ISSUE 110

# JIGSAW

THE MAGAZINE OF FAMILY DAY CARE AUSTRALIA



## 2026 Excellence in Family Day Care Awards Launch

## From Monitoring to Mentoring

## Playdough? Preschool? ...or a pile of sticks

Meet the Team * Family Day Care Week Wrap Up * Watching a Park Come to Life * Whitsundays Shire Little Locals Day Out * Dandenong 50th Birthday Celebration * Business Insights * Capability Trial * Member Spotlight * Dollars and Sense * Be You * Red Nose * Scholastic Storytime * Fun with FDCA



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

2026 EARLY LEARNING MATTERS WEEK

Learning through play

3–9 AUGUST 2026

# EARLY LEARNING MATTERS FOR EVERYONE

We invite you to join us for 2026 Early Learning Matters Week—acknowledging the importance of high-quality early learning in the lives of young children, their families and communities.

## Eight ways to be part of Early Learning Matters Week in 2026

1. **PLAY**
   Be in the moment and enable play.
2. **SHARE DOCUMENTATION OF CHILDREN'S LEARNING**
   Share documentation and stories that describe children's learning through play.
3. **HOST A PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATION**
   Bring your team together to reflect on high-quality practice and children's safety, rights and best interests.
4. **SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA**
   Post stories or reflections using **#EarlyLearningMatters**.
5. **HIGHLIGHT CHILDREN'S VOICES**
   Invite children to share their learning.
6. **OPEN YOUR DOORS TO FAMILIES**
   Offer a brief visit or information session about your program.
7. **HOST A MORNING TEA**
   Invite families, community members or local leaders to celebrate early learning.
8. **INVITE A LOCAL MP OR COUNCILLOR**
   Build connections with your local MPs and local government representatives through an invitation to visit your early childhood setting to see high-quality early learning in practice.

**We can't wait to hear about how you plan to come together to celebrate Early Learning Matters Week**

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ISSUE 109

JiGSAW

Published by Family Day Care Australia Limited (FDCA)
PO Box 571 Gosford NSW 2250
ABN: 93 094 436 021
**Telephone:** 1800 658 699
**Insurance and Membership Services:** 1800 658 699
**Email:** enquiries@fdca.com.au
**Web:** www.familydaycareaustralia.com.au
**Editor:** Hannah Kennedy
**Advertising:** FDCA Marketing
**Printer:** Kwik Kopy Gosford
ISSN 13263528

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# A word from the CEO

Welcome to Edition 110 of JiGSAW Magazine. As we reach the midpoint of 2026, it is hard to believe how quickly the year has passed. Across the family day care sector, change continues to be a constant, with significant reforms and evolving expectations requiring services and educators to adapt while continuing to deliver the high-quality care and education families rely upon every day.

This evolving landscape was front of mind as FDCA developed its Strategic Plan 2026–2029. Shaped by extensive member consultation and informed by a strong evidence base, the plan reflects both the opportunities and challenges facing our sector. It provides a clear roadmap for the years ahead and reinforces our commitment to supporting and advocating for family day care across Australia.

It is my pleasure to share a summary of the Strategic Plan with you on page 13.

This edition features a range of inspiring member contributions from across Australia.

Lizzie Stanger reflects on the development of a new community playground in Kununurra and the joy of experiencing the project through children's eyes on pages 7 and 8, while on page 9-11, Susanna Haberle explores the importance of honouring childhood and embracing learning beyond appearances with Playdough? Preschool? Or a pile of sticks?

We also celebrate achievements from across the family day care community, including a successful community event hosted by Whitsundays Shire Family Day Care and the remarkable milestone of 50 years of service achieved by Dandenong Community Family Day Care Service. Congratulations to everyone involved.

This edition also includes a wrap-up of National Family Day Care Week and the launch of the 2026 Excellence in Family Day Care Awards. Reviewing award nominations remains one of the highlights of my year, providing a powerful reminder of the dedication, passion and professionalism that exists throughout our sector. You can find important information about the Awards on pages 23 - 24.

You can expect to see all our JiGSAW regulars back for this edition, including segments like Meet the Team, Business Insights, Scholastic Storytime and an informative Dollars and Sense inclusion that we hope will be helpful as we fast approach June 30th and tax time - this can be found on pages 27 and 28.

There is a raft of other inclusions such as Member Spotlight, looking inside the family day care of Anna Haley on the Central Coast of NSW. A look at the Family Day Care Capability Trial on pages 21 and 22, an article by Jo Georgiou on her journey from educator to Coordinator and much more.

Thank you to all the contributors who have made this edition possible. Happy reading!

**Andrew Paterson**
**Chief Executive Officer**
**Family Day Care Australia**

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY:
We at Family Day Care Australia acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, the Darkinjung People, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuous connection to Country, and celebrate their traditions and living cultures.




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**THANK YOU**

A special thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition of JiGSAW.

# Meet the FDCA Team

**Get to know the people behind the scenes at FDCA. In this section, we'll introduce the dedicated team members whose passion, experience and drive, work for you every day!**



**Lydia**

**Member Liaison Officer**

**How long have you been with FDCA?**
I started in June 2023

**What's does your role involve?**
At FDCA my role involves being the point of contact for members, Primarily through phone communication. I assist with membership and insurance enquiries and ensure members feel supported and valued.

**Tell us about your previous roles within or outside of FDCA**
Prior to joining FDCA, I worked in sales at Beacon Lighting, where I gained experience in customer service.

**What's one of your favourite parts of your role?**
The best part of my role is being able to connect with educators and services to provide support and help them feel valued and heard.

**What do you like to do when you're not working?**
When I am not working, I am usually studying for university or making the most of my downtime catching up with family and friends.

**What's your favourite food?**
Chilli prawn pasta

**What's your favourite book?**
Anything by Jessa Hastings

**What's your favourite band/singer?**
Noah Kahan

**What's your favourite movie?**
Pitch Perfect

**What's your favourite activity?**
Reading

**What's your favourite podcast?**
Any true crime podcast

**How long have you been withFDCA?**
I joined in February 2012

**What's does your role involve?**
My roles see me coordinating a wide range of marketing, communications and event-based tasks. I also manage the coordination of our national digital marketing campaigns on Meta and Google Ads that promote family day care as a care option of choice for families and career opportunity for potential educators. My role also sees me and the team distribute a wide range of communications material to our members.

**Tell us about your previous roles within or outside of FDCA**
Before joining FDCA I cut my teeth in marketing, communications and events at Macquarie University at the Macquarie Graduate School of Management and then at Fairfax Media, as part of the Domain property team.

**What's one of your favourite parts of your role?**
I get to work with a large number of members each year. Whether it be via events such as the FDCA Conference, online events or the Excellence in Family Day Care Awards, I enjoy getting to meet and engage with so many amazing educators and service staff.

**What do you like to do when you're not working?**
Getting outdoors with my family, whether it be going on a bushwalk or heading to the beach.

**What's your favourite food?**
I can't decide between a Thai curry or a good pepperoni pizza.

**What's your favourite book?**
All three books in the 'Remembrance of Earth's Past' trilogy.

**What's your favourite band/singer?**
311, Foo Fighters and Millencolin

**What's your favourite movie?**
Fight Club

**What's your favourite activity?**
I enjoy playing golf and getting outdoors

**What's your favourite podcast?**
As a big fan of most sports and really enjoy the Howie Games podcast.



**Matt**

**Marketing and Events Manager**

# 2026 NATIONAL FAMILY DAY CARE WEEK WRAP UP

National Family Day Care Week is one of the most important events on the family day care calendar, spreading awareness of the vital role family day care educators, coordinators and services play in the development and wellbeing of 68,500 Australian children.

From May 4 - 10, across the country educators and services hosted picnics, morning tea and other celebrations in honour of National Family Day Care Week, highlighting the wonderful opportunities that family day care offers so many within our community each day.

Each year Family Day Care Australia hosts an event, in a new location across Australia. This year we celebrated National Family Day Care Week at the incredible Mukanthi Nature Play Space in Morialta Conservation Park in South Australia, in partnership with the Department for Education South Australia.

Nature Play SA helped to bring the picnic together with a huge array of nature based fun including, loose parts play, nature potions, small worlds village, tinkering, story time with puppets, nature mandalas and much more.

We were lucky to be joined at the picnic by Senator Marielle Smith who had this to say, "I really deeply believe in the power of early education and care, that quality care delivered in a loving, supportive and inclusive space. Family day care provides a really important part of that care landscape in Australia."

A huge thank you to all the educators and services who celebrated National Family Day Care week this year – the more picnics that we have during the week long celebration, the better chance we have of raising the awareness of family day care.










# Watching a Park Come to Life:

## Community, Curiosity and the Magic of Family Day Care

Written by Elizabeth Stanger

For a long time, the park near our family day care was closed behind temporary fencing. What had once been a familiar play space, was suddenly full of movement, machines and activity. Instead of disappointment, the children were fascinated. Each excursion became an opportunity to stop, observe and wonder about what was happening on the other side of the fence.

Large diggers arrived first, followed by trucks carrying soil, materials and exciting new equipment. The children quickly became experts at spotting the different machines and learning their names. Conversations naturally flowed as we watched the workers and the machines in action.

"That one's a bobcat," one child announced proudly after learning the name.

"That is an excavator, it's digging a really big hole!" another exclaimed, watching the scoop lift and tip soil into a pile.



