Iceland, OSHC services are primarily offered as after-school care and holiday programs. The city of Reykjavik manages and funds these services, although the payment system does not cover all costs. Divided into age groups of 6-9 years and 10-12 years, the after-

school care programs have an impressive attendance rate of 95-98%. The rarity of children not attending reflects the high number of working women in Iceland, as well as the relatively short distances between work and home. During the summer months, attendance in the holiday program decreases as families often choose to go on vacation. Interestingly, 10-12 year-olds in the holiday program can sign themselves in and out, promoting independence and responsibility.

Quality Assessment and Approach to Communication

Despite the absence of a legislative framework specifically governing OSHC, the commitment to quality is evident in the services provided. Steinunn and her colleagues assess each other's programs using a quality scale ranging from working towards to exceeding expectations. Notably, there is no communication app for parents, as the staff believes that if parents wish to see their children, they can visit the program directly. Privacy and protection of children's images are paramount, avoiding digital identification and preventing external ownership of their images.

Conclusion

Exploring out-of-school hours care in Iceland reveals a unique approach that prioritizes love, freedom, diversity, and engagement. Icelandic OSHC programs encourage child-led play, embrace diversity through rainbow certification, and focus on meeting children's needs in nurturing environments. The country's commitment to creating safe and inclusive spaces is inspiring and provides valuable insights for OSHC providers worldwide. Iceland's emphasis on community, connectedness, and love sets a strong example for the importance of these values in providing exceptional care and support to children.

Iceland, Community, and Older People: Engagement, Connection, and finding Community.



In Iceland, community is highly valued due to its small population of around 370,000 people. This sense of community is evident in various aspects of Icelandic life, including the care and support provided to older people.

During a visit to a community house, which consists of Independent Living Units (ILUs) in the multi-storey building, I observed the ground floor dedicated to serving the needs of the entire community. The community house serves as a hub for people of different age groups and provides a range of services and activities.

Young people come to the community house to learn chess, theatre, and attend various training sessions. This fosters a sense of inclusiveness and provides a space for, amongst others, disenfranchised young

individuals to participate in group activities.

On the ground floor, older people have access to services such as showering and dressing assistance. However, the community house goes beyond basic care and focuses on engagement and connection for older individuals. There is a craft room open to the whole community, equipped with sewing machines, overlockers, and ceramic painting workshops. These activities encourage creativity and provide a social space for older people to interact with each other alongside a variety of people within the community.

To live in one of the ILUs in the community house, individuals must be over 65 years of age. Once they reach the age of 67, they are no longer allowed to work. While some people embrace retirement, others find it challenging to adapt to this requirement. The staff at the community house work diligently to create a sense of community by offering free coffee and tea, organizing communal meals, creating festival days, and providing multiple opportunities for engagement.

The manager, Stigga, and the team leader, Helga, emphasize the importance of kindness, care, and support in creating a vibrant community. Stigga believes in the power of deep listening, stating that when you truly listen to someone, they feel heard and believed in, which can help them develop a sense of self-belief.

One particularly successful program at the community house is the engagement between older people and an early learning centre. This intergenerational program allows older individuals to interact with young children, fostering connections and creating a mutually beneficial environment. Stigga and Helga plan to expand these types of initiatives in the future, emphasizing a whole-community approach to engaging older people and promoting a sense of belonging.

In Iceland, the values of community, engagement, connectedness, and love are consistently prioritized. These elements are seen as universal and essential, whether it involves children or older people. Recognising the importance of diversity, Icelandic society places a strong emphasis on training and acceptance of diverse identities, including gender, culture, and sexual preference. The presence of Rainbow Streets in every city and town signifies the commitment to respecting the rights of individuals to make their own choices and celebrating the uniqueness of each person.

In summary, Iceland places great importance on community, engagement, and providing support for both children and older people. The commitment to inclusiveness, diversity, and creating meaningful connections is evident in various aspects of Icelandic society, from the Out of School Hours Care services to

the community houses that cater to the needs of older individuals.



Chapter 3: England



Embracing Humanity and Professional Love: Transforming Care, Education, and Play

My Home Life England: Fostering Intergenerational Connections

My Home Life England is dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals in care homes and other care settings. Tom Owens and Amy Simpkins from My Home Life England shared valuable insights into their intergenerational practices and the importance of positive outcomes for all involved. They highlighted the need for pragmatism and taking micro steps to achieve change. Their secrets to success included investing at all levels of management and staff, identifying meaningful opportunities for engagement, and building relationships through preparation and soft skills development.



To facilitate intergenerational connections, My Home Life England has implemented various initiatives, such as an early learning center within a residential aged care home, an Intergenerational Advisory Group, and a Friends and Neighbors Network (FANs). By weaving intergenerational work into existing practices, minimizing paperwork, and focusing on meaningful engagement, they have created an environment where people of all ages can connect and benefit from shared experiences. For example, they initiated interactions between older people and children through activities like exchanging letters, creating "Jars of Joy" filled with items or messages, and even using a "wishing washing line" in supermarkets to spark conversations and interactions.

Introduction

In a world where age and income often divide us, it is crucial to remember that humanity is at the core of our work. Regardless of our backgrounds, we all have the capacity to contribute to positive change and make a difference. In this blog post, we will explore the inspiring work of three remarkable individuals and organizations: My Home Life England, The Reach Foundation, and Adam Smart from Crown Leisure. Through their innovative approaches and unwavering commitment to relationships, care, education, and play are being transformed, creating a brighter future for all.

The Reach Foundation: Education with Love and Purpose

Mei Lim, the Director of The Reach Foundation, is committed to providing high-quality education and opportunities for all children. The foundation's cradle-to-career model focuses on stability, continuity, and coherence throughout a child's educational journey. Mei highlighted the importance of strong, trusting relationships between families and schools, and the potential of all-through schools to maximize children's potential.

The Reach School, with its emphasis on individualism, connection, engagement, and a balance between

warmth and strictness, creates an environment where children feel valued and supported. Mei explained that family dining is a centerpiece of the school, where all children are provided with school lunches, ensuring equity and fostering a sense of community. Similarly, the OSHC services follow the same model, ensuring consistency and smooth transitions for children. By maintaining the same site, environment, rules, policies, and expectations, The Reach Foundation promotes engagement, positive experiences, and a sense of belonging among children.

Mei resonates with the concept of professional love, understanding the significance of relationships in education. Mei and the foundation prioritize the “why” behind rules and expectations, making it easier for children to comply. They recognize that stability, continuity, and coherence are vital for all children, but especially for those who may be vulnerable or disadvantaged. By providing a supportive and consistent environment, The Reach Foundation aims to empower children to lead happy, healthy lives of choice and opportunity while contributing meaningfully to civic life.

Adam Smart: Championing Quality and Play in Leisure Services

Adam Smart, a for-profit provider from Crown Leisure in Cambridge, England, has built a reputation for his focus on quality service delivery and loose parts play. With a background in play work, Adam emphasizes being child-led and saying “yes” before saying “no.” He acknowledges the challenge of finding good staff and focuses on training to build quality.

Adam believes in the power of play and its ability to enhance children’s experiences. He encourages staff to connect and listen to children, valuing their input and fostering a sense of identity and belonging. Within schools, staff members are involved in running the OSHC services, ensuring consistency and promoting engagement. By employing a connect-and-listen approach, Adam strives to create an environment where children feel valued, heard, and empowered.



Conclusion

My Home Life England, The Reach Foundation, and Adam Smart from Crown Leisure exemplify the power of embracing humanity and professional love in care, education, and play. Through their innovative approaches, emphasis on relationships, and commitment to quality, they are transforming the lives of individuals across generations. By recognizing the inherent value and potential within every individual, regardless of age or income, we can create inclusive environments that foster growth, engagement, and meaningful connections.

Different services, different foci, but all striving to infuse love and professional care into our lives and work to make a positive and lasting impact on the world around us. By promoting intergenerational connections, providing stable and nurturing educational environments, and championing quality and play, we can create a society that values and supports the holistic well-being of all its members.



Netherton: Learning to be a Scouse - The Fun 4 Kidz and the L30 Community Centre



Netherton, a community nestled in the vibrant city of Liverpool, England, holds a rich history and a resilient spirit. Liverpool, a city known for its maritime heritage and cultural significance, has long been a hub of trade, diversity, and creativity. From its origins as a small fishing village in the 13th century to its pivotal role in the industrial revolution, Liverpool has evolved into a thriving metropolis with a distinct identity. The city’s history is deeply intertwined with its working-class roots and the resilience of its people, who have overcome various challenges and setbacks throughout the years.

Within this larger historical context, the L30 Community Centre and Fun 4 Kidz Play and Child Care have emerged as beacons of hope and support for the Netherton community. Established in 1998, these organizations have grown to become vital pillars of the local community, addressing the needs of families and children while striving to tackle issues such as poverty and social disadvantage. Their commitment to uplifting the community reflects the spirit of Liverpool itself, where community bonds and a sense of togetherness are deeply valued.

