



Balnarring Preschool & Infant Welfare Association

Learning and Living with nature



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Gareeal Reflection Term 1 2022

We have had a wonderful start to the year in Gareeal and have spent the term focusing on developing Children's and family's sense of belonging within the preschool community and group in many different ways. Children's growth and development is dependent on a positive and strong sense of belonging. Belonging is about the children feeling secure, supported, accepted and included within the program. To achieve this, it is crucial that we build positive relationships with and between children as well as with the natural world.

The orientation process set us up for a smooth start and allowed us to get to know each of our families and spend time in small groups with the children getting to know them and their interests. This allowed us to then slowly build up a rapport with the children as we supported them in small numbers to transition and adjust to the programs. Your support and enthusiasm for the program and the team has been instrumental in helping the children transition into kinder life this term, at both the centre and bush. We appreciate your willingness to help, join in, ask questions and share information with us.

We have been using Boardmaker to help children understand the daily schedule and reduce concerns about what to expect and what is happening at kinder. Boardmaker is a program that provides us with visual cues (pictures). As a schedule, it helps all children understand the routines, transitions and other important tasks like toileting and hand washing at kinder. We have a schedule we put up each session to show them what is happening at kinder that day and we discuss that when it is finished, their grown up will collect them. We have also introduced different songs, rhymes and music to help children transition in the program as well as our listening rules for mat times. Over the term the children have mastered the pictures and are becoming increasingly confident helping me, joining in the transitions and sharing their understanding at group times when we run through the schedule.



We have certainly loved getting to know your bubups (children) over the term and we have enjoyed spending time and playing with them on the biik (land). As the term has progressed, we can see how our relationships with them have flourished and have observed their confidence grow. They are reciprocating and communicating with us in play and interactions and even beginning to initiate interactions with us now. They will often seek us out to not only play and to ask for support when needed but to share their moments of success and achievements with us. They are becoming more open to and aware of interactions with peers



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which is important to their development of empathy for others and essential to their social skill development. Next term we will begin to extend our explicit teaching of friendship skills so all children can begin to understand what makes a good friend.

You may have noticed that we often have many of the same / similar activities out at kinder each week. This is important, particularly as children are developing their sense of belonging. It allows them to feel secure, to practice things over and over, develop skills and to extend their learning as it is familiar and predictable. We often tweak things slightly to encourage interests, engagement, exploration of new spaces or to extend children. But the repetition and familiarity in activities is important. This term Gareeal have loved sensory play experiences like water and sand play as well as the different finger-painting textures we have explored (smooth, thick, lumpy). These process focused (it doesn't matter what happens or how it looks at the end) activities allow all children to succeed and encourage children to take risks, try new things, connect, share and laugh with others, learn about textures and feelings and develop our vocabulary as we learn new words.



We have enjoyed puzzles, craft and cutting too. We have supported children's interests and their cutting skills at playdough and offered snipping opportunities with different materials like paper and herbs. We spent lots of lovely moments alongside children this term in these activities, modelling, copying and yarning with them to get to know them and build our relationships and connections together and the children's skills.



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We have encouraged children to connect with peers at many activities, sometimes through the number of seats we have available or the activity itself. Some great interactions between peers were supported at kinder this term at the chariot and seesaw as it has been a hit with the children and they have had to find a friend ask them to play and work together. We have also really loved the jumping pillow. As it is such a popular activity the children became more aware of peers and how to consider their safety and had to think of others whilst playing fairly and taking turns.



Other activities we have enjoyed that allowed us to build our relationships this term were during imaginative play such as cooking, dress ups / super heroes, construction workers and caring for the babies. We also build our understanding of the world as we engage in imaginary play which allowed us to support children's language and identity, communication and encourage interactions with others.