The children closely observed how the machines moved — how the arms lifted, how the buckets scooped, and how the wheels turned. They compared sizes, noticed patterns in the work and wondered what the finished park might look like. These everyday observations became rich moments of inquiry, with children asking questions, sharing ideas and building new understandings together. With the most incredible ability to notice each different machine, what it could do, and what it was called.

Curiosity led us to explore the project map for the park redevelopment. Together we studied the plan and talked about the different equipment that would be installed. The children pointed to the pictures and tried to match what they could see on the map with what they could observe behind the fence. This simple act of exploring the map sparked conversations about space, planning and change, demonstrating how children make meaning when given the time and space to investigate the world around them.

For months the park continued to evolve. The children watched patiently as the space slowly took shape. Continuously captivated to take time to watch what was going on.

Then the day finally came when the fence came down and the new park opened. What had once been a construction site became a vibrant community space at the heart of our town. We visited many times each week, exploring every corner of the park and noticing the fine details. The children moved through the space with excitement and familiarity, discovering new equipment, pathways and quiet places to play.



Then one morning, another exciting chapter began.

When we arrived at the park on one of our regular excursions, a Ute and trailer pulled onto the grass beside the playground. A team stepped out carrying shovels, wheelbarrows and trays of plants. The children watched with curiosity as the group prepared to start planting.

Before long, one of the team members from Nature Play Solutions walked over and warmly invited us to help.

With plenty of shovels to share, the children eagerly joined in. As we began digging into the soil, the children quickly discovered something very exciting hidden beneath the mulch — worms.

Lots and lots of worms.

"They're wriggly and tickly!" laughed one child, holding their hands out carefully as a worm moved across their palm.



Another child peered closely into the soil and asked, "Do worms have eyes?"

A third child compared two worms and thoughtfully suggested, "This one's bigger… maybe it's the mum."

These moments sparked curiosity and early scientific thinking as the children compared worms, counted them and discussed what they might mean for the soil. One child confidently shared, "Worms mean the soil is healthy."

Over the next two weeks, the Nature Play team continued planting throughout the park — and the children were determined not to miss a moment of it. Each morning, they asked the same eager question:

"Can we go back to the park?"

At their request, we returned again and again. With each visit, the children became more confident in their interactions. They greeted the Nature Play team like old friends, approached them independently to ask questions and proudly demonstrated the skills they had learned.

"I know how to dig the hole now," one child said confidently while showing a younger child where to place the shovel.

The children also began meeting other community members who stopped by the park. New friendships formed easily, and familiar faces were greeted with enthusiasm. The atmosphere created by the Nature Play team was truly special. Every child was welcomed warmly, every question was valued and the team made an effort to learn and use each child's name.

In this environment, the children felt seen, capable and included in a real community project. Their ideas, questions and contributions mattered, and this sense of belonging strengthened their confidence and connection to the world around them.

During this special time, we were also fortunate to have our Educational Support Officer visit and spend a morning with us at the park. It was a joy to share the experience together — meeting our new friends, observing the children's growing confidence and witnessing the depth of learning unfolding in such a natural way.

Moments like this highlight the unique strengths of family day care. With small group sizes, flexible routines and strong relationships. As an educator it was a magical journey to facilitate following the children's interests and creating meaningful connections between learning, place and community. Learning was responsive, collaborative and deeply grounded in the children's lived experiences.

Now when we visit the park, the children proudly point to different areas and say, "We helped with this." It is a place they have watched grow, cared for and contributed to.

They notice how the plants are growing, revisit the places where they planted and remember the people they met along the way. Recently, one child's grandparent visited the park, and the child excitedly showed them the plants they had helped plant, explaining how they were growing. The children also remind other park visitors to tread carefully around the plants, proudly taking on the role of caretakers for the space.

The park is no longer just somewhere to play. It has become part of their story — a living reminder of what can happen when children are welcomed as active participants in their community.



Experiences like this capture the true magic of family day care: learning that unfolds over time, guided by children's curiosity, strengthened through relationships and deeply connected to place.

It has been a truly magical experience and one we have all been incredibly proud to be part of. I feel confident the children will carry these memories with them for years to come.



# Playdough? Preschool? or a pile of sticks?

Written by Susanna Haberle

**There is often a quiet moment, before the children arrive, when I stand in the quietness of my family day care space, looking around whilst I consider the day ahead.**

The wobbly arrangement of loose nuts and bolts; precariously balancing on the upended stack of Giant Jenga blocks, poking out below the table, still covered with the croqueted blanket; a stockpile that I was asked to "Pweese leave till tomorrow, to make bigger". The corner cupboard displaying 'playdough blobs' to the uneducated, but to us, we know the dough colours were mixed with much consideration and placed into individual tubs and the teaspoons and river rocks, in the old shoe box alongside were purposely selected to be used…for what? Who knows, it wasn't decided yet, and the basket of sparkling quartz pieces of gravel, and sticks collected from yesterday's walk — all just waiting.

It's in these moments I often smile at the sight of what others may perceive as a 'dishevelled, mess', yet I know is engaging, unfettered, child lead, open-ended and the beginning/continuation of so much more. It's about now, whilst pondering all the 'what-ifs' and 'wow' moments that are yet to come, a question that gets tossed about in early years conversations comes to mind.. *Will my child be ready for preschool?*

…And I think to myself — ready for preschool, or ready for life?

Because here, in this small and intentional space, learning does not always look like worksheets or structured lessons. Sometimes it looks like a child kneading playdough with complete concentration. Sometimes it looks like a group of mixed-age children negotiating the rules of an imaginary shop, where tractors are loading the pizzas into the back of utes. And sometimes — perhaps most powerfully it looks like a pile of sticks roughly grouped in the yard, transformed into a fairy bridge, a cubby frame, or a carefully constructed stockyard boundary, with meters of rope knotted, woven and positioned purposefully to hold back the (imaginary) cows, as the children watch and work with deep seriousness.

From the outside, all this may appear simple. But from where I stand, it is profound!

When a child presses their fingers into playdough, they are not merely playing. They are strengthening the small muscles that will one day hold a pencil with ease. They are experimenting with cause and effect, exploring texture and resistance. They are calming their nervous system through rhythmic

movement. They are creating something from nothing — and in doing so, building confidence in their own capability.

When a child carries armfuls of sticks across the yard, carefully selecting the "perfect one," they are engaging in engineering, mathematics, collaboration, and creative thinking. They are negotiating space, practising persistence when structures fall, learning balance and stability through trial and error. They are immersed in problem-solving that is real, tangible, and deeply meaningful to them.

When they secure lengths of rope to branches, upended logs and witches' hats, then 'round- up' the cows, latching the gate closed behind them, high fiving one another on their masterful stock handling and fencing, farm skills They are imitating real-world practices, integrating observed community knowledge into play. They are practicing 'real life' Gross motor development, Emotional regulation and confidence. Completing a shared task and celebrating success builds self-belief and pride…Most importantly, it shows children who feel secure enough to take initiative, collaborate, and immerse themselves in purposeful, meaningful play. This is not just farm play — it is competence, connection, and capability in action. And one of the beauties of family day care!

In my home-based setting, learning is not rushed or segmented into rigid time slots. It unfolds through rhythm. We bake bread and count





scoops of flour. We hold High Teas, inviting and hosting guests, using real cups and saucers. We tend the garden and note the seasons shifting. We gather for story time, where imagination stretches beyond the walls of our room. We practise kindness when a friend feels sad. We practise patience when we wait our turn. We practise resilience when our tower tumbles to the ground.

In these moments, I am not standing at the front of a classroom of children seated, cross legged, delivering instruction. I am observing. I am listening. I am guiding- gently, when needed. I am protecting the whimsical, formative, sacred space of **childhood**.

Families (in the beginning) sometimes ask me about 'preschool readiness'. I understand the question and understand how the world can make early academics feel urgent. But what I see each day, in my family day care reassures me deeply.

I see children developing language as they negotiate roles in imaginative play.

I see early literacy emerging as they narrate stories about their stick houses.

I see mathematical thinking in the careful division of playdough pieces teetering on the paddle pop stick, balancing on the end of their friends finger.

I see scientific inquiry in the way they hypothesise, ponder, discuss, test and retest to find which sticks float and which sink.





I see emotional intelligence growing when they comfort a younger child, asking 'Are you OK? AND knowing how to offer empathy by way of a response to their friends reply. I see imagination when children choose to lay on the grass, facing the clouds, asking one another what they can see, laughing as they describe what they think. And perhaps most importantly, I see children who feel safe and considered significant.

In a small group, relationships are consistent and secure. Each child is known — not just by name, but by disposition, by preference, by the subtle cues that signal tiredness, excitement or uncertainty. When children feel genuinely seen, heard and understood, their confidence blossoms. They are willing to try new challenges. They trust that mistakes are safe-still part of the process, not the end. They know that they belong.

Mixed-age learning is one of the quiet treasures of my family day care. The younger ones watch

# Playdough? Preschool? or a pile of sticks?

and imitate; the older ones lead and nurture. A four-year-old might show a two-year-old how to roll playdough into a "snake." A toddler might see carefully how to balance a longer stick across two shorter ones. Leadership and empathy grow naturally, without formal lessons. Family day care mirrors family life — collaborative, honestly, beautifully, individual.