Fun 4 Kidz, a registered charity founded in 1998, initially aimed to provide out-of-school clubs in Netherton. However, due to its excellent reputation and its ability to adapt and expand services to meet the evolving needs of local communities, it has become an instrumental force in supporting families throughout Merseyside. Under the leadership of Deborah Stephens, Fun 4 Kidz now offers out-of-school childcare across nine afterschool clubs, multiple holiday clubs, and three breakfast clubs in eight different communities.

Deborah Stephens, who has been at the helm of Fun 4 Kidz and the L30 Community Centre for 23 years, embodies the community-centric approach that has been instrumental to their success. She understands that Netherton cannot be defined solely by data points, although it is characterized by high levels of poverty and disadvantage. Deborah has launched numerous projects to address inequalities and provide children and their families with opportunities for success. Out-of-school care was one such initiative, offering a safe, fun, and educational haven for children while parents pursued employment, training, or pathways to work.

The L30 Community Centre, located in Netherton, serves as the base for Deborah and her team. This charming and welcoming space employs local individuals who are deeply committed to their work. Many of the team members have been with the organization for over a decade, with some even surpassing two decades of service. This longevity is a testament to the authentic relationships, values-based work, and strong sense of community that permeate every aspect of their service offering.

Deborah’s dedication to the community has not gone unnoticed. Her efforts and community-centric approach led to her receiving the esteemed British Empire Medal, a recognition awarded to only a select few out of the 66 million people in England. This acknowledgment underscores the profound impact she has made in the lives of the people she serves.

COVID-19 presented unprecedented challenges for Deborah and her team, as well as for the entire Netherton community. However, they responded with resilience and determination, focusing on connection and engagement as key elements of survival during the pandemic. They organized fitness classes in the streets, provided packed lunches and activity packs, and established a community pantry to support families in need. Additionally, initiatives such as bus trips, community craft days, and high teas fostered intergenerational connections and brought people together.

Despite the remarkable work done by Fun 4 Kidz and the L30 Community Centre, challenges have arisen. Changes in government standards have made it difficult to explain to families that their services are now categorized differently - either meeting or not meeting, instead of exceeding the quality standards. However, the commitment to maintaining high-quality environments remains unwavering, driven by Deborah's insistence on providing the best for the children and families they serve.

Deborah's vision extends beyond simply providing childcare services. She recognizes the importance of integrating the needs of children, families, and the wider community when considering the work required. Fun 4 Kidz's out-of-school care services not only focus on care and positive play experiences for children but also create employment opportunities for families. Many individuals have been supported by Deborah and her team to gain employment and qualifications, empowering them to contribute to the well-being of their own families and the community.

The impact of Fun 4 Kidz and the L30 Community Centre goes beyond the immediate services they offer. They foster intergenerational connections, recognizing that both older and younger community members are vital contributors. By facilitating interactions between different generations through activities like crafting, karaoke, and even creating a Christmas grotto, they bridge the gap and create a sense of unity and understanding. The provision of free family photos and volunteering opportunities further strengthen these connections and reinforce the motto of "by the community, for the community."

Deborah's team operates from a building that exudes charm and warmth, where staff members purposefully refrain from wearing lanyards or keys to avoid any sense of differentiation. Volunteerism is highly valued, and pride in service delivery and community involvement runs deep. Their courses and bus trips often sell out within a day, and they have forged meaningful partnerships with philanthropists and even the renowned Liverpool Football Club. Leftover programs and pre-packaged food from the club are distributed to the community through L30, ensuring that no resources go to waste and everyone benefits.

In the face of challenges, Deborah's unwavering dedication to child-centered practice and building resilience and capacity in families shines through. She emphasizes the importance of play, fostering resilience, and creating opportunities for families to spend quality time together. From foraging to building projects, storytelling to visiting residential care homes, and

organizing events like "Meet your street," Fun 4 Kidz and the L30 Community Centre actively contribute to memory-making and strengthening community bonds.

As we reflect on the incredible work of Deborah Stephens, her team, and the community of Netherton, it becomes clear that their efforts extend far beyond the confines of childcare. They have transformed from an organization that simply provided community work to becoming a true community builder. By providing a space for people of all ages to connect and supporting initiatives that bring the community together, they have become a driving force for positive change. Despite the challenges they face, their commitment to building relationships and making a lasting impact on the community remains resolute.

Best Practice in Out-of-School Hours Care: A Conversation with Kirstin Kerr and Sandra Clare



Introduction

Welcome to our blog, where we delve into a fascinating conversation with academics Kirstin Kerr and Sandra Clare on the topic of best practice models in out-of-school hours care. In this article, we will not only explore the history of Manchester but also reflect on various aspects of out-of-school hours care, including inclusion, family-centered approaches,

recognition, challenges, and the value of play. Join us as we uncover in-depth insights from our conversation and contemplate the implications for the field of out-of-school hours care.

History of Manchester and its Implications

Manchester has a rich history that has shaped its socio-economic landscape. Understanding this context is crucial in designing effective out-of-school hours care programs. Kirstin Kerr and Sandra Clare shed light on the challenges faced by Manchester, including migration, homelessness, and poverty. These factors impact the needs and experiences of children and families in the region, highlighting the importance of tailoring interventions and support systems to address these specific challenges.

Reflection Question: How does the history and socio-economic landscape of a community impact the design and implementation of out-of-school hours care programs? How can programs be tailored to address the specific needs of children and families within a given context?

Inclusion and Family-Centered Approaches

The conversation touched upon the inclusive practices observed in after-school programs in Iceland. The division of age groups into separate locations with a strong emphasis on inclusion showcased a thoughtful approach to catering to diverse needs. Furthermore, Sandra Clare shared insights from her experience in an organisation (Pne Green) focused on keeping sibling groups together during after-school care, highlighting the importance of preserving familial bonds and providing a nurturing environment.

Reflection Question: How can out-of-school hours care programs create inclusive environments that foster a sense of belonging for children of diverse backgrounds? How can the preservation of sibling bonds and the creation of a familial atmosphere be integrated into program design?

Recognition and Integration of After School Care

One recurring theme in the conversation was the need for greater recognition of the importance of after-school care. The participants highlighted the misconception that after-school care is solely a form of childcare, emphasising the significance of its role as an extension of a child's educational journey. Integrating the experiences of school and out-of-school hours care creates a seamless continuum of learning and

support, as evidenced by successful models in North Manchester.

Reflection Question: How can we promote a unified approach to education that recognizes the critical role of after-school care in a child's holistic development? How can schools and out-of-school hours care providers collaborate effectively to create seamless educational experiences?

Challenges in Out-of-School Hours Care Provision



Our conversation shed light on the challenges faced by out-of-school hours care providers, particularly in relation to premises and funding. The division between schools that own their buildings and those reliant on rented premises creates disparities in access and affordability. The example of a community-led initiative in London, where a housing association provided after-school and holiday provision within a social housing estate, highlighted the potential for innovative solutions to address these challenges.

Reflection Question: How can policymakers and stakeholders address the challenges related to premises and funding to ensure equitable access to quality out-of-school hours care for all children? What innovative approaches can be adopted to overcome these obstacles?

Holistic Support and Meeting Fundamental Needs

The conversation underscored the importance of out-of-school hours care programs in addressing

fundamental needs beyond academic support. The “at home project” in North Manchester, which provides a nurturing environment for families experiencing temporary accommodation, exemplifies the holistic approach needed to support children and families facing various challenges. By offering resources, communal activities, and support, these programs help alleviate stressors and create a sense of stability.

Reflection Question: How can out-of-school hours care programs effectively address fundamental needs such as food security, family engagement, and a sense of belonging? How can they work collaboratively with other stakeholders, such as housing authorities and social support agencies, to create a comprehensive support system?

The Value of Play and Community Engagement

Throughout the conversation, the importance of play in children’s development emerged as a central theme. Both Kirstin Kerr and Sandra Clare emphasized the significance of allowing children the freedom to explore, imagine, and learn through play. The conversation also highlighted the value of community engagement in the planning and implementation of out-of-school hours care programs. Examples from Manchester showcased the benefits of collaboration between older residents and young people, fostering intergenerational connections and knowledge-sharing.

Reflection Question: How can out-of-school hours care programs ensure that play remains at the center of children’s experiences while actively involving communities in their design and delivery? How can intergenerational connections and knowledge-sharing be fostered to enrich the out-of-school hours care experience?

Conclusion

Our conversation with Kirstin Kerr and Sandra Clare provided deep insights into the development of best practice models in out-of-school hours care. By understanding the historical and socio-economic context of a community, fostering inclusivity, integrating school and out-of-school experiences, addressing challenges in provision, and recognizing the value of play and community engagement, we can create a robust framework for supporting children’s holistic development. As we reflect on these insights, we are inspired to advocate for equitable, high-quality out-of-school hours care that empowers children and nurtures their potential.

