

WOMEN'S
AND GIRLS'
EMERGENCY
CENTRE

ALL
IN



IMPACT REPORT *2024*



CONTENTS

Welcome to Country

4

Executive summary

6

How it started

10

Key principles and
frameworks

12

What we did and learnt

26

Our successes

38

Key challenges

46

5 key lessons for future
work in early childhood
settings

49

Closing reflections

54

Who we collaborated
with

56

Appendix

58

WELCOME *to Country*

Nagganggi *(hello In Dharawal)*

My name is Kowana Welsh Jarrett and I would like to start this Cultural process by Acknowledging our elders past, our elders present, our ancestors and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mob.

I'm a proud Dharawal/Gumbaynggirr/Gamilaraay woman.

I was born on Gadigal land with Gweagal, Bidjigal, Gadigal, and Wangal, among other Sydney clan, bloodline and kinship links. My maternal grandmother is a Timbery and I come from an unbroken line of Koori's born in Sydney pre cook.

Traditionally, my people would move about following fishing seasons in Sydney harbour and surrounding rivers from as far south as Shoalhaven, never taking more than we needed from our Lands. Our decision-making practices were always governed by mindfulness and foreseeable beneficial implications for our future generations.

The continuation of our culture lies in the ability to raise our children. This encompasses the world's oldest and most advanced child-rearing practices. Culturally, our focus was the inherent rights of our children ensuring that future generations would thrive using our ancient cultural knowledge to ensure ecological sustainability to protect our living environment. This also ensured an abundance of accessible resources that enriched and nourished our people's lives. The day-to-day practical application of these old practices provided consistent collective demonstration and transference of knowledge to younger generations, especially in the formative years.

The impact of dispossession has a profound detrimental effect and continues to change our access to Country and our right to make decisions about Country and for Country, but our fundamental cultural beliefs are still at the core of our social cultural, environmental, and socio-economic construct.

WE ARE STILL HERE!

Our natural environment and our old ways of observing environmental shifts and our observation of natural indicators is still vital to the continuation and retention of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and is embedded in Aboriginal people's way of Belonging, Being and Becoming.

Much like today, traditionally we would follow customs such as being welcomed on to Country by neighbouring nations or nations whom Country we would pass through for reasons such as ceremonies, marriage, and trade.

This traditional custom was carried out to acknowledge ancestors, people of the land past and present, acknowledge their customs and Lore and to respectfully adhere to those customs and laws whilst on Country. In turn, this ensured your safe passage through Country and modelled respectful social interaction with Country and Mob.

So, it's with these experiences, the knowledge passed down to me and the bloodlines within me I would like to Acknowledge the lands and the traditional custodians on which you live and work on.

I would like for you to now reflect and acknowledge that Aboriginal peoples have been here since the first sunrise and so called Australia was, is and always will be Aboriginal Land.

Thank you and tread lightly!





ALL IN IS *one of a kind*

The project seeks to address a widespread and pervasive problem that harms us all: gender stereotypes. National and international evidence is clear: gender stereotypes impact negatively on everyone in our society.



They stop us from imagining what we could be or do, they limit our connections with others, hold us back from expressing our hopes, dreams and fears, and make it harder for us to form healthy and respectful relationships.

Research tells us that children begin to form associations with gender early on. By the age of 3 or 4, children are already categorising their worlds according to gender. By the time girls are 6 years old, they are already more likely to think they are less intelligent than boys.²

All In works with early childhood educators, directors, education leaders and families in a



‘whole of centre’ model, empowering them to challenge harmful gender stereotypes at a critical time in early childhood development. The program provides influential adults with the tools to support young children to develop healthy, respectful relationships so that all children are nurtured, safe and encouraged to reach their full potential.