There is also space here for stillness. Not every moment must be filled with structured activity. Sometimes a child will sit quietly, turning a pinecone over in their hands. Sometimes they lay, eyes closed listening to the birds in the trees, or stay seated watching a snail slowly move on a leaf. These are not empty moments; they are essential. In stillness, imagination breathes. In boredom, creativity awakens. In calm, the nervous system regulates and restores.

I believe deeply that early childhood is not preparation for something else — it is valuable in itself. When we rush children toward academic milestones too quickly, we risk overlooking the foundations that truly sustain lifelong learning: curiosity, resilience, empathy, imagination, and a strong sense of self.

Playdough, preschool, or a pile of sticks? For me, it is not an either/or question. It is understanding that the pile of sticks may be the most powerful preparation of all. Because when children can collaborate to build something from scattered pieces, when they can persist through frustration, when they can articulate their ideas and listen to others, when they can imagine possibilities beyond what is placed in front of them — they are more than ready for preschool. They are ready for the world!

As a family day care educator, my role is not to accelerate childhood, but to honour it. To create an



environment where natural materials invite creativity, where daily rhythms provide security, where kindness is discovered and practised, and where individuality is understood, accepted AND celebrated. To partner with families in protecting this precious period of growth and development.

Each afternoon, as children are collected and stories of the day are shared — of the shop that sold "mud muffins," the "bbq chicken pizza Zanna ordered but was too spicy and she pretended to cough", of the stick bridge that finally held strong, of the playdough birthday cake with different coloured and sized pencils for candles — I see pride in their eyes. They know what they have done matters. And I know that within these simple experiences, something far greater is unfolding -Confidence. Capability. Compassion, and Connection.

So, when I look at our sometimes jumbled, bitsy, family day care space— the playdough and 'extras' sitting, the basket of sticks waiting by the door, the timber offcuts lined up ready to hold the overflow of the blue metal — I do not see "just play." I see the foundations, belonging, being, becoming. I am reminded, gently and appreciatively, that sometimes the richest learning begins not with a formal lesson, but with a child, a handful of playdough… and a pile of sticks.


















# Little Locals Day Out

Written by Amanda Brett









Whitsunday Shire Family Day Care recently hosted a vibrant and highly successful community event, *Little Locals' Day Out*, bringing together children, families and a wide range of local support services in one welcoming space.

The three-hour morning event was completely free for families and attracted more than 100 local families, creating a wonderful atmosphere filled with laughter, connection and community spirit.

The purpose of Little Locals' Day Out was not only to create a fun and engaging experience for children but also to raise awareness of the many local programs and services available to families in our region. We know that families are often unaware of the support that is right here in our community, so this event was designed to bring those services together in one place where families could meet them in a relaxed and friendly environment.

A wide range of local businesses and community services generously participated in the event. Families had the opportunity to speak with professionals in speech therapy, explore the benefits of inclusion support and connect with the Early Childhood Family Support Program. First Five Forever was also there sharing valuable information about early literacy and learning, while first aid representatives helped families better understand the importance of safety and emergency knowledge for young children with an interactive demonstration.

Children were equally excited by the many hands-on experiences available throughout the morning. A local wildlife interactive experience gave children the chance to learn about animals in a fun and engaging way, while the Ready Set Dance program and a local athletics program encouraged movement, confidence and physical activity. Cultural experiences added another meaningful element to the day, helping children explore diversity and learn about different traditions in an enjoyable and inclusive way.

Of course, no children's event would be complete without a little magic. Face painting was incredibly popular, along with the much-loved balloon lady and our very own local mermaid was a highlight for many children. Seeing the excitement on the children's faces as they participated in activities, met new friends and explored new experiences truly captured the heart of what Little Locals' Day Out was all about.

The event also gave Whitsunday Shire Family Day Care the opportunity to promote our service and introduce families to our new community toy library. Many families were excited to learn more about how the toy library works and how it can support children's learning and development at home. It was also a great opportunity for families who may be considering family day care to connect with our team and learn more about the personalised care and learning environments we offer.

Little Locals' Day Out was a wonderful reminder of how powerful community connection can be. Bringing local support programs, businesses, educators and families together in one space created a morning that was not only fun but also meaningful and informative. With such a positive response from the community, we are excited to continue growing this event in the future and strengthening the connections that support our local children and families every day.

# FDCA 2026–2029 **STRATEGIC PLAN:**

## Strengthening the Future of Family Day Care




FDCA is pleased to release our 2026–2029 Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan sets FDCA's direction for the years ahead and responds directly to the evidence, insights and challenges identified through a comprehensive strategic planning process.

Importantly, the Strategic Plan has been developed during a period of significant change across the early childhood education and care landscape. The sector continues to operate in an increasingly complex and challenging environment.

### Informed by Evidence, Guided by Members

In developing the Strategic Plan, FDCA drew on a broad evidence base including member consultation, sector and policy analysis, awareness and perception research, membership data and strategic planning workshops.

Importantly, the voice and experience of members were central to the process. Feedback consistently highlighted the increasing pressures facing the sector, including administrative burden, workforce and viability challenges, and the need for stronger recognition of family day care's unique role within the early childhood education and care (ECEC) landscape.

The Strategic Plan builds on the strong foundations of the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan while recognising that the structural, policy and regulatory environment is dynamic and rapidly evolving. It reflects both the challenges currently facing the sector and the opportunities to strengthen family day care's long-term sustainability, visibility and value within Australia's ECEC system.

### Looking Forward

The 2026-2029 Strategic Plan outlines a refined Vision and Mission that establishes clear priorities, goals and objectives for FDCA and the sector.

The years ahead will be critical. However, with the right strategic focus, improved alignment of policy and funding settings, and continued collaboration across the sector, family day care can strengthen its position as a valued, visible and viable option of choice for children, families and sector professionals across Australia.

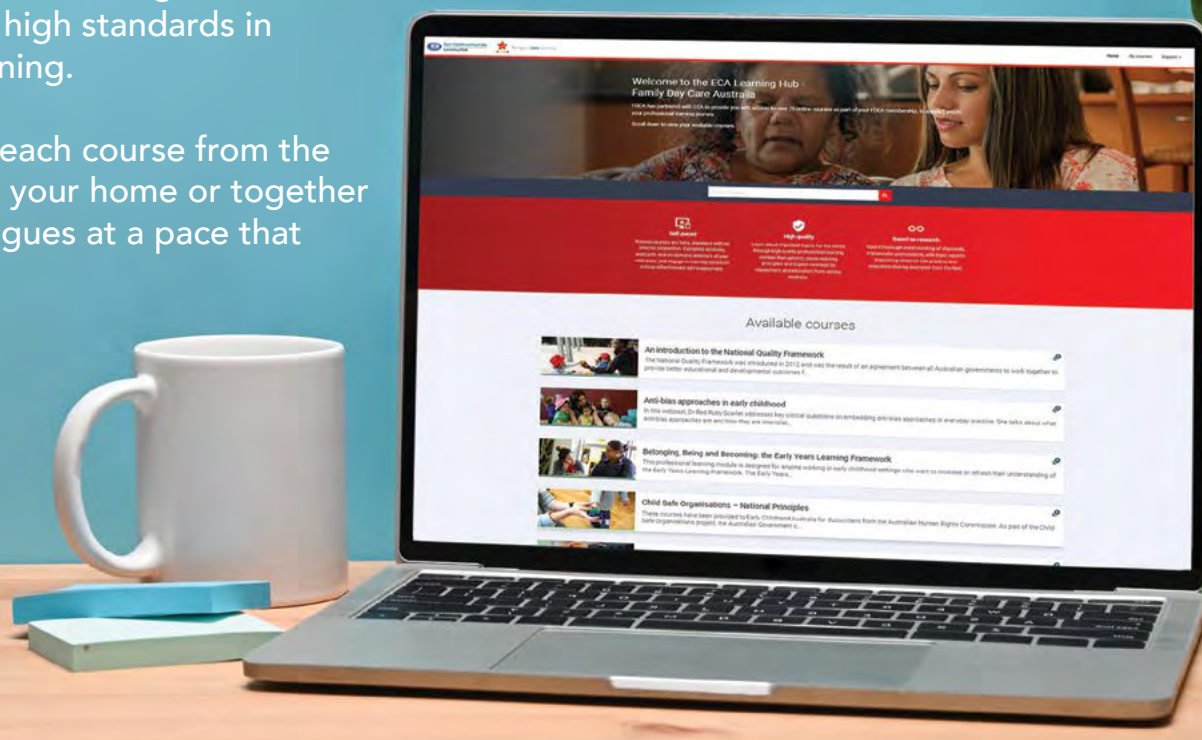
While the challenges are significant, they also reinforce the critical importance of member informed national leadership and a clear strategic direction for the future of family day care.

To view a copy of the FDCA 2026-2029 Strategic Plan, click here.

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# FROM MONITORING TO MENTORING:

## How Coordinator Relationships Shape Educator Identity

The advert in the newspaper said, *"Do you love working with children? No qualifications necessary! Contact us."*

Written by Jo Georgiou

It was 2004, and this is where my family day care journey began.

I had no qualifications, but I absolutely loved working with children. My one-year-old son would have little friends to grow up with and I would be self-employed. Families were going to trust me with the most precious people in their lives. That felt exciting… and terrifying.

How did I know if I would be any good at this? What if I got something wrong without even realising it?