Questions to ask ourselves about Children’s experiences, utilising the child’s voice:

1. Do you know me?
2. Do you hear me?
3. Do you see me?
4. Do you let me fly.
5. Is this a safe place for me?

Other Reflection Questions:

1. How does the history and socio-economic landscape of a community impact the design and implementation of out-of-school hours care programs? How can programs be tailored to address the specific needs of children and families within a given context?
2. How can out-of-school hours care programs create inclusive environments that foster a sense of belonging for children of diverse backgrounds? How can the preservation of sibling bonds and the creation of a familial atmosphere be integrated into program design?
3. How can we promote a unified approach to education that recognizes the critical role of after-school care in a child’s holistic development? How can schools and out-of-school hours care providers collaborate effectively to create seamless educational experiences?
4. How can policymakers and stakeholders address the challenges related to premises and funding to ensure equitable access to quality out-of-school hours care for all children? What innovative approaches can be adopted to overcome these obstacles?
5. How can out-of-school hours care programs effectively address fundamental needs such as food security, family engagement, and a sense of belonging? How can they work collaboratively with other stakeholders, such as housing authorities and social support agencies, to create a comprehensive support system?
6. How can out-of-school hours care programs ensure that play remains at the center of children’s experiences while actively involving communities in their design and delivery? How can intergenerational connections and knowledge-sharing be fostered to enrich the out-of-school hours care experience?





Chapter 4: Germany

A Journey through Berlin's Educational Landscape



Introduction

Welcome to my new (delayed) blog about my time in Berlin, Germany, where I had the opportunity to explore the rich history of the city and delve into its social and political environment. In this blog, I will provide some information about the education system in Germany, particularly the All Day Schools (Ganztagsschule) and their significance in shaping the educational experience and lives of children in different communities. I will also explore the challenges faced by academics, educators and policymakers in this dynamic educational landscape.

During my visit to Freie Universität in Berlin, I had the opportunity to meet with Professor Marianne Schupbach and colleagues at Freie Universität, Berlin. [Prof. Dr. Marianne Schupbach](#) is also the chair of The WERA Task Force Global Research in Extended Education.

The agenda of the day was filled with evidence, information and exploration of key issues incorporated into multiple sessions with students and academics, starting with an insightful overview by Marianne. The presentations by various colleagues shed light on the extensive national and international research dedicated to developing, informing and implementing All Day Schools in Germany.

I felt incredibly privileged to spend time at Freie Universität, notably, hearing their stand-out, collective strong focus on improving children's educational outcomes with a focus on nurturing children's social and emotional development. The university's focus was also on the transformative opportunities for schools and the critical roles of pedagogues and teachers.

My experience gave me insight into the passion and commitment of Professor Marianne Schupbach and her team. They stand as a beacon of educational excellence and innovation. Their mission centers around shaping a generation of empowered, competent and academically proficient individuals. The university has taken an active role in supporting the development and expansion of All Day Schools across Germany, emphasizing the importance of holistic education for children.

Freie Universität actively collaborates with educators, principals, and policymakers in Berlin's Ganztagsschulen. They conduct extensive research to understand the impact of Ganztagsschulen on students' well-being, academic performance, and overall development. By leveraging this research, Freie Universität assists in implementing evidence-based strategies to optimize the effectiveness of Ganztagsschulen.

History of Berlin: East and West

Berlin, the capital of Germany, has a complex history, most notably marked by the division of the city into East and West Berlin during the Cold War. After World War II, the city was divided into four occupied zones, with East Berlin becoming the capital of East Germany (GDR) under Soviet control, and West Berlin forming a separate enclave surrounded by

communist East Germany. The Berlin Wall, built in 1961, physically separated the two sides, creating a stark contrast between the free and capitalist West and the authoritarian and communist East.

In the past, All Day Schools in the eastern part of Germany, focused on providing access to employment for parents rather than emphasizing educational outcomes for children. Today, there are still broad and differing opinions regarding the previous educational systems of both the former East and West Germany, making for intriguing discussions and reflections. Additionally, across Germany's 16 states, there is diversity in approach. This heterogeneity is reflected in the varied approaches to school operations within the states.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989

The year 1989 witnessed a momentous event in history - the fall of the Berlin Wall. This event symbolized the end of the Cold War and the reunification of East and West Germany. The reunification brought significant changes to the education system in both parts of the city, as well as the country as a whole.

The PISA Shock of 2000: Catalyzing Education Reforms

In the year 2000, Germany faced a 'PISA Shock' when its students' scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) fell below the OECD average. This public outcry triggered a renewed focus on education policies aimed at improving educational outcomes across all 16 states of Germany. The subsequent transformational reforms, such as the shift from half-day to full-day schooling and the emphasis on quality early learning and care became a focus for educators and policy makers, particularly, making early education financially accessible to families. The impact of these reforms on Germany's education system and how they addressed the correlation between lower SES students and academic performance is part of a process of ongoing review and reform.

Notably, the shift towards full-day schooling was not an isolated decision but rather a comprehensive policy transformation. In 2006, the German government made it mandatory for all primary school children to be offered free All Day School. This move ensured that children from grades 1 to 3 received these services without any financial burden on their families. By 2030, all children to year 4/5/6 will have free access to All Day School as well. Some challenges exist for policymakers in maintaining consistency and tracking

progress due to the heterogeneity of approach across the 16 different states.

Promoting Children's Educational Outcomes



Through extensive research and collaboration with schools across Berlin, Freie Universität has been instrumental in driving the redesign of Germany's schooling system. The transformation from half-day to full-day schooling has become a core principle, aimed at improving children's educational outcomes. By extending the learning day and providing a diverse range of academic and extracurricular activities (music, sport, dance, art, craft, drama, games etc), students are exposed to a more comprehensive and enriching educational experience.

During my visit to Berlin, I attended two schools—a Greek/German School and one of the pioneering All Day Schools in Germany. The All Day School experience commences at about 7:30am and extended until around 5 pm, with provisions for early drop-offs and late pick-ups to accommodate parents with varying work hours. All children were provided with a nutritious hot lunch in a family-style eating environment was created. Children eat in class groups. Children served each other under the guidance of the pedagogues. Teachers, broadly speaking, did not participate and mainly left at the end of class, finishing their day at home. There were mixed feelings about the lack of teacher engagement in the latter part of the day. Food and food safety, is the great equaliser in a community and all children have access to good equality, accessible meals.

Grades 1-3 students received this service without any cost, ensuring universal access to essential meals and care for those in need. Whilst older children have the option to leave school earlier, many chose to stay and engage in various activities provided in the After-

School Program, fostering the development of their social and emotional competencies. There was a small cost to families associated for older children to stay.

Enhancing Social and Emotional Development – The Capable Child

I loved the dialogue I heard about the capable child; building capability in children and developing the whole child. The schools and Freie Universität recognise that education is not solely about academic achievement; it also encompasses the emotional and social growth of children. The commitment to nurturing students' social and emotional development is evident in the All Day Schools' approach, which incorporates specialized pedagogues and afternoon staff. These professionals, trained to engage with children in non-formal educational settings, focus on fostering a positive and supportive learning environment.

School Visits: A Glimpse into Berlin's Educational Landscape



I had the opportunity to visit and tour two schools in Berlin: Schule in der Köllnischen Heide and Athene-grundschule. I witnessed the dedication of educators in creating a structured learning environment in the morning and fostering leisure time and family interactions in the afternoon. I explored the challenges faced by schools in finding quality educators and the ongoing efforts to improve the education system. I spent time exploring the impact of All Day Schools on the lives of students, families, and the broader community.

The days I spent in two different schools epitomized the commitment of the German educational system to fostering well-rounded growth in students.

At **Athene-grundschule**, a remarkable All Day School, I met Christiane Andorf-Seretis, the principal. Christiane had been at the school for over 20 years. The school is a Greek/German bilingual institution and showcases the significance of cultural inclusivity in enriching the learning experiences of the children. The school's innovative design, with sporting fields on the roof, showed a commitment to maximizing space for both academic and recreational pursuits.

Christiane's dedication to developing a rhythm of the day was evident. Structured learning sessions in the morning were followed by leisure time and family-style meals in the afternoon. The school attracted students from across Berlin due to its bilingual focus.

During lunch, children actively participated in 'family time meals' eating in class groups and assuming set roles and completing tasks to serve each other. This practice not only encouraged a sense of responsibility but also fostered a strong sense of community among the students. The pedagogues, responsible for the afternoon activities, played a crucial role in supporting the children during mealtimes and engaging them in various extracurricular pursuits.

The principal highlighted the importance of a schedule (or 'rhythm') which was well-structured. Ensuring that formal lessons ended around lunchtime, followed by leisure time interspersed with intentional teaching opportunities. Christiane stressed the significance of a child-centric approach, building their competency and capacity by allowing them autonomy, even signing themselves out to go home on their own was part of the development of the competent, capable child.