Over two years from July 2022 to June 2024, a team of prevention practitioners at Sydney’s Women’s and Girls’ Emergency Centre (WAGEC) engaged and supported 16 early childhood education centres across metropolitan Sydney and regional NSW to participate in the *All In* pilot program.³ WAGEC engaged the Gendered Violence

Research Network (GVRN) at the University of NSW to conduct an independent evaluation of the program. The evaluation found a range of positive impacts of *All In*, identified the key elements of its success as well as learnings and opportunities for improvement, and recommended the program be expanded and its resources increased to enhance its reach and impact.

EXECUTIVE *summary*

OUR VISION

A world where all children build healthy, respectful relationships and grow up free from violence.

WHAT IS ALL IN?

Working with NSW early childhood educators, directors, leaders and families to:



Challenge harmful gender stereotypes



Support cultural safety and inclusion



Encourage healthy, respectful relationships

APPROACH

3 workshop components:



1.

Introduction to gender, equality and inclusion



2.

First Nations ways of Being, Belonging and Becoming



3.

Putting prevention into practice

RESOURCES



All In Characters



Strength Cards



Felt Boards



Stickers and Books



Posters



Audit Tools

OUTCOMES



9

Sydney Centres



7

Regional Centres



135

Educators



717

Children

After attending the *All In* workshops,
% of educators who strongly felt like they:

75%

Made efforts to
treat boys and girls
equally

79%

Understood what
gender stereotypes
are

73%

Understood what
gender equality
means

91%

Were confident to
challenge gender
stereotypes

WHAT MADE IT WORK?

1.

Centre directors
and champions
helped us build
the pilot



2.

First Nations
workshop of cultural
safety and
community child
rearing



3.

All In resources
and characters
were easily
recognisable



4.

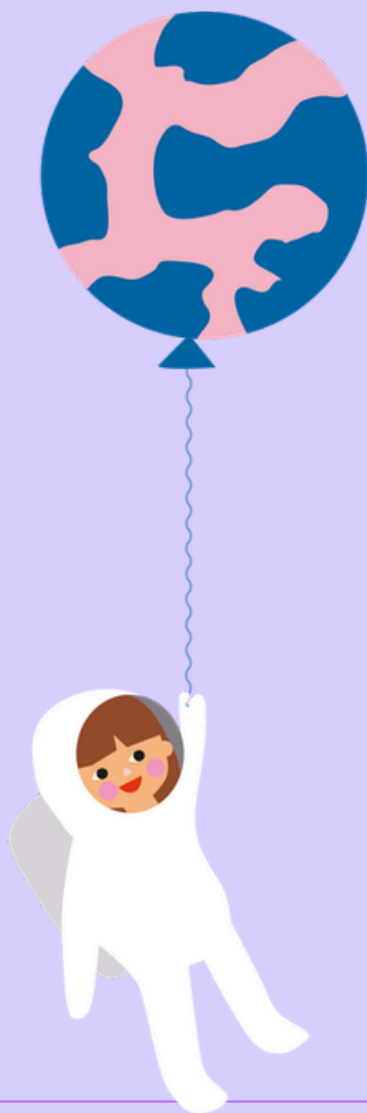
Flexibility: centres
are resource
stretched and need
flexible options



"We have become more confident to have conversations
with children if they comment on whether something is
'just for girls' or 'you're a boy and can't play with that'".

— Educator

HOW IT *started*



What might it look like to address the drivers of gender-based violence as early as possible, before harmful attitudes become entrenched?

This is the question that drove Gamilaroi woman Nat Webster to envision a new, gender-transformative approach that would ultimately become the successful pilot for the *All In* program.

In October 2020, Nat was working as a WAGEC domestic violence case manager, seeing first-hand the devastating impacts of gender-based violence on women and families. With her extensive experience in the sector and a life-long passion to end gender-based violence, Nat teamed up with Sharn Brazier, director of the Moore Park Gardens Childcare Centre (MPGCCC) in inner-city Sydney.