Enter Sandra, Lynn and Ellen — the coordinators who shaped my career.

They were there from the beginning, sitting on my couch, chatting to me and my husband, making my son giggle and play with them. They were excited for me. They asked thoughtful questions, listened carefully, and guided me without making me feel "managed." I would share my ideas about how I wanted to set up my environment, and instead of telling me what to do, they helped me think it through. Through very clever questions, I slowly realised where a few changes were needed — changes I felt I had identified myself. They made me feel heard, capable and confident.

They didn't just help me set up a service; they helped me start seeing myself as someone who *could* do this work well.

And that is where professional identity begins.

Their regular visits were never something I dreaded. They were a welcome breath of fresh air. Somehow, they always seemed to arrive at the right time — ready for a cuppa, a chat, and sometimes even lunch with the children. We would talk about what had been happening since the last visit, the challenges I was facing, and the things I was proud of. They celebrated my wins and gave thoughtful input into my programming.

The visits left me feeling like I was on the right track.

As an Educator, that kind of support shapes everything. It builds confidence. It reduces isolation. It reminds you that you are not doing this alone.

In 2006, I was fortunate enough to attend the FDCA Conference in Alice Springs. As we all know, family day care can be an isolating profession, so the chance to connect with other Educators was invaluable. What surprised me most, though, was hearing how many educators spoke about their coordinator visits with dread.

They talked about "spot checks."

They described feeling nervous, on edge and defensive. I was genuinely shocked. I remember telling them how wonderful my coordinators were — how they would just pop in for a coffee and a chat. Someone asked if I was told they were coming, and when I said no, one educator rolled her eyes and said, *"Jo… that's a spot check."*

That moment stayed with me.

Because while technically the visit may have been the same, the experience of it was completely different.

That is the power of relationship.

The way a coordinator shows up can shape whether an educator feels judged or supported, scrutinised or strengthened. Over those few days, I heard stories from educators who felt empowered by their coordinators, and others who felt micromanaged by them. It made me realise how lucky I had been — and how influential that support had been in keeping me in the sector.

My coordinators didn't just make sure I met requirements. They mentored me. They encouraged me to study further. They helped me build a professional service. They showed me that family day care was not "just babysitting" — it was meaningful, intentional, professional work.

That identity matters deeply in our sector.

When the National Quality Framework arrived, that message became even clearer. We were no longer seen as "carers"; we were recognised as *educators*. I felt strongly that this mattered. Family day care has always delivered extraordinary outcomes for children and families, and it deserved to be recognised as the professional, valuable form of education and care that it is.

But with that recognition came change. And with change came pressure.

By 2010, I had stepped into the role of coordinator myself and began visiting educators in their own homes. Very quickly, I realised that every educator was different. Every service was different. Many had been operating for years and understandably felt confident in their own ways of working. At the same time, the sector was shifting rapidly. educators were trying to make sense of the EYLF in their daily practice, while services were grappling with growing regulatory expectations and increasing accountability.

That is where the tension sits.

How do we support educators while also monitoring compliance? Which hat are we wearing when we walk through the door — support, or compliance? And how do we get the balance right?

For me, the answer has always come back to one thing: respectful relationships.

Compliance matters. It has to. Children's safety, quality practice and professional accountability are non-negotiable. But when visits become purely about boxes, breaches and evidence, something important gets lost. Educators can begin to feel unseen, unsupported and reduced to paperwork. Over time, that erodes confidence, identity and wellbeing.



We talk a lot about recruitment in family day care, but not enough about retention. People stay where they feel valued. They stay where they feel capable. They stay where someone sees their strengths, helps them reflect, and reminds them that they are doing important work.

That is the difference between monitoring and mentoring.

Mentoring does not mean ignoring non-compliance or avoiding difficult conversations. It means approaching those conversations through relationship, curiosity and respect. It means knowing your educators well enough to read the room. It means recognising when they need challenge, when they need encouragement, and when they simply need someone to say, *"You're doing better than you think."*

It means asking reflective questions instead of delivering constant correction. It means helping educators identify their own strengths and build on them. It means spending enough time in their environments to understand the context of their practice — not just the paperwork attached to it.

Strong coordinator relationships can directly influence educator wellbeing, confidence and professional identity. They can reduce burnout. They can create a culture where educators feel safe to ask questions, admit uncertainty and keep growing. And when educators feel supported to grow, quality practice strengthens across the whole sector.

Of course, the reality is that coordinators are under pressure too. We are expected to support, guide, monitor, document, evidence, follow up, and prove — constantly. If something goes wrong, there must be a paper trail showing what was communicated, taught and checked. That pressure is real, and it can be exhausting.

But perhaps that is exactly why relationships matter so much.

Because both coordinators and educators are carrying a lot. We are all trying to stay afloat in a sector that often feels like it is drowning in documentation. We are all trying to do the right thing for children while navigating endless expectations behind the scenes.

So maybe the invitation is this: put the checklist down for a minute and talk.

Get to know each other. Build trust. Communicate openly. Lead with respect. Support with intention. Challenge with care.

Because when coordinators move from simply monitoring practice to genuinely mentoring the person behind the practice, something powerful happens: educators don't just comply — they grow.



# Celebrating 50 Years of Family Day Care:

## A Legacy of Nurturing, Trust, and Community (1976-2026)

Written by Inoka Nakandala

This year marks a truly special milestone for Dandenong Community Family Day Care Service, 50 years of providing high-quality family day care to children and families in Dandenong and Surrounding suburbs. It is a moment of reflection, celebration, and gratitude as we honour the journey that has shaped who we are today.

Established five decades ago in response to the growing needs of local families, Dandenong Day Nursery Inc, who established our long day care service, could not cater for the number of families needing care, so in December of 1976, Dandenong Family Day Care began with a small group of passionate educators dedicated to providing safe, nurturing care in a home environment. Family Day Care became a popular alternative



and as the scheme grew, it became clear that Dandenong Community Family Day Care needed their own premises. The Committee, after a concerted fund-raising effort and generous donation from one of the original board members, took the opportunity to purchase a house within walking distance of Dandenong Day Nursery to establish the coordination unit. The scheme is coordinated from this site today and is still managed by the Dandenong Day Nursery Inc. Committee. What started as a modest initiative has grown into a trusted and valued community-based service, supporting generations of children and families.

Over the past 50 years, we have had the privilege of supporting thousands of children through their early years. Many of the families who once relied on our service now



Councilor Rhonda Garrard from City of Greater Dandenong has reconnected with her family day care educator during the 50 years celebrations.



return with their own children, a testament to the lasting impact of quality care and meaningful relationships.

The day was filled with a wide range of free activities for children and families to enjoy, creating a lively and welcoming atmosphere. Attendees delighted in meeting and petting friendly farm animals, experiencing fun rides, food stalls and a community BBQ. Creative arts activities encouraged children to explore their imagination, while families enjoyed the opportunity to mingle and connect with friends and the wider community. A traditional smoking ceremony was a meaningful highlight of the celebration, adding cultural significance to the day's festivities

Our educators are the foundation of our success. Their dedication, compassion, and professionalism have shaped the lives of countless children. Many have been part of our service for years, bringing experience, continuity, and a deep commitment to nurturing each child's development. Through ongoing training and development, our educators continue to provide environments where children can learn, explore, and thrive.

Our connection to the community has always been strong. We proudly celebrate diversity and inclusion, ensuring every child and family feels welcomed and respected. Over the years, we have built lasting partnerships and contributed to a supportive network that strengthens our entire community.

As we celebrate this 50-year milestone, we also take time to acknowledge the many educators, families, and community members who have been part of our journey. This special event has brought together past and present families to honour this incredible achievement.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to continuing our legacy of excellence. As the needs of families evolve, so too will our service — while staying true to the values that have guided us for the past 50 years: Inclusion, care, respect, and a passion for early childhood education.

We thank our community for their ongoing support and trust. It is a privilege to be part of so many children's early years, and we look forward to continuing this journey for many years to come.



**Coordination Unit staff**
Seated Front: Lauren Bailey (Coordinator)
Seated Middle from left to right: Inoka Nakandala (Ed Leader) Dona Kollurage (Coordinator), Chris Gabriel (Coordinator)
Seated at the back: Deborah Noble (Manager)

# BUSINESS INSIGHTS

## *Safe Play Reminder – Trampolines & Outdoor Equipment*



Active outdoor play is an important and valuable part of family day care and supports children's physical development, coordination, confidence and overall wellbeing.

However, it is important to ensure that when children are using trampolines and outdoor play equipment that they are adequately supervised and every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and hazard (as required under Sections 165 and 167 of the Education and Care Services National Law).

### Trampolines in Family Day Care

In family day care, trampolines are not specifically prohibited under the National Regulations, however, their use must comply with your approved provider's policies and risk assessment processes. Some services may prohibit trampolines, while others may allow them under strict safety conditions.

Trampolines are consistently identified as higher-risk equipment due to fall height and collision injuries. Educators must always follow their service's policies and procedures, as required under Regulation 168(2)(a), which requires services to have policies and procedures relating to health and safety. This includes how supervision and risk management are implemented in practice.

### Safe Practice Considerations

If your service permits trampolines or elevated play equipment, it is important to consider the following.

