



Quality in rural and remote settings

Ensuring high-quality learning experiences and care for children—whatever their individual circumstances—is the goal of the *National Quality Framework*. But the way in which early childhood services go about meeting that goal depends on a broad and complex range of factors. A service's geographical location can have a profound effect on the type of program it offers. In this series of three articles, we talk to educators from three rural services about how they deliver high-quality experiences for the children in their care.

Case study No.1: Boyup Brook, Western Australia | Population: 1,588

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Boyup Brook is a wheat and sheep farming community in the south-west of Western Australia, around 100 kilometres from the coast and 269 kilometres from Perth. The YMCA Early Learning Centre is the sole early childhood service in Boyup Brook, operating three days per week for an eight-hour day. The centre offers a multi-age program for children from birth to five years, and is licensed for 19 places.

Josie Scally has lived in the region for most of her life, and has been Director of the early childhood education and care centre in Boyup Brook for 18 months. She describes the town as very community-orientated, 'Everyone hops in and helps if someone's having a crisis,' she says, 'if there's a death or a birth or whatever. Everyone is there to help each other, everyone knows each other, so it's very, very tight-knit.'

The program at the centre is 'very, very focused around the rural setting that most of these kids come from,' Josie explains. This means a lot of physical play, plenty of natural materials and a program that takes place mostly outdoors.

'The children spend a lot of their day outside, right from the beginning to the end of the day,' says Josie, 'because they are obviously not used to spending long periods of time inside. Even very young babies don't like it, because they're used to being allowed to go out in the backyard where there's a fence and they can see for five kilometres down the road.'

Drawing on the children's interests and environment, the program at Boyup Brook has a strong focus on animals. 'We use that as an opportunity to teach them about animal welfare, habitat, animals all over the world,' Josie says. 'So we've branched into the globe, looking at maps. For us, it's been about educating them about their community and then the world at large, and also caring for each other.'

A key element of intentional teaching is around health and safety in farm settings. The educators have set up a safety and construction trolley, stocked with child-sized high-visibility vests, safety helmets, safety cones and real tools. The program has strong support from families. 'The way I look at it,' says Josie, 'it's really about supporting the children in the environments that they'll be going back to at the end of the day.'

The educators also ensure that children are able to explore beyond their own experiences. Josie noticed that the children's play tended to assign very traditional roles along gender lines, so the educators encourage the children to use all of the elements in their environment. 'We have one little boy, who's the youngest of six farm boys, and he loves the ballet dancing, tulle dresses, things like that,' she explains. 'So we really encourage those children to engage in that, because traditionally, as one of six boys, he wouldn't have had access to that sort of stuff. Mum and Dad are very supportive. But at the end of the day, we know that he does love to be outside, so he takes his tulle skirt with him.'

For the educators at Boyup Brook, the distance from major cities means that access to training is an ongoing challenge. Online training resources are useful, but the educators 'also need that contact with other educators and need to brainstorm ideas,' Josie says. On the positive side of the ledger, the isolation means that educators at the centre have become very resourceful. 'When we go to bigger places and we see what other people are doing, we think, "Oh, gosh—we actually would have made that or borrowed it, or one of the parents would have donated it"', Josie says.

'I think resourcefulness is a really good skill to have and I think, not only have we developed that as a team, but we're also passing that onto our children—they've become very resourceful as well because of the role-modelling they see.'

The next article in this series will visit the Portland Child and Family Complex, a wrap-around education, care and health facility in coastal Victoria.



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