



* Image courtesy
of Torquay Kids Early
Learning Centre

Delivering excellence in early learning and care

In 2015, Ezidebit customer Torquay Kids Early Learning Centre was recognised by ACECQA as one of Australia's leading early learning and care services. We sat down with director Kathy Hogan to learn how the centre delivers excellence.

The educators at Torquay Kids Early Learning Centre in Hervey Bay, Queensland, were "over the moon" when they learned their centre had been awarded an 'Excellent' rating by ACECQA, the highest rating an Australian education and care service can achieve.

"We gathered all the children in the playground and I held up a sign and everyone jumped up and down and screamed," recalls Kathy Hogan, director of the 70-place standalone centre. "It was a great morning!"

Kathy says the programs and practices that led to Torquay Kids' 'Excellent' rating were inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach the centre has adopted in recent years.

"Reggio Emilia focuses on developing good citizenship skills," she explains. "It looks at social justice, rights of children, and at the image of the child as being extremely capable, competent and able to achieve at their own level."

To reflect this philosophy, children regularly step outside the centre into the "real world", where they can connect with their community and learn how to become good citizens.

Excursions include weekly visits to the local library for story time and to borrow books, and participation in various community events. Children can explore nature at the bush kindergarten the centre operates at the botanical gardens for six to eight months of the year. And thanks to a partnership the centre has established with a local primary school, children can use the school's oval and play equipment to stay active and develop their motor skills.

Supporting children's social and emotional development before they transition to school is another key priority at Torquay Kids. In 2012, the centre received funding to participate in a KidsMatter mental health program, which provides access to valuable online training and workshops, and guidance from a KidsMatter support person.



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Torquay Kids has been using the Ezidebit method of collecting payments for more than nine years. During this time we have found it to be an efficient and effective way of monitoring the debt and ensuring accounts are kept up to date. The website is easy to navigate, allowing access to information about accounts, forms, expired cards coming up and much more. The Ezidebit company provides daily reports, which are easy to read and include any declined payments for prompt follow-up. We love the Ezidebit method and this is our primary method of receiving monies at the service. We use this excellent service to complement our 'Excellent' rating.

Kathy Hogan, Centre Manager
Torquay Kids Early Learning Centre

“The KidsMatter program has helped to educate us to become more responsive and more understanding,” says Kathy. “We never hear a raised voice; it’s very calm and peaceful because children and families are truly respected.”

Kathy says employing a dedicated family support worker has been one of the best decisions the centre has made since implementing the KidsMatter program.

“When parents come in she will welcome them, sit with them, they go in the kitchen and have coffee with her and debrief over their morning.

“We have really come ahead in leaps and bounds in our relationships with families. They appreciate what we’re doing and what we’re trying to do.

“If I could get every childcare centre in Australia to participate in the KidsMatter program, that would be fantastic. The benefits are just phenomenal!”
Along with the successful implementation of the KidsMatter program, Kathy says the strong relationships the centre has developed with the local Butchulla people is a key factor in its “Excellent” rating.

This started in 2012, when Kathy attended training on the history of Queensland from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as part of the Queensland Government’s Crossing Cultures program.

“Until that time I was probably the most ignorant person in the world to the plight of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families,” admits Kathy. “But I came away quite determined to do something.

“A lot of people think, ‘Oh, it’s NAIDOC Week or Reconciliation Week, we better do something.’ ‘It’s sorry day, let’s put up a sorry poster.’ But it’s not about that, it’s about making those connections and developing that respect for the Indigenous people. Once they know you’re interested, they’ll give you the world. It’s our children who are going to carry on their culture.”

To start to build these connections, Kathy obtained funding to invite local Indigenous people to the centre, to share their powerful stories with the educators. Since then staff and children have got to know the linguists and environmental elders who come to the centre. They have visited the Indigenous settlement Cherbourg, and gone on excursions to a farm run by the Korrawinga Aboriginal community, where children could explore the land and participate in Indigenous rituals.

To further their understanding of Indigenous culture and history, staff embarked on an eight-week training program via the Workforce Council.

“It was absolutely fantastic,” says Kathy. “At the end of that we went for Walk on Country, where you actually go out with the elders and they take you to their sacred places and explain what happened. That was a huge journey for us.”
Recently the centre has opened an Indigenous art space and employed an Aboriginal liaison officer to maintain a strong connection between the centre, Aboriginal elders and health services.

Kathy says the relationships the centre has developed with the local Butchulla people have helped children understand the importance of respecting and celebrating diversity.

“Through our respect and through it just being there every single day, they don’t see it as a difference. And that is the difference.”

And what does the future hold for Torquay Kids Early Learning Centre?

“For now our journey is Reggio Emilia, and maintaining every aspect of our ‘Excellent’ status. Every week our lead educators come together for collaborative planning. We’ll talk about particular observations, we’ll talk about certain children and plan collectively for them, and part of that program now is researching in Reggio. We’ve just turned a fork in the road to a new philosophy and a new way of being.”