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Malvern early learning service a finalist in national awards

An early learning facility in the Victorian suburb of Armadale, that has brought outdoor play-based learning back into the curriculum, has been named a finalist for the Advancing Practice Award in the 2012 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

The Sustainable Principles Program — operating at Malvern Early Learning & Child Care Centre (MELCCC) — is shifting away from the convenient and low-maintenance synthetic and plastic play and learning spaces which have gained popularity in recent years, towards sustainable and environmentally-friendly areas using natural materials.

MELCCC director, Mrs Hayley Clift, was instrumental in this shift and believes that changing behaviours requires long-term commitment.

“In our area, and areas across the nation, there are growing numbers of children living in apartments and townhouses with limited access to outdoor play areas and little exposure to natural elements,” Mrs Clift said.

“Our new play and learning area ignites the child’s natural sense of adventure, while teaching life-long lessons in environmental and sustainable behaviours.

“We have found that parents have been very supportive on the whole. Through education, we have been able to address any scepticism and concerns about their child’s safety — where some parents initially wanted to keep them wrapped in cotton wool. Our approach ensures that future generations will have the opportunity to embrace and enjoy the natural world.”

Children at MELCCC are involved in composting activities, water conservation, and growing herbs and vegetables to support the centre’s healthy-eating policy. They also ensure kitchen scraps help to feed the resident guinea pig.

The judges praised the nomination for wholly committing to the cause, and taking a long-term approach to improving the quality of education and care of the children.

The winner of the Advancing Practice Award — and Outstanding Educator Award — will be announced at a gala dinner during Early Childhood Australia’s National Conference, at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre on World Teachers’ Day, Friday 5 October 2012. The Advancing Practice winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant, provided by ME Bank.

HESTA is one of Australia’s largest super funds, with more than 750,000 members and \$20b in assets. It is chosen by more people working in health and community services than any other fund.

Visit hestaawards.com.au to book tickets for the event or learn more about the awards.

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