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Newcastle preschool committed to inclusion a finalist in national awards

A Newcastle preschool committed to fostering Indigenous culture, health and nutrition is a finalist in the 2014 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

The KU Windale Preschool in Newcastle is one of five finalists in the Excellence in Building Inclusion Award category.

Director, Kate Kinsella, said the team realised that some local parents were sceptical about the education system which meant their children were missing out on this formative part of their education.

“We reached out to the community and, from our very first contact with prospective families, sought out the family support services we thought they needed,” Ms Kinsella said.

“We’ve also developed relationships with case workers and Indigenous Elders to support the children.”

The Preschool employed an early childhood teacher of Indigenous background, to support the work of the service and to provide a valuable link to the local Indigenous community.

Staff also undertook further training to learn about local traditions.

“Another important initiative has been the creation of a community vegetable garden at the service to promote healthy food choices and further engage with families,” Ms Kinsella said.

“Cooking experiences are now a regular part of the curriculum and the children’s home-packed lunchboxes are becoming healthier as a result. We regularly invite parents into our learning spaces and have local artists who work with the children.

“All of this has contributed to our preschool exceeding the national quality standard ratings, which has given us an enormous sense of pride.”

Ms Kinsella and other interstate finalists will be flown to Melbourne to attend an awards dinner, where the winners will be announced during the Early Childhood Australia National Conference on Saturday 6 September 2014.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, generously provided by long-term HESTA awards supporter ME Bank.

The Excellence in Building Inclusion, and Advancing Pedagogy and Practice Award winners will each receive \$10,000 to further implement their program or initiative. The winner of the Outstanding Young Graduate Award will receive a \$10,000 development grant.

HESTA is the super fund for health and community services, with more than 785,000 members and \$28 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

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

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