

NEWSLETTER FOR NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES, KINDERGARTENS, PLAYGROUPS AND INTERESTED PARTIES OCTOBER 2012

GREETINGS

Tēnā koutou katoa, malo e lelei, talofa lava, ni sa bula vinaka, talohani, kia orana, fakalofa lahi atu and blessings and warm greetings to you all.

We hope that the new term is going well for you.

Setting up an Early Childhood Service

We keep hearing about groups that are considering setting up an early childhood group in their parish. We commend this heartily. It's a long process, which usually starts with a playgroup (which may or may not feed into a programme of pre-school classroom visits organised by the school for children approaching their fifth birthday), and gradually people begin to realise that it might be possible to establish an early childhood centre or service.

We remind you that Government has recently announced a large injection of funding, to enable the setting up of new services. There are criteria attached, of course. The funding will only be available in areas where there is a significant shortfall in the number of places currently available to parents, therefore one of the first tasks for anyone thinking about setting up a service is to establish how many children from 0-4 there are currently in the area, any elements that may be going to change the number of pre-schoolers (e.g. a planned housing subdivision), and how many places are currently available in early childhood services in the area. This is the scoping needed to identify whether a new service is needed.

The Government has identified specific areas where it wishes to support the development of services – mainly South Auckland and West Auckland. This does not mean that you cannot set up a service in your area, just that you may not get a lot of financial support from the Government for the cost of buildings.

Gather ideas by visiting different types of services in the area (e.g. full and sessional centres, kindergartens, play centres, etc). Simultaneously, spend time looking at the information on the Ministry of Education website, www.minedu.govt.nz. Search for 'early childhood'. There is a great deal to learn!

NZCEO can suggest Catholic early childhood services that you may wish to contact, to find out how they went through the setting up process, and what they think is most important to make the venture successful and provide the best education and care.

If you have done your basic scoping and can see a path ahead, you have probably already discussed the idea with your parish priest and your school principal. It is then time to get in touch with your diocesan Catholic education office, to let them know what you are thinking about. Some dioceses have more experience than others with early childhood education, but it is a matter of courtesy, at the least, that you let them know what you are hoping to do. Also, contact the National Centre for Religious Studies (NCRS) if you are ready to start looking at the Catholic early childhood curriculum (which sits alongside Te Whāriki, the national curriculum).

Catholic Early Childhood Professional Development

We were, in the end, unable to offer sessions at convention, owing to lack of registrations, and also because our presenter became ill.

We are pleased to report, however, that professional development continues in the diocese of Auckland, with a day session held each term. This is a wonderful development, and we offer hearty congratulations to the diocese.

New Zealand's Ranking in Early Childhood Education

The Economist Intelligence Unit (www.managementthinking.eiu.com/starting-well.html) was recently commissioned by the Lien Foundation, Singapore, to devise an index to rank preschool provision across 45 countries encompassing the OECD and major emerging markets. The Starting Well index assesses the extent to which these governments provide a good, inclusive, early childhood environment for children between the ages of three and six, including availability, affordability and quality. Finland, Sweden and Norway perform best, and European countries dominate the rankings. New Zealand came in at ninth overall. Perhaps our quite high placing is influenced by the fact that our children start universal free education at age five, but it's still good to see.

International experts who were consulted about what makes quality early childhood education stressed a high standard of teacher education, clear curriculum guidelines, and ensuring parental involvement.

Catholic early childhood services do well to consider that they have an important role in evangelising parents, not just children. We praise Jubilee Catholic Early Childhood Centre, Hamilton, for its excellent work in this area.

Latest edition of 'Children'

The winter 2012 (No 81) edition of 'Children', the Journal of the Office of the Children's Commissioner, is completed devoted to articles about early childhood education. It is a very significant contribution to the debate about the value of early childhood education, which children can access it, and so on. To get a copy contact the OCC publications request line on 0800 224 453 extension press option 2, or email publications@occ.org.nz. Please read it!

Best wishes to you all.

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