#### Supervision

Children must be adequately supervised at all times in accordance with Section 165 of the National Law and Regulation 122. To support compliance:

- Maintain active, direct supervision at all times and ensure a clear line of sight.
- Position yourself so you can intervene immediately if required.
- Avoid completing other tasks during higher-risk play.

#### Access Control

Taking reasonable precautions under Section 167 of the National Law includes managing children's access to higher-risk equipment.

- Restrict access when equipment is not actively supervised.
- Secure enclosures and remove ladders where applicable.



- Consider limiting trampoline use to one child at a time to significantly reduce collision-related injuries.

**Environment and Maintenance**

Under Regulation 103, premises, furniture and equipment must be safe, clean and in good repair. Educators should:

- Inspect equipment regularly for stability and signs of wear.
- Ensure impact-absorbing surfaces are appropriate and well maintained.

**Documentation and Risk Assessment**

Services must maintain policies and procedures relating to health and safety, including supervision and risk assessment under Regulation 168(2)(a). Risk assessments should clearly outline:

- Identified hazards
- Supervision positioning
- Control measures
- Review processes

Risk assessments should be reviewed following any incident or near miss, and whenever there are changes to the environment or equipment.

## Reflective Practice Questions

- Can any child access elevated equipment without your knowledge?
- Where do you position yourself during active outdoor play?
- Are your safety rules consistently reinforced and understood by children?
- Are supervision strategies clearly planned and documented?
- Do current control measures reflect "reasonable precautions" as required under Section 167?
- Are you ever completing other tasks while children are using elevated equipment?
- Have you reviewed your service's policy regarding trampolines and elevated equipment?
- When was your outdoor equipment risk assessment last reviewed?

Outdoor play should be engaging and developmentally beneficial. With strong supervision, clear safety controls and well-documented risk management processes in place, the risk of serious injury can be significantly reduced.

Please take time to review your outdoor environment, supervision positioning and risk assessment documentation.

## Need to report an incident?

You can report an incident via your FDCA Member Zone. FDCA's Incident Report forms are also available online and once completed can be emailed to memberservices@fdca.com.au.

Please note educators and approved providers also have a range of reporting obligations relating to incidents under the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations. Please visit the ACECQA website to see a summary of the notification obligations under the National Law.

# Making a Difference in Communities

## - The Family Day Care Capability Trial

**Every day, family day care educators and services make a difference in the lives of children and families, particularly in communities where access to care is limited.**

For families in regional and remote areas of Australia, finding high quality early learning can be challenging. Long waitlists, restricted options and a lack of flexible care can create significant barriers to workforce participation and children's access to early learning.

The Family Day Care Capability Trial ("the Capability Trial"), funded by the Australian Government and facilitated by FDCA, is helping to test measures aimed at addressing educator shortages, including targeted start-up funding to support eligible new educators in establishing their own family day care businesses in communities where access to care has been limited.

With more than forty educators opening their own family day care businesses to date through the Capability Trial, and more in the pipeline set to commence soon, early insights are already showing the impact on communities – highlighting the important role family day care services and educators play in improving access to care where it is needed most.

Lila, an educator in a small village in north-eastern New South Wales, recently opened her family day care and became the only early childhood education and care option in the area. While nearby towns have long day care centres, these services are often full and operate with lengthy waitlists.

One parent explained that without reliable local care, career opportunities were limited. "I studied software engineering. At the end of the course, without child care, I was unable to take an internship position offered to me because it required full-time attendance."

> "Having local child care means I can get a full day's work in without travel and cost being a concern"

Lila's family day care now plays a vital role in supporting local families to maintain employment, reduce long daily commutes, and access high-quality early learning close to home.

"Having local child care means I can get a full day's work in without travel and cost being a concern," one parent explained. "We can leave later in the morning so we have more time together, and I can leave later from work to pick up our son, so I get more time to get work done."

A similar story is being seen in Western Australia, where educator Kate, who opened her family day care business last year, to meet a growing need in her rural community of Gidgegannup.

Before Kate opened, local families were navigating long waitlists, limited care options and very few flexible choices. For some it meant reducing work, while for others it meant considering leaving the workforce altogether.

Chrissy, whose child attends Kate's family day care said, "if I didn't have a place with Kate, I would have had to reduce my hours and days significantly, which would have put us under a lot more financial stress."

Another parent, Sophie, shared "getting a place at Kate's family day care has allowed me to go back to work on a permanent basis since maternity leave. Without child care I wouldn't have returned to work."

For local families, it was about more than finding any child care place.




The small group setting, consistent educator relationship and focus on outdoor play provided the ideal environment for children who had struggled in larger settings. “Family day care was our preference for care, but all the local ones had waitlists years long. Kate has made us feel so much more comfortable leaving our daughter with someone else” Sophie explained.

The Capability Trial is already showing the value of practical, targeted support for family day care services and educators to reduce barriers to entry, strengthen capability and build confidence in the sector. Just as importantly, it is giving us real insight into what works in practice, not just in theory, across a wide range of communities and service contexts.

Importantly, the Capability Trial is about more than testing new ideas in the short term. It is designed to build a strong evidence base for future, funded programs and broader reform across the sector.

By testing these approaches in real-world settings, FDCA (supported by the Australian Government Department of Education) is working to ensure that what comes next is practical, effective and grounded in the day-to-day experience of services and educators. For members, this means the Trial is playing a direct role in shaping a more sustainable, better supported future for family day care.









# EXCELLENCE IN FAMILY DAY CARE AWARDS2026

## FDCA is excited to announce the 2026 awards are now open!

In its 15th year, the FDCA Excellence in Family Day Care Awards will continue to showcase the wonderful work done by educators, coordinators and services in the family day care sector to deliver high quality early childhood education and care to children across Australia. The awards give families, educators and service staff an opportunity to express in their own words what makes their educator, coordinator or approved service such an integral and special contributor to their lives and to the lives of the children in their care.

### How do the awards work?

During the nomination period families, service staff and educators are invited to nominate their family day care educator, coordinator or approved service via a simple online nomination form, with nominations closing on 2 July 2026. When an educator, coordinator or approved service is nominated they are advised of their nomination via email. During the nomination period, regular emails are sent to all nominees informing them that they have been nominated. A nomination list is also published on the FDCA website, this is updated bi-weekly. Inside the email, nominees are invited to make a supporting submission against specific questions outlined in the online submission form before the submission deadline (19 July 2026) to progress within the Awards.

### Why should you get involved in the awards?

The Excellence in Family Day Care Awards plays a key role in FDCA's media and public relations strategy and provides a platform to showcase family day care on a national scale via a local media

campaign that targets regions across the country. In 2025 the awards generated positive media stories across Australia that reached an audience of over one million people via print and online news. By getting involved in the awards, you will not only be giving your families, educators and service the opportunity to say thank you, you will also be part of a national campaign that promotes the uniqueness of family day care.

## KEY DATES

| | |
|---|---|
| Nominations open | Monday, 25 May 2026 |
| Nominations close | Thursday, 2 July 2026 |
| Submissions close | Sunday, 19 July 2026 |
| Regional winners announced | Tuesday, 29 September 2026 |
| Star Award winners announced | Thursday, 8 October 2026 |
| National finalists announced | Tuesday, 20 October 2026 |
| Winners announced (Gala Dinner) | Saturday, 28 November 2026 |

### Awards categories:

**Educator Awards**
75 regional awards
4 national finalists

**Coordinator Awards**
4 national finalists

**Service Awards**
4 national finalists

**Perpetual Star**
Awarded to one educator, one coordinator and one Service that have each been registered in the family day care sector for a period of 15 years or longer.

Nominees are notified of their nomination via email, so it is essential that your email address is registered with FDCA and that our email address, **marketing@fdca.com.au** has been added to your safe sender list.

The Excellence in Family Day Care Awards remain the only dedicated national awards program for the family day care sector. The awards program also remains the cornerstone of FDCA's public relations strategy to position family day care as an option of choice in early childhood education and care.






# Member Spotlight

## Anna Haley, Hearts & Minds Playschool, Kariong NSW

***1. How long have you worked in family day care for and where are you located?***

I have been running Hearts & Minds Play School for almost four years. Based in Kariong on the NSW Central Coast it is a family day care service for preschool aged children, registered with Inspired EC.

***2. Can you tell us a little bit about your background in the early childhood sector?***

I have worked in early childhood education and care for over 20 years. I trained as a primary school teacher with an early years specialism in England and taught for three years in large multicultural school in Birmingham. When I moved to Australia, I worked casually as an early childhood teacher across a range of settings in Sydney before finding my tribe. I then spent 12 years as the preschool teacher and Assistant Director of a beautiful long day care centre on Sydney's Northern Beaches. After having my own children, I moved to the Central Coast with my young family and opened my family day care. It was a dream of mine both personally, to be able to have my children with me at home, and professionally, to run a service in a way that was authentic to my philosophy. I had been aware of Inspired EC through attending their training courses and when I realised they ran a family day care scheme I knew that they would be a wonderful fit for my child-led, nature inspired, play-based ethos. The team at Inspired have been supportive and inspiring since day one.

***3. If you could provide only one answer to the question – why choose family day care – what would it be?***

Working in family day care has shown me that, in early childhood education and care, relationships are everything. Before entering family day care, I didn't fully realise how responsive and deeply attuned early childhood education could be to each individual child. While all areas of the early childhood education and care profession aim to provide this level of care, family day care truly makes it possible through its small group sizes, consistent relationships and personalised approach. One of the most rewarding aspects of family day care is the ability to build genuine, meaningful connections with children and their families. These close, secure relationships during the early years have a profound impact on children's growth, wellbeing and development, providing the strong foundations they need for future learning, schooling and life.