The integration of pedagogues and the Ganztagschule was a key focus for the school, promoting collaboration and shared goals. Christiane emphasized the importance of cultivating the right

mindset among teachers and staff, as well as fostering passion and commitment towards education. At Athene, the provider was a NFP which worked in partnership to integrate the morning and afternoon curricula.

For older children, flexibility was offered, allowing them to leave after formal classes if they wished. It was heartening to learn that many children chose to stay for the enriching After-School Program, showcasing their eagerness to learn and grow beyond regular school hours.

During my visit to **Schule in der Köllnischen Heide**, I witnessed a school that played a pivotal role in serving a community predominantly (98%) Arabic. In Germany, much is written about the 'Arab Clans' and the challenges with the lack of civic engagement and broader community connection. Despite facing challenges related to high crime rates and overcrowded living conditions, the school takes a proactive approach to cater to the unique needs of its students and families. The children's homes were often a one or two bedroom unit with up to 8-10 people residing within it. The living conditions often impact on children's fatigue and energy levels at school. Stefan, the principal, shared the challenges he and his colleagues faced, including: parental disengagement with the education outcomes of their children, a shortage of quality teachers, an overcrowded curriculum, resource shortages and a lack of coordination with the afternoon program. However, he emphasized the importance of prioritizing education and investing in the development of passionate and committed educators. One of Stefan's colleagues highlighted that 40% of the Government's budget was spent on social services whilst only 4% was spent on education. There was a reflection that if these percentages were switched it would positively benefit the whole community and build an educated and engaged community.

Stefan and his colleagues, Marcus and Connie, spoke passionately about their dedication to providing a nurturing environment for the children. The school followed a unique practice, where teachers followed the same group of students for three years, fostering deep connections and personalized support. After this period, a change in teacher was implemented to offer fresh perspectives and a new learning experience.

The All Day School experience can be a lifeline for many students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Stefan remarked that for some children, the hot lunch provided by the school was likely the only nutritious meal they received each

day. Additionally, after summer breaks, the cooks intentionally served extra stodgy meals, rich in filling ingredients like potatoes and meat, to meet the heightened hunger of the returning students.

The challenges faced by the German education system are not to be underestimated. The shortage of skilled workers, lack of recognition for intellectual work, resource orientation, and the need for more time and space for project-driven learning are significant areas that demand attention and solutions

Despite the progress, challenges persisted in Berlin, such as integrating All Day Schools with structured school hours and meeting the needs of low socioeconomic status children, there is a genuine desire among educators to create an environment that prioritized education and provided ample resources to support the unique needs of each school. The expansion plans for all children from 2030 will be challenged by the availability of quality educators and pedagogues, something the schools are currently considering in the context of expansion implementation.

Challenges and Ongoing Efforts

Despite significant progress, Freie Universität acknowledges the challenges that come with implementing and sustaining All Day Schools. The integration of morning classes with afternoon activities remains a focal point for improvement, as seamless co-operation between teachers and pedagogues is vital for students' comprehensive growth. Freie Universität is dedicated to continuously refining the educational model to create a more cohesive and integrated learning experience.

Views of Children in Germany

Children in Germany have always been considered as an integral part of society, and the education system has evolved to cater to their needs and development. With a focus on improving educational outcomes for all children, the government implemented reforms to extend schooling hours, transforming half-day schools into full-day schools (Ganztagschule). Freie Universität and other academics are still exploring, developing and enhancing opportunities for this change to impact the lives of children and their families, especially in the early years of schooling.

This provided challenges faced by policymakers in maintaining consistency and tracking progress due to the heterogeneity of different states.

Children’s attendance

Transition points in Australia can be a challenge – busses, collections points at schools, missing children, signing in and signing out, children unexpectedly absent, safety, children absconding and so on.

At each school I visited, the children stayed on site and were unique to the school in which the All Day School was located, hence the roll and children’s data was shared with the afternoon pedagogues. At one point I asked how they knew all children were there and what happened if a child absconded. The principal said: “why wouldn’t they come, they love it here”. In her 20 years there had been one issue. On average it was about a 1:11 ratio for children to pedagogues. I noticed the children running over to the Ganztagschule and being signed in by a pedagogue sitting in the entry way. The Ganztagschules were dedicated spaces. All rooms had a wooden board at the door with a set number of slots (please look in photo album for pic). The children placed their ID card in slots to indicate who was in there and, once the slots were full, it also indicated that there were no vacancies for additional children. I liked this!



The buildings were built with a focus of All Day School, with comprehensive recreation and leisure resources.

What did I LOVE?

- The focus on building the capable child, building expectations and competencies were key themes.
- Play focused
- Child-centred
- The dedicated rooms to arts, crafts, drama, games, and other areas of interests to the children.
- The schools are integration -oriented
- The built environment was built for the whole day and the whole child, enabling teacher time and dedicated space for recreation and leisure time
- Teachers following the child for three years
- Pedagogues seemed welcomed, connected and engaged in the whole school environment
- Recreational and leisure oriented with intentional teaching opportunities
- Enablement – enabling independence, opportunities an expectation of the child
- Secular
- No cost for ages 6/7/8/9/
- Consistency of providers

Conclusion

There is a lot to consider with Germany’s journey in education. There is a strong focus on building evidence and considering the evolution and evaluation of the all day schooling experience for children. The integration of before, after school with schooling itself was evident. The focus on building children (not supervising) was prominent in the German approach - as was enablement. All children and young people, whilst studying (including university) receive free public transport. My questions are, do our regulations and law hinder or enable our ability to adopt some of these approaches? Are we child-led enough? Could we integrate with schools more?

Other reflection questions to consider:

1. What are your thoughts on the transformation of half-day schools into full-day schools (Ganztagschule) in Germany? How might this change impact the lives of children and their families, particularly those from different socioeconomic backgrounds?
2. In light of the challenges faced by educators in integrating Ganztagschule with structured schooling, how important is it to bridge the gap between morning classes and afternoon activities? What innovative approaches could be adopted to improve this integration?
3. Consider the experiences of different cultural communities in Germany’s education system. How do you think schools and policymakers can promote better inclusion and integration for this community, and what benefits might arise from doing so?
4. Reflect on the impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 on education in East and West Germany. How might this historic event have influenced the current education policies and practices in the unified country?
5. What lessons can be learned from the “PISA Shock of 2000” and Germany’s subsequent focus on improving educational outcomes? How might other countries facing similar challenges benefit from Germany’s response?
6. Based on the experiences of educators and principals in Berlin’s schools, what do you think are the most critical factors in building a supportive and effective learning environment for children?
7. Think about the role of the All Day Schools (Ganztagschule) in developing children’s social and emotional competencies. How might these schools contribute to the holistic growth of students beyond academic achievements?
8. Consider the challenges faced by Ganztagschule, such as the shortage of quality teachers and pedagogues. How might investing more resources in education, as opposed to social security, impact the overall well-being of society?
9. After reading about the different educational approaches and experiences in Berlin, how might your own country’s education system compare? What potential lessons could be applied or adapted from Germany’s model?

Remember, these reflection questions are meant to be thought-provoking and open-ended.





Chapter 5: Boston, United States of America

Building Resilient and Capable Children - Exploring Innovative Approaches



Boston was a unique environment and opportunity. I had the opportunity to visit and meet with a number of people along with attend locations:

1. [The PEAR institute](#) (now called the Institute for the Study of Resilience in Youth, ISRY) where I met with Gil Noam's amazing and committed team led by Dr Patty Allen
2. Chris Smith from Boston Beyond
3. [Outward Bound](#)
4. [Boston Chinese Neighborhood Centre](#)
5. [The Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly Team \(LBFE\)](#) (please see new blog)
6. Attended the Patricia White Affordable apartments for older people to participate in a digital

It was a really busy week in Boston. ISRY provided an amazing start to my week. Dr Patty Allen and her team

were generous in spirit and time as they talked through some of the work they are doing. They spoke about three very innovative programmes Edge, Brainy and DOS which are being implementing in out of school hours care services across Boston. A strong focus of the work being conducted is about building the social and emotional development of children.

However, some states have banned programmes which are defined as social and emotional development. I struggled to understand why a state would ban programmes related to social and emotional development. I have read some articles about it, but it is potentially about the politicisation of children's development and linking social and emotional development to critical race theory. I have hyperlinked a number of links at the end of this blog.

The conversations about this with colleagues here in the USA, raised contemplations about language and perceptions.

I know I have "issues with language". Ask my colleagues! For example I don't like the word 'kids' I prefer the word 'children'. The word 'kid' is of mixed origins and for me, doesn't articulate respect for children. I recognise that we shorten words in our everyday conversations and it's also common to say the word 'kids' in the everyday vernacular. But in professional language, on radio, TV, in marketing and advertising, giving children respect by using the word 'children' or indeed 'children and young people', I feel, denotes that, as a society, we respect and regard children and young people.