The children's relationship with the biik and natural world is also developing as they spend time at bush camp and outside at kinder. We feel safe and have learnt to stay together in the boundaries at bush camp. As our sense of belonging has increased over the term in turn our confidence to explore within the boundaries has developed. We have found new spaces and seen new possibilities for play with and in nature. We have supported children to connect, be curious, enjoy and look closely at nature and all its treasures. We have seen them grow



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more conscious and curious of plants and animals and begin to understand how precious these are. They are enjoying learning about Boon Wurrung culture and other First Peoples culture through songs, stories and movement. Bundjil and Waang have been a big hit and are helping us to understand that all of nature is important even the small things. Ants have become a weekly hot topic! The children are learning how to share the space with these tiny yet marvellous creatures. They have spent hours following, thinking deeply and wondering, showing compassion, studying and learning to coexist with ants at bush camp. We love singing on Country and learning about the trees and animals that we have noticed. The banksia seeds from Old Man Banksia trees and listening, watching, imitating the birds, especially yang gurrk (wattle bird) who loves the nectar on the banksia flowers. We have explored burrows, collected nature's treasures, begun to look closely at nature and see it differently over the term showing our growing sense of belonging



The chickens have also helped children deepen their relationship with nature as they learn to care for and interact thoughtfully and empathetically with them.

Your enthusiasm in Gareeal for joining in and being open to kinder events has also really supported and helped to build your child's sense of belonging. We have loved celebrating with you this term and having you join us for some special events. It was a great night at our kinder welcome evening in February and I hope you enjoyed learning about First Peoples



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culture that night. It was also wonderful spending time with you all to celebrate Harmony Day at kinder recently. The children were so excited to share the kinder with you and it was beneficial for them to have you join us and join in some of their favourite songs and activities. It was also a great opportunity to put together our group display for our family photos. I'm looking forward to putting the recipe book together for the 3-year-old families over the holidays and hope this helps to build children's identity and sense of belonging as you use it at home together.



Harmony Day - celebrating cultural diversity and recognising that we all belong. We had fun listening to a story, using clap sticks and singing our Boon Wurrung song. Today we built our confidence and sense of belonging as our families created our group display with us and we shared our kinder with them. Fostering a sense of community and belonging allows children to feel respected and encourages respect for others and difference.

Equally, we have appreciated your time and support within our bush kinder sessions, which wouldn't run without your support. We are looking forward to having you play and stay at the kinder in Term 2 as well. I will be placing a blank term roster for kinder Play and Stay on the whiteboard out the front of kinder on our first Monday back. The bush kinder will also be up and the remainder of Term 2 will need to be filled for the program to run. We ask families commit to once a term and have decided to let families sign up to a day that suits them.



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This term our favourite songs have been:

- The Boon Wurrung song
- She-oak tree song
- See the sleeping animals
- Open shut them / opposite open shut them
- One hoping finger
- BBBB Bananas



Feel free to come on in 15 mins earlier to join in the end of the session songs if you wish. We only ask that you sanitize your hands and enter before we have started our mat time so that it doesn't distract the children.

I hope you have enjoyed the short texts I have sent with a few key things we have done after some sessions towards the end of the term. I do keep a planning and reflection book which you are welcome to look through to see what we have been doing as well. I will be sending you all our reflection sheet each week via text going forward which will give you an idea of what we have done and also help you initiate conversations with your child about kinder. Be mindful of big open-ended questions like "what did you do today?" as these are daunting and require a lot of complex executive functioning skills for children to answer. To support children to build the skills to reflect on their day, you can try to offer ideas to help them think about what they did. For instance, "Jill read the hungry caterpillar book today, or I saw some dinosaurs in the sandpit today or did you have a turn of the water pump or feed the chickens". We also often focus on who our children play with and ask, "who did you play with today?". Again, children may not be able to answer this and will have spent time with many children in various activities. I intend to send home a group photo collage to help children become more familiar with other children in their group at the start of term 2. Put it on your fridge or on a wall somewhere they can grab it easily.

I'm looking forward to seeing you all in Term 2. Have a safe and happy break.

THANKS, JILL 😊



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