***4. What has your family day care been up to lately?***

My program is highly child-led and uses the environment as the "third teacher," thoughtfully inviting exploration, curiosity and meaningful learning experiences. My preschool-aged group has recently been exploring the concept of place — discovering where in the world our families originate from and closely examining maps, atlases and globes linking this to travel and transport. Through this inquiry, children are fostering a deep sense of belonging within our group through exploring and investigating our local community and the places that are important to them. They are broadening their understanding of the world by recognising and celebrating the differences and similarities within our group. Together, we created "mini-me" blocks featuring each child's photograph, along with blocks representing their homes and other meaningful local buildings. These resources encouraged rich small-world play, storytelling and imaginative journeys connected to their lived experiences. This led us to consider and reflect on 'Place-Based Pedagogy' to build strong connections with the natural environment around us. The children are developing an understanding of the land we learn and play on by observing the plants, birds and insects we encounter in our garden and at the park behind our home.

***5. What would you say your family day care is best known for?***

Hearts & Minds has become known for being a little oasis of calm and is often sought out by those preschoolers who prefer a less stimulating environment, a slower pace, more time for uninterrupted free play and lots of time in nature. Families know that their children will receive truly responsive care and be supported in their own individual learning journey. Hearts & Minds is known for being a 'Curiosity Approach' setting. My learning environment supports autonomy and independence as well as engagement with critical thinking and problem solving by design. My aim is that the authentic items, curious treasures and loose parts provided spark curiosity, motivate play and engage learning. The








'Curiosity Approach' Accreditation journey is not about learning a technique or implementing a 'look' but reflecting on practice and ensuring that this aligns with our values and philosophy. It has inspired me to use open-ended resources and to trust children with real authentic items.

### *6. What do you like to do when you're not working?*

You will find me in op-shops looking for treasures to share with the children! I love finding authentic and interesting items to provide rather than just toys. We recently found typewriter which the children are really enjoying using! When not working, I am kept busy with my own two young children. We love travelling, spending time in nature and being on the beach. Living on the Central Coast there is always something new to discover.

### *7. What is the best piece of advice you would give to a new educator?*

I would highly recommend that new educators:

- Find your tribe — people who align with your values, encourage you, and inspire you to continuously reflect on and strengthen your practice.
- Make time for play, both within your work and outside of it. Play is one of the most powerful ways to bring joy into our lives, build connections, and remain engaged and present with the children in our care.
- Develop an awareness of your nervous system and wellbeing. This work can be both emotionally and physically demanding, so learning to recognise your body's stress and safety cues can help reduce anxiety, build resilience and support positive mental wellbeing. Co-regulation is also a vital part of early childhood development, as children learn to regulate their emotions through safe, responsive relationships with trusted adults. Modelling self-awareness, calmness and emotional care is therefore a powerful gift we can offer children.

### *8. What is the biggest change you have seen during your time working in the sector?*

One of the biggest changes has come from growing research in psychology and neuroscience, which has shown us that children are not passive recipients of knowledge. Instead, learning becomes far more meaningful when children are curious, engaged and active participants in the process. Throughout my time working with children, I have seen a significant move away from the traditional adult-dominant behaviourist approach. We now view children as capable, competent and naturally curious learners who thrive when they are given opportunities to think critically, make choices and actively contribute to their own learning. This shift recognises that developing independence, creativity and problem-solving skills is far more valuable than focusing solely on obedience or external rewards, which can often diminish children's intrinsic motivation. For me personally, moving away from behaviourist practices has involved a process of both unlearning and relearning. Although these ideas were deeply ingrained through my own childhood experiences and early teacher training, they never truly aligned with my image of children as capable, competent and self-directed learners.

### *9. What is the best advice you have received yourself?*

Be authentic.

If you really believe in something -your passion shines through and you attract like minded people. Since starting Hearts & Minds this is what I have aimed to do and it has driven me to continually reflect and improve. For me, I strongly believe in the power of play, that childhood is short and that we should not waste children's precious time with things like worksheets.

### *10. What has been the highlight of your career so far?*

To design the Hearts & Minds program based on what I believe about children and to see my vision come to life over the past 4 years has been incredible. Connecting with families who are aligned with my philosophy and who value what I do has been both affirming and rewarding. Being awarded Family Day Care Educator of the Year for Central Coast was a huge honour. Now, after three years of professional development work I am on the verge of Hearts & Minds being awarded Curiosity Approach Accreditation. It has been a labour of love but I'm so proud of what I have achieved.



# Dollars and Sense

## Maximising Your Tax Deductions:

### Practical Tips for Family Day Care Educators Before 30 June

With only a few weeks left until 30 June 2026, now is the perfect time for family day care educators to review what you can legitimately claim, ensure your records are complete and organised, and make smart decisions that could reduce your 2025–26 tax bill.

As a home-based sole trader, you have access to many deductions — but accurate records and proper substantiation are essential.

### 1. Getting Your Records Organised

**Unless you have a receipt or other clear evidence for a purchase, you will not be entitled to the deduction**. This is one of the most common reasons educators miss out on legitimate claims.

**Action steps now:**

- If you have not already started recording your expenses, begin now using a system that works for you — whether it's a simple personal spreadsheet, a manual cashbook (pen and paper), or a commercial/specialised package.
- Photograph your receipts electronically (ensure the date, amount, and supplier are clearly visible) and store them securely.
- Save them in a dedicated cloud folder (e.g. OneDrive or Dropbox) labelled "Tax Records 2025-26".

**Helpful technology tip:**

Many educators find receipt-scanning apps save a huge amount of time. Popular options include **Dext** and **Expensify**, which let you snap a photo and automatically extract the details.

There is also a new app specifically built for family day care educators called **MyFDC** (sign up at app.myfdc.com.au). It offers a free base version with affordable paid options for OCR (automatic text recognition) credits and custom reports. Because it is tailored specifically to the way family day care works, it is often simpler and more relevant than general tools. It's worth checking out if you're looking for something designed for our industry.

**Note business-use percentages** on shared expenses when recording them.

### 2. What You Can Claim – Practical Examples

**100% deductible business expenses** (if used only for family day care):

- Toys, books, craft supplies, educational materials
- Cleaning products, consumables, and food/snacks provided to the children
- Professional development, first aid courses, and memberships
- Insurance (public liability etc.) and accounting/tax fees

**Apportioned home expenses** (based on business-use %): Combine your timesheets (hours of care) with a simple floor plan or measurements of the areas used for day care (prepare one now **if you haven't already done so). Example:** 35–40 hours of care per week in dedicated play areas can often support 30–50%+ of electricity, gas, internet, phone, and cleaning costs.

**Assets & Equipment:** Eligible small businesses can immediately deduct the business portion of assets costing under $20,000 each if ready for use by 30 June.

Use our **example expenses guide** for a helpful reference of common claims: https://tinyurl.com/FDCExamples



Ben Mueller
from FDC Tax

### 3. Smart Spending Decisions Before 30 June

Avoid buying items solely to reduce tax. A $1,000 deductible purchase at a 30% marginal rate saves only ~$300 in tax — you're still out of pocket $700 if you don't genuinely need it.

#### Practical planning tip:

Get a quick profit estimate from your accountant and compare this year to next:

- Expect **higher income next year**? Bring forward genuine needed expenses (e.g. pre-pay insurance or buy required equipment/ supplies).
- Expect **lower income next year**? Defer non-essential spending.

Focus on items that genuinely improve your service or make operations easier.

### 4. Motor Vehicle Expenses – Critical Timing for This Year

Vehicle costs (school pick-ups/ drop-offs, excursions, supply runs, training) are often one of the biggest deductions for educators.

**Important rule:** To claim **any** deduction or instant write-off on a new or used vehicle **this financial year**, the car must be **purchased, delivered to you, and ready for use before 30 June 2026.**

Simply ordering the vehicle or paying the deposit/invoice is **not enough**. If delivery occurs after 30 June, the deduction shifts to the 2026–27 tax year. Contact dealers immediately to confirm realistic delivery dates.

#### LOGBOOK TIPS:

- Start or continue a logbook **before 30 June** — you can finish the 12-week representative period after 1 July and still use it for this year.
- Without a full logbook, estimate kilometres with clear documentation (e.g. "3 school runs/week × 12 km return × 40 weeks = 1,440 km" plus excursions and supply trips). Estimates are allowed but usually support lower claims.

Record your odometer reading on 30 June anyway.

### 5. Super Contributions – A Strategy Worth Considering (But Not for Everyone)

Making personal concessional super contributions before 30 June can provide an immediate tax deduction and help build your retirement savings. Contributions must reach your fund by 30 June.

**However, this is not suitable for everyone** — particularly lower-income educators with modest profits (e.g. under $45,000). You may not have spare cash available, and the direct tax benefit can be small.

**Helpful option for lower earners**: If your total income is **$47,488 or less** in 2025–26, consider making a personal after-tax contribution of at least **$1,000**. You may qualify for the government **super co-contribution** of up to **$500** — essentially free money to boost your super.

**Another idea**: The **First Home Super Saver Scheme** (FHSSS) lets eligible first-home buyers contribute into super, claim a deduction where eligible, and later withdraw the savings (plus earnings) for a home deposit.