My other word 'issue' is 'ladies' and I'm sure some of my colleagues are laughing as they read this now. As a staunch feminist, I often say I am not a lady, I am a woman! The word lady denotes so many layers of societal expectation of how a woman must act, behave, relate and engage. The word 'woman' to me, describes equality, respect, empowerment and ownership of one's own gender.'

1. Equality and Respect: The term "woman" is seen as more respectful and emphasizes gender equality. "Lady" can be perceived as patronizing or

infantilising because it historically implied a certain standard of behaviour and social class. Using "woman" recognizes the maturity and autonomy of individuals regardless of their gender.

2. Removing Gender Stereotypes: The term "lady" is sometimes associated with traditional gender roles and stereotypes, implying certain behaviours or expectations based on societal norms. On the other hand, "woman" is a neutral term that allows women to be seen as individuals with their own unique qualities and characteristics.

3. Inclusivity: "Woman" is a more inclusive term that encompasses all adult females, regardless of their marital status or social standing. On the other hand, "lady" can imply a specific set of characteristics or manners that not all women identify with or want to conform to.

4. Empowerment: The use of "woman" empowers individuals by recognizing their agency and autonomy. It allows women to define themselves on their terms rather than conforming to societal expectations.

Language can play a significant role in shaping perceptions and attitudes. By using "woman" instead of "lady," feminists, like me, aim to promote more accurate and respectful representations of women in society. It's important to note that language is continually evolving, and opinions on these terms may vary among feminists and individuals. Some people might prefer the term "lady" due to cultural or personal reasons, while others might find it problematic for the reasons mentioned above.

My final word on language. What has surprised me in the US is the discussion about young people and how sometimes their colour comes as part of the characterization of who they are so for example "Johnny is a black young man" instead of "Johnny is a young 16 year old man whose resides in XXX area and whose parents..... He comes from a home of XXX social economic status....."

In my time in the USA, skin colour was a strong defining element of a person. I struggled with how it was used as a descriptor of young people; potentially establishing preset racial views from the get go. The use of colour to describe a person in American English (and in many other cultures) is a form of racial or ethnic identification. It can involve using terms like "Black," "White," "Asian," "Hispanic," (and others) to refer to a person's perceived racial or ethnic background. This practice has historical roots and has evolved over time.

Historically, the United States and many other countries have been characterized by significant racial and ethnic diversity due to migration, colonization, and the slave trade. These historical events led to the coexistence of people with various physical appearances and cultural backgrounds. Using colour terms to describe a person's race or ethnicity often reflects an attempt to categorise people based on their physical characteristics. However, it's essential to note that race is a social construct, and the concept of race is not based on biological or genetic factors. Instead, it is a product of societal attitudes and historical categorizations.

I recognise there is another toss of the coin here and pride of colour and origins is also a context to be considered in the culture of USA. One young woman, a leader of a young person's program pondered the question and said "but if we don't acknowledge who people are (i.e. colour), then we are not being honest". Being proud of being a 'black woman' or a 'black man' in a positive constructive sense and equalising gender and social status is another construct to consider in the conversation.

I also note that I don't live in the USA and I have a very superficial understanding of the culture and the personal experiences of the racial tensions and challenges here. I know there is work being done to minimise those tensions and reduce and erase those divides, I hope this work continues and is not hampered. It requires strong thought-leadership and an enduring focus on the world within which we want to live.

While some individuals may prefer to be identified by their specific racial or ethnic background, it can be suggested that using colour-based terms can sometimes be oversimplifying or perpetuating stereotypes. Ideally, individuals should be identified and referred to based on their preferred terms, acknowledging their individual identities and backgrounds. Discussions about race and ethnicity are sensitive and require respect for people's preferences and individual identities. Using language that reflects a commitment to understanding and inclusivity is critical.

Back to ISRY! Is where I met with Patty and her incredibly committed and passionate team of professionals each talking about the projects they were working on and how they were contributing to the capable child. We spoke about some of the themes I'd been considering and they spoke richly about the work they were doing and how they partnered with organisations to enable them to provide a service to

children and families. Further to this, they focus on working with staff. By working with staff, building their resilience, staff are able to focus on the resilience of the children. The dual role of care is a strong focus. "If we don't support them, they can't support children."

[The Clover Model](#), a founding conceptual model of ISRY is a well-rounded model which focusses on Social and Emotional Development. It has four leaves, as its namesake suggests. They are:

1. Active Engagement
2. Assertiveness
3. Belonging
4. Reflection

ISRY works 'at the intersection of development/clinical psychology and education'. Based at McLean Hospital (America's foremost psychiatric hospital), it was developed to connect proactive, early intervention and prevention research and educational practice.



Throughout my trip we have all recognised the depressed social and emotional development environment children have been in, due to COVID and isolation; at ISRY we spoke about the impact these artificial limits had on children and their development.

I queried the role of play. ISRY saw the importance of intentional play in their projects; more referring to it as 'hands on engagement', so information is garnered and retained. Patty spoke about the role of physical movement and learning. "children want to move their body, they want to interact with the world around them while they are learning." One such example was a gamified program called "Brainy" which was focussed on learning about the brain and concussion impacts. Children put a puzzle together, but every so often they had to stop and spin a wheel. The wheel could stop on a positive impact or negative impact and there was a

subsequent consequence for that impact. The children worked in teams to complete the puzzle and address the consequences. Through this process, children's learning about concussion was embedded.

Another program was focussed on girls and engineering. Engagement and Development for Girls in Engineering. A program demystifying engineering and providing an opportunity to enter into or consider engineering and all of its opportunities.

ISRY also have a variety of tools on their website to assist with observations, linkages, engagement and connections.

ISRY work with all forms of out of school hours care and in strong partnership with

Boston Beyond

Boston Beyond (BB) is an organisation led by Chris Smith. It has been working since 2005 to engage an increasing number of students in summer-time and after school time activities. More than 25,000 students participate annually in after-school and summer learning programs. BB support over 475 programs and schools to offer high-quality out-of-school learning experiences across different grade levels and neighborhoods. The RAND Corporation's extensive national study on summer learning, the largest of its kind, has demonstrated that Boston Beyond's approach yields significant, long-term impacts on student learning. High-attending summer students in their programs exhibited a 25% advancement in reading and math compared to their peers and also showed improvements in social and emotional skills.

Like ISRY, Boston Beyond highlight the value of After school programs because they provide students with an opportunity to develop essential skills and grow socially and emotionally among their peers and supportive adults. Boston Beyond's evidence is showing that evidence-based after-school programs have been linked to improved school attendance, increased engagement in learning, and higher graduation rates, particularly benefiting students from low-income families who are at greater risk.

Boston Beyond operates as a convener and facilitator, bringing together nonprofit providers, educators, researchers, city leaders, and other stakeholders who share their mission to enhance after-school opportunities for Boston students. The network is guided by four themes: a focus on skills development, program innovation, common measures for tracking

progress and outcomes, and professional learning opportunities for program leaders and staff.

In addition to their general work, Boston Beyond has directed special initiatives to address specific areas of concern in after-school practices. These initiatives include strategies for supporting social and emotional learning at the elementary level, expanding STEM programming and fostering STEM career aspirations among middle schoolers, and designing a system for validating students' acquisition of crucial skills in middle and high school.

The organisation employs a comprehensive set of measures to gauge student skill growth and program quality. These measures go beyond standardized tests and cover a range of program factors and learning outcomes, including social-emotional skills as well as incorporating input from students and staff. Partners receive Program Reports for Improvement and System Measurement (PRISM) annually, which compare their performance against research-informed benchmarks and other local providers. These reports help identify strengths and areas in need of improvement, while also enabling the network to identify challenges and successful practices across their programs.

The suite of measurement tools used by Boston Beyond includes tracking student participation, conducting program observations to assess program quality factors, gathering student and staff feedback through surveys to gauge skill development and program quality, and utilizing data to inform curriculum refinements and overall network growth.

The programs Boston Beyond partner with are wide and varied: 50% are on school sites, some are volunteer run, some are intergenerational, some are part of structured organisations such as the YMCA/Boys and Girls.

The difference I have heard here in America is the use of language related to 'hands on' and 'skills-based' rather than play or play workers. Unlike Australia, the out of school hours services incorporate all of the city's out of school hours opportunities - museums, sports clubs, dance, martial arts, lacrosse, theatre, visual arts, youth leadership. All types of programs fit within the criteria of OSHC services.

Of note, Boston has a system of [bussing](#) children across the city to their school, brought about by the Garrity order in 1974. This commenced as an anti-segregation approach for children but still continues to this day. There is some discussion about the cost of busing and how this money could be invested differently to achieve educational outcomes.

Thanks to Chris, I visited both Outward Bound for young people and the Boston Chinese Neighbourhood Centre. These services were starkly differently from each other.

