

# Children's Charter of Rights: caring for each other and the environment

## Clarence Park Community Kindergarten

### Our context

We are a full-time Government-funded DECD Kindergarten in a quiet suburban area. The cultural diversity of our families is increasing and some of our children are supported by bilingual workers. This has led to some amazing understandings developing in the children about how people can be a bit different or the same as them.



*Clarence Park Community Kindergarten*

### Our vision and values for a more sustainable world

We'd like to see children and their families aware of how important it is to care for one another and living things in their environment, and these concepts are embedded across our Statement of Philosophy. The Kindergarten is a place where everyone can learn about sustainability, grow new skills and have opportunities that may not be available to them in their own homes, such as having a garden.

### Our sustainability initiatives

For many years our Kindergarten community has been exploring what sustainability means, continually reflecting on and improving our sustainable practices, and sharing our learning with each other. Our initiatives include the resource separation systems, dynamic outdoor learning spaces with loose parts and digging patch, rainwater tank for water and mud play, composting, keeping chickens, growing and eating fresh fruit and vegetables, reusing and recycling, and supporting children to ride to kindy day one day a week rather than use the car.

The children of 2016 were involved in the development of the Children's Charter of Rights to encourage them to discuss and practice skills to form good relationships. The focus is mostly about our behaviour towards one another but it is also about thoughtfulness in all sorts of environments – with each other, other things and ways to look after the environment.

The Charter is based on what the children believe. Staff talked with the children about how they all have the right to feel safe and be looked after, and so do all living things. We asked questions such as 'What does it look like when we're caring for each other?' 'What does it look like when we're taking care of the environment?' This discussion included considering how others might be impacted by the decisions they make. It was about thinking about safe practices and ways of including others in a caring, considerate way. The children's responses were transcribed and added to the physical display of the Charter on one of our walls which included photos of the behaviours they described.



*Caring for the chickens*

"Putting paper in the right bin and doing puzzles"

"When I play with the chickens nicely"

"Baxter" (the bearded dragon)



To accompany this resource, every time we see things people are doing that support the Charter of Rights we document it and share it with everyone through our Charter of Rights book. What's been really nice has been that if there has been play that isn't nice we can remind children about the wall of the Charter of Rights, which shows people working collaboratively, holding chickens gently etc.

A has a great understanding of the Charter of Rights. "I want no-one to get hurt at this kindy." A told me one day. I is always very kind and thoughtful as she shows new children around at our kindy. We often seek her out for this responsible job. AD interrupted a child to talk to me, then noticing this, apologized and said to his peer "You go first."

It is these kinds of interactions we have been focusing on in our Charter of Rights news and now it is embedded and part of the culture.



*The Charter of Rights wall*

## Curriculum connections

Our sustainable practices and exploration of wellbeing have a strong connection to all five outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework. We fully exploit the potential of our indoor, outdoor and social environments to provide us with learning opportunities, real-life problems, chances to learn new things and challenge ourselves, support each other to feel safe, and take actions to look after each other and our world.

## Developing leadership

In Term 3, we started a Green Team. Each day the children can ask to be on the Green Team, and if selected they get a

special badge to wear and take responsibility for jobs around the Kindy. The children themselves decided what the jobs would be – helping other children put materials in the right bins, putting the texta lids back on, feeding the chickens, collecting the eggs and putting the number in the egg book. We have developed an information sheet which the children take home to share what their Green Team jobs have been, to help parents understand our sustainable attitude and learnings.



*Parent information about Green Team responsibilities*

## Challenges

We like to leave our garden open for weekend use by families. Unfortunately this created a number a number of challenges - people ignoring our 'dogs not allowed' sign so the chickens were getting harassed and dog poo was left on the ground. Staff initiated installation of push down taps in the outdoor water trough as they have come in on Mondays and found taps running. We are still trying to solve the problem of blockages in the water trough due to sand play.

## NRM Education support

Our NRM Education Officer Amy Blaylock meets with us several times a year to support our sustainability initiative planning, challenge our thinking and help us document our achievements and ideas. She also shares ideas from other sites, finds resources to support our work and helps us with grant applications.



## Communication and participation

We are always providing children with opportunities to communicate their ideas and participate in our sustainability actions. In 2015 the children wanted to buy new toys, so staff engaged them in discussions about recycling and second hand shops. The children decided to bring in the toys they no longer used and sold them for gold coin donations, as well as preparing and selling produce from the garden to families. They counted the money, looked through catalogues and decided which toys to buy. If the staff had bought what they thought the children wanted, they would have picked different and probably less popular items, and the children would have missed out on a rich and extended learning opportunity involving critical thinking, problem solving, planning, negotiation and numeracy.

We use our regular newsletters and displays in the Kindergarten to engage with and share our learning with families. For example:

"The focus for term 2 will be a unit of work on recycling which will teach the children many numeracy concepts such as observation, sorting, classifying, noticing, and communication. It will bring awareness about the importance of recycling and reusing. Many games and activities will be structured on the subject of recycling and caring for our earth. We will be observing and doing audits on how much we put into our rubbish versus recycling and compost during snack and lunch times. The children will be encouraged to communicate this information to you and in turn bring less food packaging that goes to landfill in their lunch boxes." *Newsletter, Week 1, Term 2, 2016*

"We are trying to reduce our landfill so please think carefully about how you package your child's food. Reducing the amount of plastic wrap and processed food will help with this. If you need some ideas for lunch see the display on the door next to the lunch trolley or talk to one of the educators." *Newsletter Week 8, Term 2, 2016*

Through our shared learning with families we have been able to reduce the amount of packaging being brought to Kindy in lunch boxes, and improve the amount of fresh food being eaten.

In our Term 1 interviews, staff invited families to share their skills with the kindergarten, and three have adopted garden beds to develop and care for with the children -

butterfly, succulent and Chinese vegetables/herbs.

Some parents have also donated materials and time to install new garden beds. Children and their families are learning about natural cycles as we take our fresh food scraps and turn them into compost which feeds our gardens, or give them to our chickens who then provide us with eggs which we can cook with.



*Helping each other put on gloves for gardening*

## Outcomes

At the end of the year several children commented in their verbal review of things learned in 2016 that they now know about caring, sharing and taking turns with their peers. Parents have also expressed feedback about the impact this focus has had.

"S has very much enjoyed her time at kindergarten as well as the community around it. As a parent I've seen her grow and develop skills in this centre that I value. Thank you to all of the staff for creating learning opportunities and giving S a wonderful time her."

## Next steps

We will put the Charter of Rights in a more prominent place this year and encourage parents to add their comments, and be more consistent with referring to the Charter. We also won a grant to support our goal of increasing children's understanding of safety and to encourage families to leave their cars at home. To our existing bike track we will be adding a bus stop, bike rack and pedestrian crossing, and encouraging the children to leave bikes in a safe place. We will be collecting data to support an observation of change in behaviour.

## For more information

Rita MacFarlane, Director, Clarence Park Community Kindergarten [Rita.MacFarlane887@schools.sa.edu.au](mailto:Rita.MacFarlane887@schools.sa.edu.au)

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