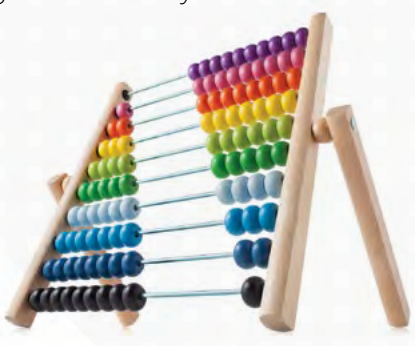
Always discuss your personal situation with your accountant or financial planner before acting.

### Top Practical Actions Right Now

- Obtain your Educator Payment History Report from your scheme.
- Photograph and organise all outstanding receipts (consider a receipt-scanning app).
- Prepare a simple floor plan of care areas if needed.
- Record your 30 June odometer reading.
- Speak with your accountant soon about your overall position.

**Remember:** This is general information only and not personalised tax or financial advice. Everyone's circumstances are different — consult your registered tax agent or accountant for advice tailored to you. Visit ato.gov.au for official guidance.

Taking these practical steps will help you claim everything you're entitled to and finish the year organised. You provide a vital service caring for children — your records should work just as hard for you.





Photographer: Kelly Sikkema

# Building capacity

## through short, targeted learning

In 2019, FDCA led research on how to attract and keep Family Day Care educators. The research also explored how new family day care educators could be better supported.

Experienced family day care educators shared what they thought would help people join the sector and stay. They highlighted the need for free targeted training, webinars, and easy access to resources.

Almost ten years later, the family day care sector and the wider ECEC sector face more pressure and higher compliance demands. Attraction and retention continue to be major challenges.

ECEC leaders now work in more complex environments. They support their teams while managing competing demands and limited time.

Many family day care professionals say it is hard to make time for professional learning, yet we know this learning brings clear benefits for children, families, and educators' own career growth.

To respond to these challenges, Be You, the national Australian mental health initiative delivered by Beyond Blue, in partnership with Early Childhood Australia and headspace, has created a Micro Learning offering for the broader ECEC sector.

### What is Be You Micro Learning?

Micro Learning is a new addition to the free, evidence-based tools and training offered by Be You. These short pieces of content aim to build mental health literacy, support educator wellbeing, and strengthen learning environments.

One family day care leader described Micro Learning as "PD in your pocket" and said she was grateful that family day care educators were considered during development.

Micro Learning includes short videos and articles that help educators build confidence in supporting mental health and wellbeing. Each item can be completed quickly, making it ideal for family day care educators who need flexible, accessible, and practical learning.

### Advantages of Micro Learning for family day care educators

Family day care educators often work alone and do not have the daily peer contact found in larger early learning settings. This can make learning and wellbeing support harder to access.

Micro Learning helps by offering:

### Short, easy-to-use content

Most modules take only a few minutes to complete. They can

fit into breaks, planning time, or quieter moments.

## Practical strategies you can use straight away

Each module links directly to everyday practice and focuses on educator wellbeing.

Educator wellbeing affects the quality of care children receive. Be You's learning opportunities include simple strategies to help educators set healthy boundaries, manage stress, and reduce burnout.

All content is grounded in research, supports the Be You implementation cycle, and is developed with mental health professionals. This ensures that the information is reliable and high quality.

## Popular Micro Learning packages for family day care educators

Micro Learning is a popular way for ECEC services to share information on core topics such as boundary setting and using tools like the Mental Health Continuum.


Photographer: Kelli McClintock

The Importance of Educator Boundaries, presented by clinical psychologist Dr Rebecca Ray, encourages educators to explore ways to protect their time, energy, and emotional wellbeing.

For family day care educators who often blur the lines between home and work, these skills are especially important. Dr Ray offers practical strategies to help educators set realistic boundaries that support wellbeing and long-term sustainability.


Photographer: Markus Spiske

Understanding the Mental Health Continuum introduces a simple, visual way to understand how children and young people experience mental health. It also provides tools to help educators notice early signs of change and respond with confidence.

Because each module is short and easy to share, coordination units and educators can use them to build a consistent approach to mental health and wellbeing across networks.

## How to access Micro Learning

After registering with Be You (which is free), users gain access to a personalised dashboard. From there, they can:

- Save and revisit favourite resources
- Share content with colleagues
- Filter learning by topic or stream
- Track progress over time

To explore the full range of Micro Learning options and choose the ones that best suit your learning community, visit the Be You website.

# Safe Sleeping Bags in Family Day Care

**Supporting Safe Sleep and Meeting Standards**

Family day care educators have a legal and ethical responsibility to keep babies safe during sleep.

Every rest time must follow safe sleep recommendations, helping reduce the risk of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI), including SIDS, while also meeting National Quality Framework and ACECQA requirements.

Safe sleeping bags can support this, when used correctly.

## What Is a Safe Sleeping Bag?

A safe baby sleeping bag is used to keep baby warm without using loose bedding like blankets. Loose bedding may risk baby's head & face being covered especially if baby is rolling.

A safe sleeping bag must:

- Have fitted neck and armholes (or fitted sleeves)
- Allow free arm movement
- Have no hood
- Be the correct size for the baby
- Suit the room temperature (TOG rating)

These features help keep babies the right temperature and reduce the risk of overheating or hed and face being covered.

## Key Safety Rule

Always place babies on their back to sleep, with their head and face uncovered.

## Why Use Sleeping Bags in Care?

Sleeping bags help create a safer and more consistent sleep environment. They:

- Reduce the risk of bedding covering the face
- Help maintain a stable temperature
- Support back sleeping
- Provide a clear, consistent routine

This is especially important in family day care, where multiple children may have different routines.

## When to Stop Swaddling

Stop wrapping (swaddling) as soon as a baby shows signs of rolling (usually around 12 weeks).

After this:

- Arms must be free
- Wrapping is no longer safe
- Use a sleeping bag instead

**IMPORTANT**

**Never wrap a baby inside a sleeping bag. This can cause overheating and restrict movement.**

## Choosing the Right Sleeping Bag

Use this quick checklist:

- Fitted neck and armholes – not loose
- No hood – keeps face and head clear
- Correct size – not too big
- Right TOG – for the room temperature
- Secure zips – no damage
- Free arm movement – essential for safety
- Light weight natural fabrics – cotton or bamboo preferred

## Understanding TOG (Warmth Rating)

TOG measures how warm the sleeping bag is.

- Low TOG = warm weather
- High TOG = cooler weather

Check the baby's chest or back:

- Warm = comfortable
- Hot/sweaty = too warm
- Cool = may need another layer

## Safe Use in Family Day Care

To meet safety standards:

- Always place babies on their back
- Keep head and face uncovered
- Do not add blankets over sleeping bags
- Supervise sleeping children
- Follow your service's sleep and rest policy

Consistency is key across all educators.

## What NOT to Do

Avoid these unsafe practices:

- x Sleeping bags that are too large
- x Bags with hoods
- x Extra blankets over the top
- x Weighted sleeping bags
- x Restricting arm movement
- x Wrapping once baby is attempting to roll

**High-Risk Practices**

Do not use weighted, hooded, or loose-fitting sleeping bags even if families have supplied these items.

## Talking to Families About Clothing

Sometimes families may provide clothing or sleep items that are not safe (for example: too many layers, thick clothing, or unsafe sleeping bags that have a hood).

When this happens:

- Use clear, simple language
- Focus on safety, not criticism
- Refer to your service policy and safe sleep guidelines
- Offer a safe alternative

You might say:

*"For safe sleep, we need baby's arms free and no extra layers. Today we will use this sleeping bag to keep them safe and comfortable."*

This helps build trust while ensuring you meet your legal responsibilities.

Continuous supervision is best practice in care setting. If not regular checks

## Safe Sleeping bags at a glance

- ✓ Fitted, hoodless sleeping bag
- ✓ Correct TOG for room
- ✓ Baby on back
- ✓ Face uncovered
- ✓ Arms free after rolling

## Continuous Supervision

Red Nose recommends that continuous supervision is best practice. This ensures that there are bedside checks that include regular visual inspection of an infant's:

- Skin colour
- Breathing
- Sleeping Position.

If continuous supervision is not possible regular quality physical bedside checks, at least every 10 minutes, and more frequently for infants or children with known SUDI risk factors should

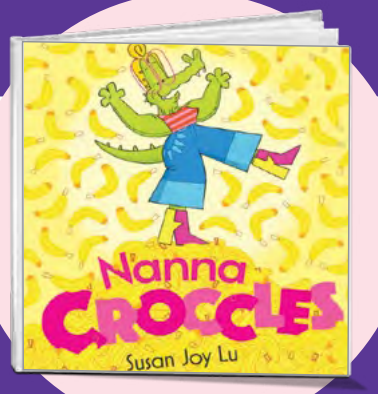
**Safe sleep is everyone's responsibility.**

SCHOLASTIC

# Storytime

## NANNA CROCCLES

Nanna Croccles is a bright, vibrant, and full of energy character, she's definitely not an ordinary nanna. Children found the story funny, and they could relate to Nanna's character when we read the thing she loved the most were bananas. As we read, children were curious to see what else Nanna loved and what she was doing around the neighbourhood. This book is full of kindness, creativity, and easily explain the sense of community.