Outward Bound



I met with Nikki initially (Chief Education Officer) and then Kelly and Jalen at Outward Bound Boston. Outward Bound Boston, is also known as Thompson Island Outward Bound. It is dedicated to transforming lives through challenge and discovery. Their core mission is to create stronger and more equitable school communities by providing free experiential learning programs that enhance academic success and foster personal growth.

Their research-based programs are designed to combine STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), social-emotional learning, and challenge-based learning. By offering a unique blend of academic and life skills education, students have the opportunity to develop essential competencies alongside their academic achievements. By challenging students' minds, hearts, and bodies, the organisation helps them tap into their inner strengths and

capabilities, empowering them to realize their full potential.

With a legacy of 200 years of service to children in Boston and a 47-year partnership with the Boston Public Schools (BPS), Thompson Island Outward Bound has been an integral part of the education landscape for over three decades.

One of the outstanding aspects of their programs is that they are funded through a combination of philanthropy and the revenue generated from private events held on the island, making their offerings accessible to families at no cost.

Their programs cater to Boston public middle school and high school students. I had the opportunity to participate in the Green Ambassadors program. In this program, whilst the young people were older, I witnessed the focus on developing both social and emotional development and encourage the building of capability, in a gentle but firm way.

Both Kelly and Jalen had been through the program and were now leaders. Their team and leadership skills were strong and evident. The young people listened to both Kelly and Jalen as they gave comprehensive instructions centered around group and collaboration skills, leadership skills and work activity. Many of the young people who participate in this program come back as leaders because of the familial experience and their exposure to STEM and the outdoors.

The Green Ambassador Program, is a summer employment initiative for high school students in Boston. The program provides paid opportunities for students aged 15 to 18 to work in the green job sector. During their participation, Green Ambassadors undergo a comprehensive learning experience that encompasses various personal and professional skills.

Participants in the Green Ambassador Program gain knowledge and expertise in environmental stewardship, climate change responsiveness, natural resource and facilities management, and technical outdoor skills like camping, paddling, and water safety. The program also emphasizes the development of teamwork, collaborative problem-solving, improved communication, navigating challenges, and gaining self-confidence.

The focus of the Green Ambassador's work revolves around social and environmental justice. They engage in hands-on learning and application of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) skills while also building strong group membership and leadership abilities. Additionally, the program instills a

commitment to taking individual and group action to mitigate the impacts of climate change in and around Boston.

The Green Ambassador Program collaborates with industry professionals and community leaders to increase environmental consciousness, promote academic interest, and expand life skills among the participants.

The Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC) stands as a pillar of empowerment for Asian and new immigrant communities, offering a wide array of innovative and family-centered programs and services. At its core, BCNC is dedicated to fostering healthy families, achieving economic success, and contributing to the thriving communities it serves, impacting the lives of over 13,000 children, youth, and adults every year.

One of the cornerstones of BCNC's approach is the value it places on community collaboration. Embracing the collective power of the whole community and forging strong partnerships.

Central to BCNC's philosophy is its holistic approach to empowerment. The center deeply respects and celebrates the strengths of families and individuals, providing comprehensive support for their social-emotional, mental, and economic well-being. Understanding the unique complexities of each family, BCNC takes into account factors such as composition, economic status, racial and ethnic background, immigration history, values, beliefs, and practices.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are guiding principles that permeate BCNC's efforts. The organization values and honors the diverse identities, experiences, abilities, and languages brought by both constituents and staff. Among the many programs that exemplify this commitment, the Red Oak After School and Summer Program stands out as it provides licensed out-of-school time childcare for children aged 5-13. Through this program, BCNC nurtures children's growth through literacy and arts education in a multicultural and multilingual environment, encouraging creative expression while fostering academic skills, social-emotional development, and language proficiency.

During my visit to BCNC, I had the privilege of meeting with Bithaus and Harry to explore the challenges and opportunities in Out of School Time for their organization. One of the challenges they face is the building's age and structure, as well as the task of attracting and retaining quality educators. While the lack of an internal playground presented obstacles,

the center's shared space with other BCNC services added to the complexity. Despite these challenges, the commitment of the dedicated staff to the children's growth and development was a strong focus.

BCNC's staff, comprising group leaders and assistants, undergo thorough background checks to ensure a safe environment for the children. However, attracting and retaining staff remains an ongoing challenge due to salary concerns, long/unusual hours, and the diverse needs of the children. The lack of a clear professional identity and pressure to assist with homework completion also contribute to the complexity of the role. Yet, amidst these challenges, BCNC remains a place where children form rich connections with their peers, particularly within the multi-linguistic and cultural tapestry of the community.

The focus on social and emotional development is at the heart of BCNC's ethos, with a strong arts and education curriculum driving the program's impact. However, the ongoing challenges of funding and resources hinder the realization of their vision for an even bigger and better program. One poignant expression of the children's experiences was conveyed through a K-Pop quote that captured the feeling of life's grind: "Oh my God, Why is there so much work, OMG, why is there so much work, OMG." This heartfelt sentiment illustrates the long days and pressures faced by the children and staff alike.

Noting the above comment, BCNC, continue to be dedicated and strive for excellence, creating a nurturing space where families, children and individuals can thrive.

Conclusion

The blog post provides a reflection on my visit to Boston, where I had the opportunity to meet with various organisations and explore different approaches to child development and education. The focus in Boston was on social and emotional development and building a capable child through skills-based afterschool learning. The organisations highlighted in the post, including the Institute for the Study of Resilience in Youth (ISRY), Boston Beyond, Outward Bound, and the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC), all of which play crucial roles in supporting children's growth, well-being, and academic success.

Reflection Questions:

1. What were the main themes and concepts discussed in the blog post? How do they connect to your own experiences and beliefs about child development and education?
2. The use of language was a topic in the post. How does language shape our perceptions and attitudes toward children, gender, race, and ethnicity? Have you encountered similar discussions about language in your own community or workplace?
3. How do the programs and initiatives described in the blog post (ISRY, Boston Beyond, Outward Bound, BCNC) address the social and emotional development of children? How important do you think these aspects are in a child's overall development?
4. How do you, and your colleagues conceptualise a capable child?
5. What do you do, in your programming to build capability in children in your Out of School Hours Care service?
6. The blog post touches on the challenges faced by these organisations, such as funding, staff retention, and resource limitations. How do you think these challenges impact the effectiveness of the programs and services offered to children and families?
7. The post mentions the focus on STEM education, social-emotional learning, and challenge-based learning. How can these approaches be integrated into traditional educational settings to better support students' academic and personal growth?
8. Consider the discussion about using colour-based terms to describe race and ethnicity. What are your thoughts on using such terms? How can we approach discussions about race and ethnicity in a respectful and inclusive manner?
9. The blog post mentioned the debate over banning social and emotional development programs in some states. What are your opinions on this matter? How can we strike a balance between addressing children's emotional needs and avoiding potential politicization of education?
10. Based on the information in the post, what similarities and differences do you notice between the educational and out-of-school programs in Boston and those in your own community or country?

11. The blog post briefly touched on the impact of COVID-19 on children's social and emotional development. How do you think the pandemic has affected children's well-being and learning, and what measures can be taken to address these challenges?
12. After reading about the different organisations and programs, which one resonated with you the most, and why? How can the insights from these organisations be applied to enhance child development and education in your own context?



Breaking the Chains of Isolation: Empowering Students and Seniors through Intergenerational Bonds



Boston and Intergenerational Practices

Boston Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly (LBFE) is a distinguished non-profit volunteer-based organisation that forms part of a national network committed to alleviating isolation and loneliness among the elderly. Since its inception in 1979, LBFE Boston has been dedicated to improving the lives of older adults who often face challenges such as limited access to transportation, language barriers, and a lack of nearby family or friends. Their primary focus is on older adults living independently at or below the poverty line, and their programs are open to all without regard to race, gender, creed, nationality, or sexual orientation.

The vision of LBFE Boston revolves around creating inclusive, intergenerational communities where the young and old come together in the spirit of friendship. They achieve this by collaborating with public and affordable senior housing buildings, local seniors' centres, as well as Boston's colleges and universities. Through these partnerships, LBFE connects young and older participants to foster mutual understanding, learning, and joy in their life.

LBFE Boston's core programs, CitySites, Digital

Dividends, and Creative Connections, serve as the pillars of their impactful initiatives. CitySites enables weekly intergenerational activities in senior housing and centres, where participants engage in various activities, such as games, arts and crafts, and storytelling, all conducted in their preferred language.

Digital Dividends was born in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and seeks to bridge the digital divide for isolated, low-income older adults. This program provides laptops, internet connectivity, and weekly training in essential tech skills, empowering participants to stay connected with their loved ones and the wider community.

In line with the belief that the arts have the power to enrich lives, Creative Connections brings professional arts instruction to older adults in public and affordable housing, removing barriers to access and providing culturally relevant content.