Together they considered the possibilities of working through early childcare centres with educators, children, and families, to challenge and even prevent the formation of harmful gender stereotypes that drive gender-based violence. Despite the turmoil and uncertainty of COVID, Nat and Sharn persevered and in 2021 MPGCCC partnered with WAGEC to deliver three workshops.

In July 2022, having received seed funding from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, WAGEC began project planning and recruitment, and the expanded *All In* pilot was born.

Meet our *All In* characters

MEET

Dixie



Dixie is a First Nations girl who loves nothing more than going home and gathering a good feed of pipis with her mother and grandmother.

Dixie loves being on Country. Even though she is only four years old, Dixie is showing that she can already compete with the boys when she plays her favourite sport – Rugby League. Dixie loves it when her Mob cheers her on from the sideline and tells herself to keep trying when she is feeling challenged. She is as determined as non-binary people and boys to represent her Mob as a professional rugby league player.

KEY PRINCIPLES *and frameworks*



Our Watch's *Change the Story*⁴ and *Changing the Picture*⁵ primary prevention frameworks form the foundational evidence-base for the *All In* projects.

Change the Story is the core framework to guide a coordinated and effective national approach to preventing violence against women. *Changing the Picture* is a national resource to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Encapsulating decades of national and global research and practice, Our Watch frameworks articulate the intersections between gender inequality and the structural and systemic inequalities that drive gender-based violence.

In developing the *All In* project, WAGEC mapped Our Watch's evidence against key principles of equality, inclusion and respect, as articulated in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF, updated 2023)⁶ and Dr Red Ruby Scarlet's *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood Education* (Fourth Edition, 2020).⁷

The EYLF highlights the importance of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in educator practice and philosophy, including collective approaches to nurturing children. The *All In* project has therefore ensured these critical principles are foremost in our approach.

All three sets of frameworks and philosophies focus on celebrating inclusion, diversity, equality, and respect, while guiding educators to support children to see and experience healthy, equal relationships in early years.

Using these national frameworks and principles, the project aims to empower influential adults to directly challenge the drivers of gender-based violence, specifically harmful gender stereotypes and rigid gender roles, and to promote children's identities, confidence, connection and wellbeing.