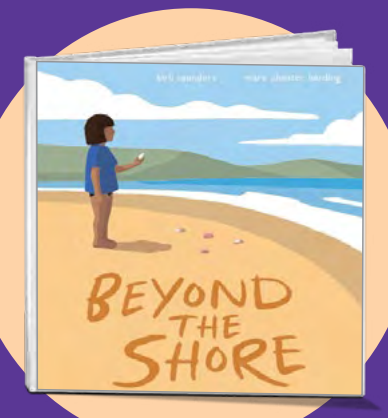

## I'D RATHER BE A DRAGON




The dragon textured illustration on the cover of the book immediately captured my little readers' attention. This is a beautifully illustrated book with lots of fun details. My little friends loved the dragon transformation, and they were roaring as we read it. This story celebrates imagination, individuality, self-image, and the courage to be yourself.

## BEYOND THE SHORE

The gentle illustration, the sea animals, and the simply, but powerful story, kept my little ones engage during the reading. Children were excited when they saw the whales' shadows reflecting on the bottom of the ocean and they were eager to point out every single creature they saw through the pages. This book explores courage, curiosity, and nature. At the end, the story sparked a conversation about our favourite sea animals and the things we do when go to the beach. Of course! We had a sensorial experience with sea animals after we read the book.







## LET'S GO RACING

The hardcover book instantly caught my little ones' attention, especially the cars enthusiasts. This accelerating story is a colourful introduction to the world of car racing, that also emphasizes the teamwork, and the joy of following something you like. The bright colours and race track vibes lift off each page. We had a fun time reading this book and we got to play with some racing cars afterwards.

## ABOUT SCHOLASTIC

Scholastic has been the market leader of Australian children's publishing for over 50 years, bringing the joy of reading to multiple generations of Australian families.

Scholastic proudly partners with Australian day cares, schools and major retailers. Scholastic products can be found in Book Club, Book Fairs, the classroom, retail chains and independent booksellers.

Scholastic believes that all children should have regular access to quality, affordable books that they have chosen for themselves. Reading ignites a spark of adventure that a child can carry within their heart well into their adulthood. Scholastic hopes to light this spark within every child.

**Learn more at: scholastic.com.au**

## BOOK REVIEWER:

**At Mariana's Family Day Care we promote learning with personalized attention and an educational program designed for each child. We are inspired by Maria Montessori's philosophy, we support children to grow in independence and fulfilling their natural abilities along with nature exploration activities, gardening, music lessons, communication in English and Spanish, and lots of fun.**

# FUN WITH FDCA

Competitions close 30 September 2026





## Riddle

Solve the riddle to the right for your chance to win two eco-friendly animal play sets: Farm Animals and Safari Animals.

Valued at over $90, the Wild Animals and Farm Animals play sets feature vibrant sets of safari and farm animals, crafter from high-quality, sustainable rubber wood. Perfect for young children, offering opportunities for imaginative and role-playing activities. These eco-friendly toys support emotional and developmental growth while providing hours of fun.

Competition closes 30 September 2026

I'm packed each morning but emptied by noon.

I carry comfort, chaos, and sometimes a spoon.

I hold spare clothes, artwork, and snacks for the day,

Yet somehow a dinosaur sneaks in to stay.

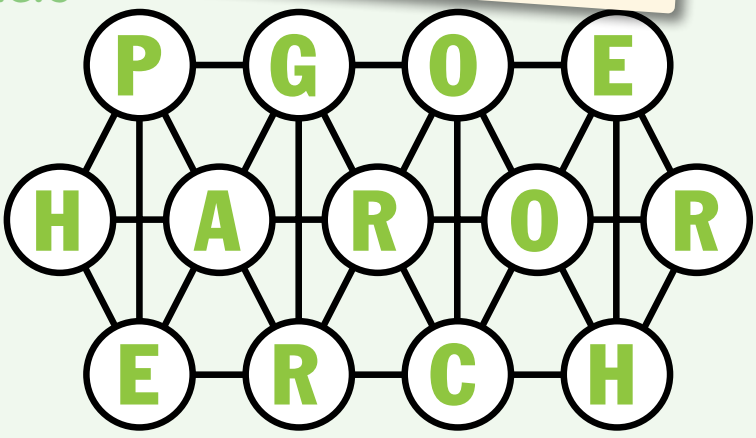
What am I?




## Chain Letters

Can you find the 13-letter word hiding in the chain? You must use all 13 letters once only and can move from circle to circle only where they are connected by lines.

Competition closes 30 September 2026




## Red Star House

Find the Red Star House and you can win a Linking Families of The World Set.

This beautifully crafted lacing and imaginative play set is valued at $109.95 and promotes values of respect equality, and inclusion while developing fine motor and cognitive skills. The set includes 24 reversible wooden figures, representing diverse families from around the world. The figures can be linked together using the six coloured laces that are included.

Competition closes 30 September 2026

## congratulations

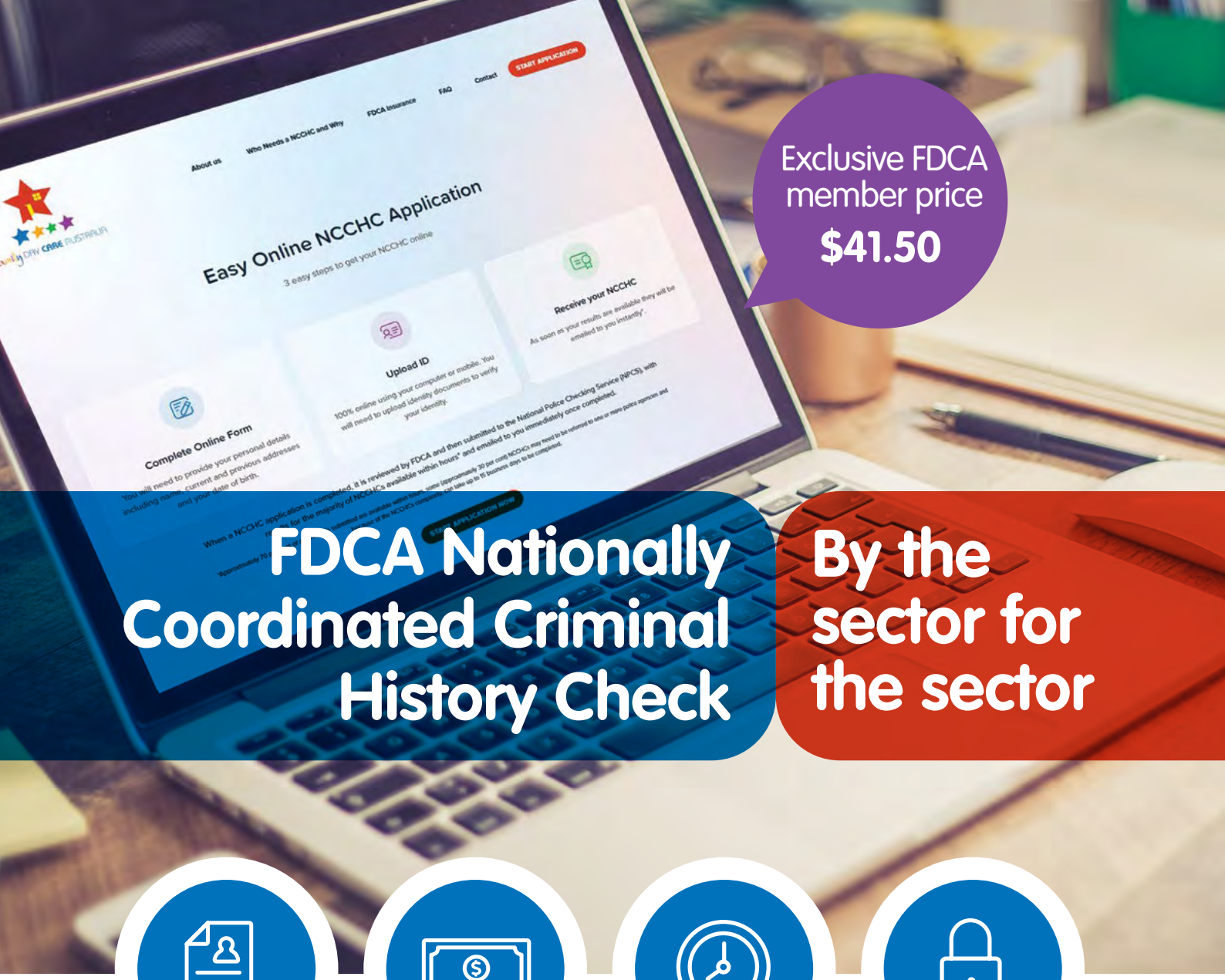
*...to the winners from Issue 109*

**Find the Red Star House**
Mikala Hutteroth, NSW

**Riddle**
Melissa Thomas, NSW

**Chain Letters**
Cheryl Richter, SA

To enter the competitions, visit www.fdca.com.au/competitions




Exclusive FDCA member price **$41.50**

# FDCA Nationally Coordinated Criminal History Check

## By the sector for the sector

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Save on cost

Save on time

Save on worry

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Current FDCA members receive discounted rates, allowing them to access the best value price on the market, while new educators qualify for a discount on their FDCA start-up insurance policy.

**To find out more visit www.fdcachecks.com.au or call 1800 658 699.**

Family DAY CARE AUSTRALIA