LBFE Boston also facilitates Community Connections, facilitating short-term intergenerational engagement opportunities like art courses and partnerships with schools and assisted living facilities. Additionally, they host luncheons, a summer picnic, Thanksgiving Day luncheon, and Winter Holiday celebrations, providing cherished moments of connection and camaraderie for older adults and volunteers alike.

LBFE's history traces back to its founder, Armand Marquiset, who envisioned "spreading across the earth igniting little fires of love" to relieve isolation and loneliness. He began this noble mission in Paris, visiting elderly individuals in need, sharing meals, bringing flowers, and offering companionship. Over time, this spark of love grew, leading to the establishment of LBFE chapters across Europe and North America.

The organisation's efforts align with the sobering findings of the US Surgeon General's advice on loneliness, which emphasizes the critical importance of social connection for individual and societal well-being. Loneliness and isolation can and does have severe consequences on physical and mental health, comparable to the effects of smoking. As such, LBFE's work in fostering meaningful relationships and combating loneliness holds immense value for older adults and the wider community.

Through LBFE's intergenerational programs, they not only improve the lives of the elderly but also build friendships and understanding between generations, ultimately creating a more compassionate and connected society for all.

I was extremely lucky to catch up with several LBFE colleagues who were warm and generous with their time and information.

Very clearly Australia's Federal Government policy is focussed on keeping older people at home longer. Residential Care is becoming a service provided later in life and for those more unwell or with complex conditions. We know, on average, people spend less than two years in residential care homes prior to passing away.

Isolation and loneliness are major risks and issues for our older Australians living at home. We must ask ourselves, how do we, as a sector develop innovative and thoughtful programs to connect older people to their communities, older people to each other and older people to younger Australians to stave off these risks and keep our older Australians safe and well at home.

LBFE are doing just that, through their programs not only in Boston, but in other chapters, they are spreading love (as their founder stated).

The outcomes are not only generous for the older people but for the students as well. Often students are far from home, and lonely.

Whilst we have some programs in Australia, we also have the capacity to expand these programs in line with the changes to Government policy.

As an example of positive intergenerational practices, Warrigal has developed a beautiful program, where students, mainly between the ages of 16-18 are employed to work in our Residential Care Homes. These Assistance Care Employee roles (ACEs) have become critical in providing social, emotional and dining support for our residents. Our ACEs are consistent, connected and engaged and it provides them with an opportunity to explore Aged Care as a career and a profession.

LBFE's focus is on reducing isolation and loneliness through community based supports via intergenerational engagement, mainly with students. These students connect and provide skills to the older people.

The digital dividends program provides digital equity for older people to ensure they have fair and equal access to and use of digital technologies and online resources. As society becomes increasingly reliant on digital platforms for communication, information, and services, it is essential to bridge the digital divide and ensure that older individuals are not left behind.

Closing the gap on the following areas of digital is a focus of the digital dividends program.

- 1. Access to Technology:** Digital equity starts with providing older adults with access to the necessary digital devices, such as computers, tablets, and smartphones. This may involve initiatives to provide affordable or subsidised devices to those with limited financial resources.
- 2. Internet Connectivity:** Alongside access to devices, internet connectivity is crucial for older people to benefit fully from digital technologies. Efforts should be made to expand broadband availability and affordability, especially in rural areas and low-income communities where access might be limited. LBFE have provided internet access to their participants.
- 3. Digital Literacy:** Digital equity also involves promoting digital literacy among older adults. Many older individuals may be less familiar with technology, and offering training programs that teach them how to use digital tools, navigate the internet, and stay safe online can empower them to engage confidently in the digital world.
- 4. Tailored Content and Interfaces:** Websites, applications, and online services should be designed with the needs of older users in mind. This includes using larger fonts, clear language, and intuitive interfaces to accommodate varying levels of digital literacy and potential physical limitations that older adults may face.
- 5. Accessible Technologies:** Ensuring that digital technologies are accessible to older individuals with disabilities is crucial. This involves making devices and software compatible with assistive technologies, such as screen readers or voice commands, to facilitate ease of use.
- 6. Supportive Community Programs:** Community-based initiatives and organizations, like Boston Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly, can play a significant role in promoting digital equity for older people. These programs can offer training sessions, workshops, and ongoing support to help seniors adopt and embrace digital technologies.
- 7. Addressing Social Isolation:** Digital technologies can be powerful tools in combating social isolation among older adults. Equitable access to digital platforms can enable them to connect with loved ones, participate in virtual social activities, and access online support networks.

8. User-Centered Design: When developing digital products and services targeted at older users, involving older adults in the design process can lead to more effective and user-friendly solutions.

9. Policy Advocacy: Governments and policymakers play a critical role in promoting digital equity. They can support initiatives that address the digital divide, fund digital literacy programs, and implement policies to ensure fair and affordable access to technology and the internet for older individuals.

In Australia, as the student population experiences a notable increase, a multifaceted and mutually beneficial approach to mitigating isolation among students and older individuals holds significant promise. Specifically, programs designed for international students offer opportunities for language enhancement and foster cross-cultural connections through immersive dialogues. These initiatives, inspired by successful programs in Boston through LBFE, London through Generations Working Together and Netherton, England at L30, focus on building connections within local communities and establishing pathways for meaningful relationships at a local level.

Evaluating the effectiveness of such programs includes measuring social capital outcomes by asking participants questions such as their willingness to seek help from neighbors or offer assistance in return. Feedback from participants indicates that friendships are formed, and genuine connections are fostered, as evidenced by consistent attendance and enthusiastic engagement.

Amidst studies suggesting that Generation Z faces heightened loneliness, it's becomes apparent that addressing social isolation has relevance for this demographic as well. The significance of positive outcomes for all age groups reinforces the value of these initiatives.

During a visit to the Patricia White Apartments in Boston, which is an affordable independent living unit complex for older individuals, I had the privilege of witnessing and engaging in discussions about the Digital Dividends program. Both older residents and students were deeply engrossed in conversations about computers, tablets, the internet, and associated programs. Additionally, these interactions transcended into profound and personal discussions on support, care, and meaningful connections.

The program's potential to foster community engagement and establish stronger ties with neighbours makes it an inspiring model for adaptation and implementation in Australia's Home Services, offering an effective means to combat loneliness and connect people with their local communities and fellow residents.

In conclusion, the power of intergenerational connections in breaking the chains of isolation is undeniable. As Australia's student population experiences a resurgence, embracing a multi-pronged approach that fosters meaningful relationships between students and older individuals can bring about transformative benefits for both groups. Through programs that promote language improvement and cross-cultural exchanges, students can immerse themselves in a world of diverse perspectives while helping combat the loneliness that can plague our older generation.

Inspired by successful initiatives in Boston, London and Netherton, we know participants can form genuine friendships. The impact extends beyond language and technology discussions; these interactions transcend into heartwarming conversations about support, care, and a sense of belonging. As research points to Gen Z as the loneliest generation, the value of such programs becomes even more pronounced in addressing the challenges faced by the younger population.

During my visit to the Patricia White Apartments in Boston, I observed firsthand how the Digital Dividends program brought students and older residents together, igniting a powerful connection based on shared interests and the warmth of human compassion. The potential for such programs to be integrated with Home Services in Australia, nurturing a culture of community and connectedness, is immense.

By embracing these intergenerational bonds and unleashing the power of genuine connections, we have the opportunity to empower both students and seniors alike. I'm curious to explore opportunities to break down barriers, enrich lives, and continue to build upon a more inclusive and compassionate society where no one is left isolated, but instead, we all thrive through the strength of our bonds.



Chapter 6: Toronto, Canada



Embarking on my exploration of Canada, I commenced my journey in Toronto, Ontario, a city that embodies the vibrancy and diversity of the nation. Toronto is the largest city in Canada and the fourth-largest in North America. Its population, nearing 3 million in the city proper and almost 6.5 million in the Greater Toronto Area, represents a dynamic blend of cultures, languages, and backgrounds; the most diverse in Canada.

Toronto, a microcosm of Canada's multicultural ethos, experiences extremes in temperature, with July the hottest month (average 21 degrees Celsius) and January, the coldest (averaging -2 degrees Celsius). The city's rapid growth and diversity are particularly evident among its 420,000 residents under 14 years of age. This demographic diversity sets the stage for a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities within Canada's education system, particularly their Out of School Hours Care (OSHC).

Ontario, the focal point of my initial exploration, holds a pivotal position as Canada's most populous province, home to 15 million people. Accounting for 38.5 percent of the nation's population, Ontario encompasses the capital, Ottawa, and Toronto. The province is also recognized for its vast geographical expanse, ranking as the second-largest province in Canada.

Navigating through the intricacies of the Canadian education system, I learned that the absence of a national educational framework places control at the provincial level. Despite a goal of achieving \$10 per day early learning, funding is currently exclusive to early learning, with no provision for Out of School Hours Care. This patchwork approach has created a tension between the needs of families and the operational challenges faced by service providers.

