



## Quality in rural and remote settings

This is the final instalment in our three-part series about rural and remote early childhood settings and the types of experiences educators and children create in these settings. We visit Babinda in Queensland, the wettest town in Australia.

### Case study No.3: Babinda, Queensland | Population: 1,167

‘Because we are in a small community, there are more opportunities to be connected closely’

For early childhood teacher Lorinda Jago, there’s nothing too difficult about running the local kindergarten in the small town of Babinda, 60 kilometres south of Cairns. But that’s because she was born and bred there. For any other educator, running a preschool in the wettest town in Australia might be more of a headache.



‘I’ve been living here all my life, so I don’t really think about the weather,’ Lorinda says. ‘And playing in the rain doesn’t really seem to faze the children.’ Outdoor play is still a major part of the program at the Babinda Kindergarten, which has 22 approved places. The town recorded annual rainfall of 4,302 mm—that’s 4.3 metres—in 2012. ‘The children all bring spare changes of clothes, and the parents really don’t mind because they understand that it’s Babinda and it’s just raining all the time,’ Lorinda explains. The only time she modifies the program is if ‘it’s pouring down with rain’, when she chooses not to set up gross motor circuits in the outdoor space, for safety reasons.

But there’s much more to Babinda than just rain. Lorinda describes it as a very close-knit community, and she has used those ties to create opportunities for the children at the kindergarten.

‘Because we are in a small community, there are more opportunities to be connected closely with families and others,’ she says. ‘We’re very closely connected to the schools. We often help them out any way we can, and they come to us for excursions, or we go to them on an excursion.’

For Book Week in 2013, the kindergarten joined with one of the two local schools for an excursion to the Babinda library. The kindergarten will also host a live music performance next month, which local schools and playgroups are participating in and helping to fund. ‘It’s more viable, financially, to have the school and local playgroups participate,’ says Lorinda. ‘So I think it’s very important to have those relationships.’

The program at the kindergarten also includes participation by the children and educators in broader community events, like the annual harvest festival parade. The children’s interests, shaped by their local environment, are a big factor in the planning and programming that the educators undertake. Local landmarks like the Boulders—a series of huge outcrops of granite boulders along Babinda Creek—form part of the program, along with native animals, birds and insects. In its first assessment under the *National Quality Framework*, the Babinda Kindergarten was rated as ‘Exceeding the *National Quality Standard*’.

The only professional challenge associated with working in Babinda is ‘being a little bit disconnected from other kindergartens,’ Lorinda says. ‘The next kindergarten is in the next town, which is Innisfail and that’s a half hour drive away. We have opportunities to connect with peers through network meetings, but sometimes you do feel a little bit disconnected.’

For Lorinda, the benefits of living and teaching in her home town far outweigh the minor challenges. ‘It makes my job easier in some ways, because I’ve lived in Babinda my whole life, so everybody knows who I am and I know who everybody else is,’ she says. ‘I’ve already established relationships, but someone from the city might find it really hard.’



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