Meet our *All In* characters

MEET

Rob

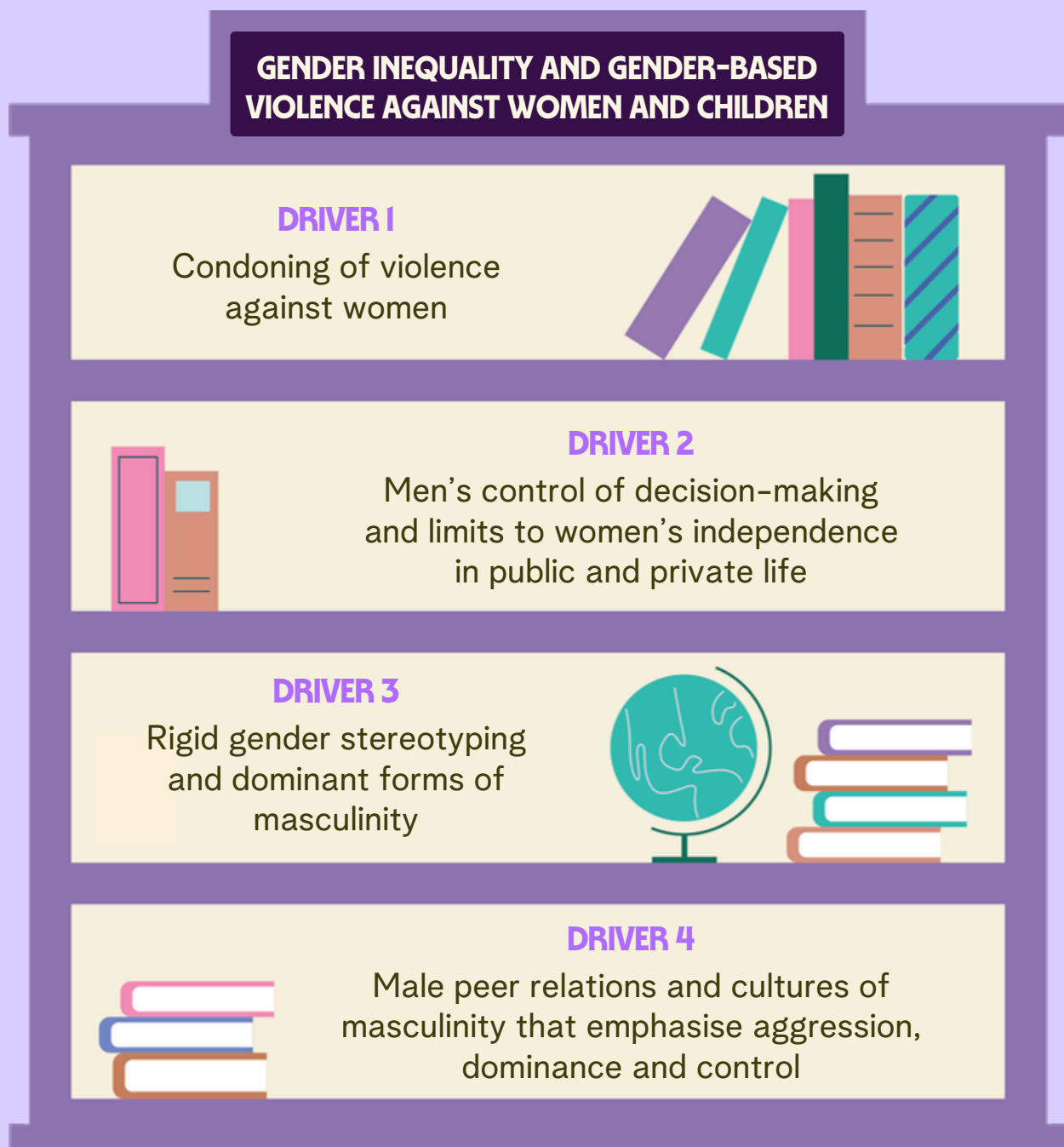


Rob is a proud Aboriginal boy who loves getting painted up, singing his song lines in language and doing traditional and contemporary dance with his Mob.

He is also a deadly big brother to his little sister Dixie and together they walk and talk to Country. They take it in turns carrying the bag with the gifts from their Country. He is always curious to learn more so his favourite thing is listening to his dad share culture and knowledge. When Rob grows up he wants to teach language and continue his storytelling.