The policy landscape in Canada underwent a significant shift with \$10 day child care offering for families, though this did not extend to Out of School Hours

Care. Challenges persist due to the fragmented policy environment, hindering the development of a cohesive and integrated system. The lack of a standardized national approach has impeded comprehensive research and analysis on a broader scale.

In 2022, Statistics Canada noted that 40% of children aged 4-12 who attended school participated in some form of before or after school care. School based programs were the most common, followed by informal care by a relative (14%) or sibling (11%). Affordability, hours of operation and finally characteristics of care were the main areas of discernment for families.

During my stay in Toronto, I had the privilege of being hosted by Cynthia Abel, Deputy Registrar & Director, Registration Department at the College of Early Childhood Educators, and her colleague Graeme McIntyre, Research and Policy Co-ordinator. Their detailed coordination facilitated a series of meetings over the week, providing me with invaluable insights into the intricate workings of Canada's early childhood education landscape.



The role and purpose of the college is to regulate and govern Ontario's registered Early Childhood Educators in the public interest; it is the only professional self-regulatory body in Canada. The college regulates the profession by establishing and enforcing:

- Registration requirements
- Ethical and professional standards for registered early childhood educators
- Requirements for professional learning and
- Complaints and disciplinary process for professional misconduct, incompetence and incapacity. (ref: college-ece.ca)

My engagement extended to discussions with Dr. Rachel Hayden from the University of Western Ontario, delving into intergenerational practices. Dr. Hayden emphasized the pivotal role of a meaningful curriculum in fostering connections, stating that "bringing people together doesn't create the magic, but having a curriculum that is meaningful does." Further to that I met with Naida Meghi for the Allen Gray Continuing Care Centre where an early learning centre was located within the walls of an aged care environment. Their collective insights shed light on the importance of intergenerational practices and the opportunities for older people and younger people to share skills, fun and time to their collective benefit. Dr. Hayden is clear when she highlights the importance of an intentional engagement, whilst Naida spoke beautifully about the rich incidental and planned engagement with being located in situ. The opportunities for elders in the family to relate to their youngest additions and staff having the opportunity to have their children located on site whilst they worked. Children undertook such activities as participating in Bingo, delivering mail, shared gardening experiences, wheelchair races and so on. They were just recommencing planning of additional programs after the cessation of all programs due to COVID. One of the most poignant comments I heard was how, in the process of engaging, children were able to develop expertise but also show mastery to people who might no longer be able to master skills that they had learnt. Programs such as music therapy was noted as being very powerful and undertaking an intergenerational music program. Naida was of the view that children learnt early about grief and loss and learnt to relate across a cross-section of community by being co-located in the residential care home. Highlights of intention, choice, positive engagement, identified greater joyful experiences for children and older people, along with the staff.

My engagement with the First Nations Technical Institute provided me with deep insights into the indigenous community's needs, a meeting with unveiled a rich tapestry of history, challenges, and resilience. Established 38 years ago, it stands as one of the oldest and largest indigenous education institutions in Ontario. The institute's journey from a technical institution to its present form, grounded in indigenous ways of knowing, reflects both progress and persistent systemic barriers.

The year 2017 marked a legislative milestone, recognizing nine indigenous education institutions in Ontario. These institutions, each focusing on distinct areas, have expanded their offerings, with five university/bachelor programs nearing completion, including social work, indigenous justice, midwifery, indigenous food, and bachelor of education.

The challenges faced by indigenous people in education extend beyond the institutional level. Barriers from decision-making processes to streaming within schools were highlighted. The significance of cultural advisors emerged as a crucial aspect of supporting indigenous learners, acknowledging the importance of community, prayer, and song.

The holistic approach of the institute integrates indigenous knowledge systems into teaching methodologies. It emphasizes the teachings of the 7 Grandfather principles, providing a foundation for healing across body, mind, emotion, and spirit. The institute's commitment to addressing trauma within the community resonates with the belief that "as we are healing, we can raise children in indigenous love and not in colonial pain."

Exploring the challenges within the Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) sector brought attention to the often-overlooked issue of split shifts. Undertaking research on split shifts, an area predominantly studied in the context of bus drivers and nurses, revealed the challenges faced by OSHC staff earning under 40k per year. Their experiences, including undervaluation and difficulties in claiming space within school settings, shed light on the need for comprehensive reforms in the sector.

In addressing these challenges, discussions revolved around the potential roles of teacher-trainees in the OSHC sector. Acknowledging the need for a more-rounded and qualified teaching workforce, conversations highlighted the importance of fostering deeper relationships, shared spaces, and facilitated communication.

There is some progress in different areas, for example, affordability – there was lots of progress, Parent fees are being lowered, some provinces have done it in better ways. However, the view is need to move from a market system to get high quality. Broadly speaking, the Government committed in expanding only in the NFP space

Public funding is only for core services. For example, no regulatory requirement for food to be provided. That would allow the operators to charge extra for food. Additional fees can not be compulsory. There also needs to be a real focus on building competency in the workforce part of this is increasing the wages of the workforce. The majority of staff don't have qualifications.

In summary, my Canadian experience provided a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges and remarkable initiatives within the country's education system. While Canada strives for an equitable, safe, and accessible education system, there remains work to be done in shaping and developing the system through collaborative efforts at federal, provincial, and territorial levels. Policymakers are focused on key pillars such as high-quality, inclusive education, affordability, and improving access, yet the road to achieving these goals is complex and requires ongoing commitment and innovation

Reflection Questions: Diversity and Multiculturalism

1. How does the diversity of Toronto reflect the broader multicultural ethos of Canada, and how might this impact education, specifically in Out of School Hours Care (OSHC)?
2. In what ways can a diverse population in a city like Toronto contribute to both challenges and opportunities in the education system?
3. How might the extreme temperature variations in Toronto influence the Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) sector, and what considerations should be made to address these challenges?
4. In what ways can weather-related factors impact the planning and implementation of educational programs, especially for children 4-12?
5. How does this impact the attraction of staff?
6. What are the localized opportunities?
7. How might a patchwork approach to funding and policies create tension between the needs of families and the challenges faced by service providers?

8. What are the key challenges faced by the Canadian education system due to a fragmented policy environment, and how can a lack of standardized national approach hinder comprehensive research and analysis?
9. How would funding for Out of School Hours Care impact access, affordability, equity and staff attraction?
10. How do intergenerational practices, as observed in the Allen Gray Continuing Care Centre, contribute to the overall development and well-being of both children and older individuals?
11. In what ways can intentional engagement, choice, and positive interaction enhance the experiences of both children and older people in such intergenerational programs?
12. What are the persistent systemic barriers faced by indigenous education institutions, and how have these barriers been addressed or intensified over time?
13. How does the incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural advisors contribute to the holistic approach of indigenous education, and what role does it play in supporting indigenous learners?
14. What are the challenges faced by the Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) sector, especially regarding split shifts and undervaluation of staff?
15. How might teacher-trainees contribute to addressing these challenges, and what role can they play in fostering deeper relationships and communication within the OSHC sector?
16. How has progress been made in terms of affordability in the education system, and what steps can be taken to move from a market system to ensuring high-quality education?
17. In what ways can public funding be better utilized to address core services and build competency in the workforce, including increasing wages and qualifications?
18. What specific progress has been made in the OSHC sector, especially regarding parent fees and public funding, and how can these advancements be further expanded and improved?
19. How might the shift from a market system to a focus on non-profit spaces contribute to the overall quality and accessibility of education in Canada?
20. Based on the insights gained, what are the ongoing challenges in shaping and developing Canada's education system, and how can collaborative efforts at federal, provincial, and territorial levels contribute to overcoming these challenges?
21. In what ways can policymakers continue to focus on key pillars such as high-quality, inclusive education, affordability, and improving access to ensure a more equitable and accessible education system in Canada?
22. Based on the insights gained, what could we learn from the Canadian experience?
23. In what ways can policymakers continue to focus on key pillars areas for Out of School Hours Care in Australia?

Thank you

A Churchill Fellowship is a deeply personal endeavour. The pursuit of knowledge for the betterment of Australia requires immense commitment. I deeply appreciate being selected by The Northern Districts Education Centre (Sydney) under their sponsorship with the Churchill Trust to support leaders in developing best practice models for Out of School Hours Care (OSHC).

From the initial application and interview process to the journey itself, every aspect centres on a fellow's specific goals. This undertaking demands a significant investment of time—hundreds of hours spent on planning, preparation, booking, and travel arrangements. I am profoundly grateful to my family, friends, and colleagues for their unwavering support, love, guidance, and assistance throughout this journey.

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My heartfelt thanks also go to those I visited, who generously offered their time, insights, and help. There are too many people to thank individually but know that each of you is represented in the words and photos within these pages. Blessings to you all, and my deepest gratitude.





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Out of School Hours Care