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Royal Children's Hospital kindergarten educator wins national award

A Victorian graduate, who developed an early-learning program for children hospitalised with chronic health conditions, has won the Outstanding Young Graduate Award at the 2014 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

Sonya Nedovic — of The Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute, Melbourne — received the award for developing a high-quality educational program at the hospital, for children who would otherwise miss out on vital learning opportunities.

The Hospital's first Early Childhood Educator, Ms Nedovic said she developed a program with an individualised learning plan for each child, and fosters social interaction with other children and the natural environment.

"The hospital kindergarten program has been developed through consultation with clinical and allied health practitioners across the hospital, and with the children and their families," Ms Nedovic said.

"Each child's individual learning plan reflects their interests, strengths, skills, developmental needs, family backgrounds and insights provided by their usual community-based kindergarten."

Ms Nedovic said there were some initial challenges in developing a daily group-kindergarten session on the wards, as patients are often isolated from one another.

"Parents expressed a desire for their children to engage with others as much as possible. This can be difficult when some children are not able to leave their rooms for medical reasons and the children can be located across a number of different wards in what is a very large hospital," she said.

"We were able to overcome this by collaborating with clinical staff to find ways for a group program to run."

HESTA CEO, Anne-Marie Corboy, presented Ms Nedovic with the Outstanding Young Graduate Award during a dinner in Melbourne on Saturday 6 September 2014.

"It's our pleasure to recognise this highly-motivated young graduate, who has overcome numerous obstacles to ensure seriously-ill children can still access early learning opportunities," Ms Corboy said.

Ms Nedovic received a \$10,000 development grant, courtesy of long-term HESTA awards supporter, ME Bank.

"The prize money will allow us to organise a seminar to showcase the program and demonstrate innovative approaches that support children's learning when traditional learning spaces are not available," Ms Nedovic said.

The Advancing Pedagogy and Practice Award winner, KU James Cahill Preschool in NSW, and the Excellence in Building Inclusion Award winner, Barkly Mobile Preschool in the Northern Territory, each received \$10,000 to further implement their programs.

ME Bank CEO, Jamie McPhee, said, "We're proud to continue our support of the HESTA Awards program, recognising the tireless contribution of individuals and organisations in health and community services."

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.

To learn more about the 2014 winners and finalists visit hestaawards.com.au

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