

PO Box 615
Carlton South VIC 3053
hestaawards.com.au

 @HESTAECawards

Media release 20 August 2014

WA Early Childhood Centre a finalist in national awards

A team of educators who 'deinstitutionalised' a university-based early childhood centre, giving children greater freedom and choices in their daily routine, is a finalist in the 2014 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

Unicare Early Childhood Education — based at the University of Western Australia — is one of five finalists in the Advancing Pedagogy and Practice Award category.

Unicare has been recognised for transforming the learning environment of its centre over an eight-year period, to provide more opportunities for children to explore their physical environment and exercise more freedom and choice in their daily activities.

Unicare Executive Director, Karen Palmer, said her team wanted to deliver more than 'child care' and create a place where children learn and flourish — a home away from home.

"In the first instance, this involved replacing plastic toys with those made from natural materials, painting the walls in calm colours and selecting home-like furniture," Ms Palmer said.

During a makeover of the gardens, all partitioning fences were removed, giving a greater sense of space and freedom. The dining room was transformed into a restaurant with small tables and a child-sized bain-marie, so children can serve themselves. Lunch is available from 11am to 1pm and fruit bowls are in every room so children can eat when they feel hungry.

"We also established a nature program — The Attenborough Program — that involves experiments on wind velocity and rain formation, as well as planting, harvesting and even climbing trees," Ms Palmer said.

"We've introduced animals including chickens, birds and a piglet.

"Additional learning areas were established and aptly named — Columbus (science and discovery), Nightingale (literacy and numeracy), Colosseum (construction) and Monet (the arts) — with children able to move freely from one to another based on their interests.

Ms Palmer 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 Advancing Pedagogy and Practice, and Excellence in Building Inclusion 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.

MEDIA CONTACT: Luisa Saccotelli 0400 149 901 or Aileen Muldoon 0419 112 503.