

22 September 2018

## Winners announced in national early childhood education & care awards

Early childhood educators from Tasmania and New South Wales took out top honours at the 2018 HESTA Early Childhood Education & Care Awards in Sydney last night.

South Hobart's Lady Gowrie Tasmania Integrated Child and Family Centre were recognised for their innovative activities program for inner city children designed to improve their physical health and wellbeing.

Mikarie Child Care Centre in the southern Sydney suburb of Kirrawee took out a top award for their inclusive, holistic education program encouraging acceptance and belonging for children with a disability.

Graduate Sharon Alexander from Sydney's Lilyfield Early Learning Centre was also recognised for designing a peer mentoring program to foster the professional development of fellow educators.

HESTA CEO, Debby Blakey said this year's winners showcase the vital role early childhood educators and carers play in enhancing children's learning and in improving community access to their services.

"The winners have shown outstanding leadership in developing curriculums that improve early childhood education by creating engaging learning environments that not only foster children's development but also promote inclusion and acceptance," Ms Blakey said.

"Through the awards, we are honoured to shine a spotlight on the vital work of early childhood educators and carers around Australia."

Proud Awards sponsor ME – the bank for you generously provided the \$30,000 prize pool, divided among the winners in the three award categories. Winners will receive \$10,000 in a ME Everyday Transaction account to use for further education or team development.

### The 2018 Award winners are:

#### **Advancing Pedagogy & Practice**

##### **Lady Gowrie Tasmania Integrated Child and Family Centre South Hobart, TAS**

Awarded for their evidence-based action research project which builds early childhood educators' capacity to create opportunities for children to flourish in the areas of physical health and wellbeing.

The project 'Physical Health and Wellbeing: innovative approaches in an inner-city community' focuses on developing children's gross motor skills by introducing activities that challenge children's physical and cognitive abilities.

Co-team leader, Bridget Blain said the project's design was determined after research from the Australian Early Development Census revealed children attending their service were at higher risk of being developmentally vulnerable in the areas of physical health and wellbeing.

"As a result of the project educators are now working more intensively to create physical environments that thrill and challenge children," Bridget said.

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A consultancy team made up of early childhood educators and lecturers were brought together to facilitate the action research project which is a collaboration between the Australian Early Development Census and Lady Gowrie Tasmania.

"A great outcome of the project is the increased focus on providing myriad opportunities for genuinely effortful activity within all of our children's learning spaces, both indoors and out," Bridget said.

Lady Gowrie plan to use the prize money to further explore he benefits of Action Research.

## **Building Inclusion**

### **Mikarie Child Care Centre Kirrawee, NSW**

Awarded for their early childhood education and care service and curriculum that caters to children with and without a disability in one setting.

The Mikarie Child Care Centre was established by The Sylvanvale Foundation following extensive research showing the local community lacked adequate child care services for children with disabilities.

Sylvanvale Chief Executive, Leanne Fretten, said Mikarie's inclusive approach means that children develop in a high-quality educational setting that encourages acceptance and belonging.

"Mikarie was set up to offer an environment which helps each child to participate in as many activities as possible regardless of their ability by providing additional assistance and modifying activities," Leanne said.

"The long day care centre is responsive to individual needs and respectful of diversity. It benefits all children and contributes to building the foundations of an inclusive society."

"Our service means that at an early age children learn that all people should be treated equally, they have the opportunity to build friendships with people with a disability and understand that we're all the same."

Receiving the award on behalf of Mikarie, Room Leader Cameron Evans said winning the award was the culmination of a lot of hard work and showcased the amazing professional skills of the Mikarie team.

"We do what we do every day to see the smiles on the children's faces and to help them reach a personal goal," Cameron said.

"It might seem something simple like crawling or walking but these are huge milestones that we get to share with the children and their families."

Leanne said they will use the prize money to train educators on strategies to enhance inclusion.

## **Outstanding Graduate**

### **Sharon Alexander Lilyfield Early Learning Centre Sydney, NSW**

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Awarded for designing a peer mentoring program for staff, which supports educators in setting professional development goals and encourages them to critically reflect on their work.

The mentoring program encourages educators to share their knowledge and experiences via staff meetings and peer mentoring sessions, where staff set individual goals and identify key focus areas for improvement.

"As educators, we need to collaborate and work together to achieve this common goal of making a difference in the lives of young children, as the first five years are most crucial," Sharon said.

"My Director and I wanted to create a space where educators can communicate freely, learn from each other's experiences, feel motivated and empowered to bring out the best in ourselves and in turn, our children."

Sharon said the most rewarding part of her work is seeing the positive influence she can have on children's development.

"I want to be an advocate for children and their learning because seeing the difference and impact I've been able to have on a child is so rewarding," Sharon said.

Sharon said that she will use the prize money to undertake further professional development and contribute a portion of the funds back to Lilyfield Early Learning Centre.

"The program is at an initial stage but we really want to see how we can take this further and hopefully benefit many more educators in our industry," Sharon said.

"What is so powerful about the program is that it's not just about mentoring as the person who is the mentor is also learning."

For further information and photos from the event please visit: [hestaawards.com.au](https://hestaawards.com.au)

Ends.