

Welcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to kindergarten

Transcript of video

This video is available from <http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/26492.html>

Brad Jarro:

Bidjara and Ghungalou man; Member, QSA
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education committee

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers are advised that this video may contain names, images or voices of people who have died.

This resource looks at ways to welcome Aboriginal children and Torres Strait Islander children and their families to kindergarten.

Lynne Ireland:

Director / teacher, Boopa Werem Kindergarten

Some of the things that we do to open the doors to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and make them feel welcome: we have an acknowledgement of traditional owners at our entrance, we have the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags that we display... We have a lot of resources that we use that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture — puzzles, books, dress up clothes, posters and story books that we use. It's really important, I think, for children to see their culture reflected in the place that they come to kindy. I think it makes them feel a greater sense of belonging to the service for the parents and the children.

Marcia Mitchell:

Torres Strait Islander (Boigu Island), Parent

I've continued to bring my children here at Boopa Werem for the last 21 years because the children have really enjoyed the staff, they've made us feel comfortable, the children learning their traditional culture — the Island dancing and the singing — has made it fun for the children and they've really looked up and respected the teachers for that. I think that the culture is very valued in this kindergarten because we have the flags showing when you walk in. You have the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artefacts scattered around the room.

Lynne Ireland:

We also try to have a very "open-door" policy. Parents and families are welcome, other people from the community are welcome and we don't put a lot of restrictions on when people can come. If people come in to enrol their child, even if it's in the middle of a session, we try to accommodate that as much as possible and not put up barriers to people coming in and feeling welcome to come in. And the same thing with other community groups, we try as often as we can to accommodate that and be welcoming of anybody who needs our help or has something to offer us really.

I think it's really important for centres to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. You need their input and their understanding and the rapport that they have with families. For us, at this kindergarten, the majority of our staff are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, so that makes a huge difference, because they already have so many connections within the community that they

really help the non-Indigenous staff connect with community that way and provide really valuable input.

Marcia Mitchell:

Seeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members working here when you first walk in the door relaxes you straight away. It makes you feel comfortable. You're not shame — like a lot of us blackfellows get embarrassed or shame and don't know how to speak to non-Indigenous people without being embarrassed. But you feel you slot right in, you feel comfortable and there's a sense of family, you know, being around our own people.

Lynne Ireland:

If you don't have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff, I think you would really need to look at your community and find someone who's willing to come in to the centre, to provide you with that kind of input. Whether it's through an Elders group or even a health service — it could be in any capacity — but I think it really makes a difference that you make those links.

Jane Harris:

Torres Strait Islander
(Darnley Island),
Kindergarten assistant

The most important thing about what I do here is welcoming the children, supporting the parents, and they all — they just feel great. And getting that positive feedback from the parents, you feel like you're doing the right thing.