

Australia's top early childhood professionals named

Australia's top early childhood education and care professionals have been recognised, with eight finalists announced for the 2016 HESTA Early Childhood Education and Care Awards.

The awards recognise professionals in the early childhood sector who demonstrate outstanding dedication to delivering the highest levels of practice improvement and development in the categories of Advancing Pedagogy and Practice, Outstanding Young Graduate and Excellence in Building Inclusion.

HESTA CEO, Debby Blakey, said the finalists were selected from a shortlist of outstanding individuals and organisations.

"We're honoured to be able to bring national recognition to the vitally important work early childhood educators do in developing and nurturing the next generation of Australians," Ms Blakey said.

"These finalists have proven themselves leaders in building inclusion and creating learning outcomes for the children in their care. The inspiring levels of excellence achieved by all our finalists provides significant broader economic and social benefits to the communities in which they operate."

Advancing Pedagogy and Practice Award

Bundjil Nest Project Team

Balnarring Pre-school

Balnarring, VIC

For collaborating with the local Indigenous community to develop the 'Bundjil Nest Project' and educational program for children which acknowledges and embeds the beliefs and values of the First Peoples into centre practice and learning, as well as the wider community.

Clarendon Children's Centre

South Melbourne, VIC

For implementing research projects and ongoing staff collaboration, focused on innovative ideas benefiting the centre's teaching approach and children's learning outcomes.

Kylie Keane

Forrest Out Of School Hours Care

Forrest, ACT

For introducing a new learning program to the centre aimed at fostering children's imaginations and encouraging them to play outdoors and engage with the natural environment.

Karen Winderlich

Halifax Street Children's Centre and Preschool

Modbury, SA

For transforming the internal environment and learning approach the centre creates for infants and toddlers, and actively challenging and encouraging others in the profession to view children in this age group as competent and strong learners.

Outstanding Young Graduate Award

Hannah Goldspink

Tumut Preschool Cooperative Society Limited

Tumut, NSW

For championing change and breaking down barriers when integrating the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) with the centre's curriculum.

Rachael Sydir

Explore and Develop – Penrith

South Penrith, NSW

For strengthening children and teachers understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and practices by facilitating the creation and implementation of a Reconciliation Action Plan.

Excellence in Building Inclusion Award

The Infants' Home

Ashfield, NSW

For researching and developing a Children's Charter which acknowledges the rights of children, this informed and influenced a range of inclusive practices which were implemented across the organisation to embed and promote inclusion.

Winyu Early Childhood Service Team

YWCA Canberra

Gungahlin, ACT

For consulting and collaborating with key community stakeholders to create a flexible curricula program which nurtures and supports its culturally diverse community.

All finalists will be flown to Darwin to attend an awards dinner, where the winners will be announced during the Early Childhood Australia National Conference on 7 October.

Longstanding Awards supporter **ME- the bank for you**, has generously provided a \$30,000 prize pool, to be shared among the three award categories.

Find out more about the HESTA Awards Program at hestaawards.com.au

Follow the Twitter conversation [@HESTAECawards](https://twitter.com/HESTAECawards)

Media contact

Sam Riley, HESTA Media Relations Manager – (03) 8660 1684