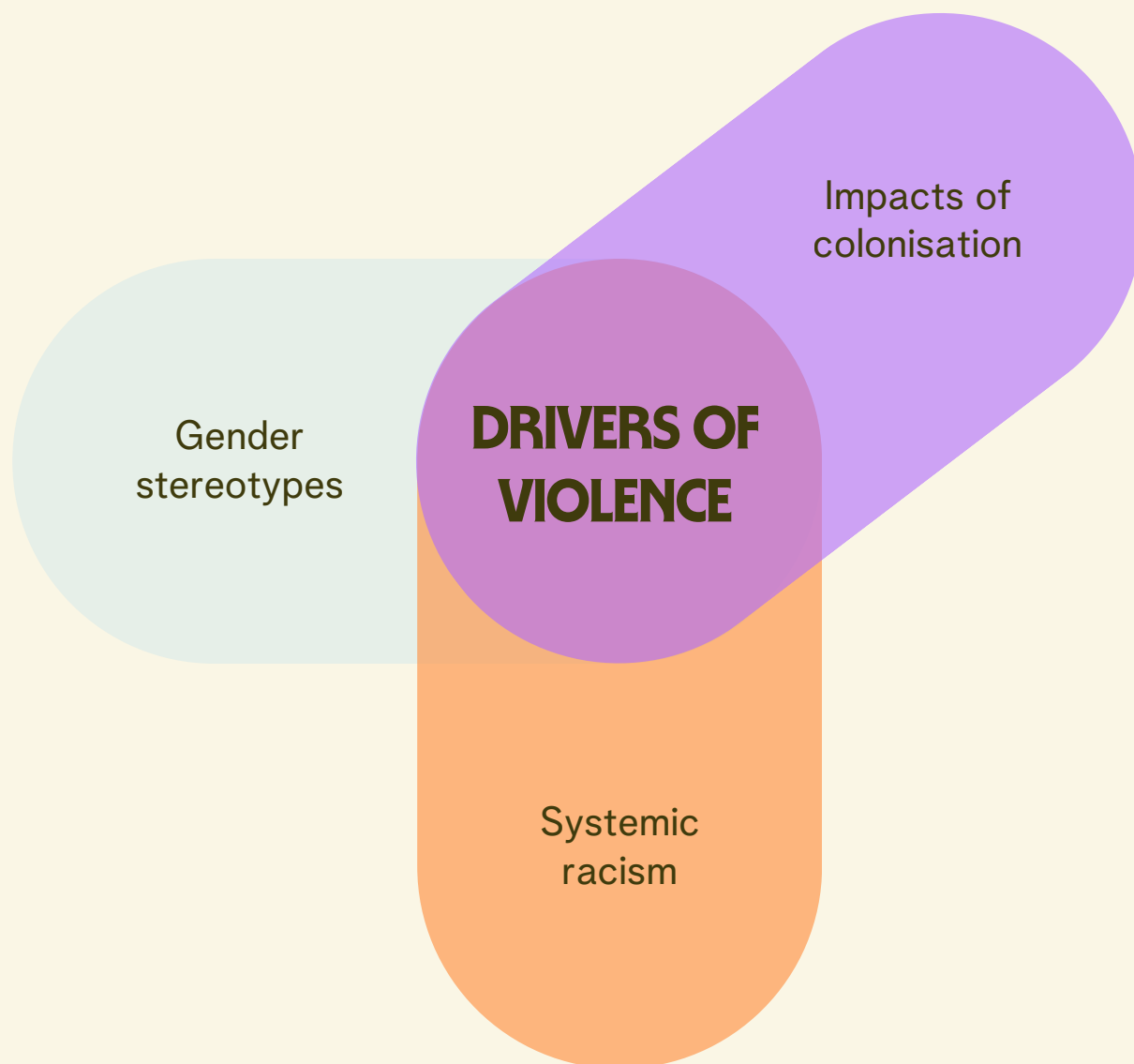
CHANGE THE STORY

Change the Story is Our Watch's evidence-based framework to guide a coordinated and effective national approach to preventing violence against women.



CHANGING THE PICTURE

Changing the Picture contains a set of clear actions that are needed to address the many drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.



EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES

OUTCOME 1

Children have a strong sense of identity



OUTCOME 2

Children are connected with and contribute to their world



OUTCOME 3

Children have a strong sense of wellbeing



OUTCOME 4

Children are confident and involved learners



OUTCOME 5

Children are effective communicators



“The first iteration of the EYLF was built on the implicit premise that Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing underpin every part of the vision, pedagogy, principles, practices and outcomes. This is explicitly named in the EYLF V2.0 and couldn’t have come sooner. There is no early childhood education or out of school hours program that isn’t held, cuddled and enmeshed with Indigenous cosmologies.”

– Dr Red Ruby Scarlet



THE ALL IN THEORY OF CHANGE AND EVALUATION



To evaluate the *All In* pilot and identify improvements for future project iterations, WAGEC engaged Professor Jan Breckenridge and Mailin Suchtin and their team from the Gendered Violence Research Network (GVRN) at the University of NSW.

The theory of change was developed by WAGEC in consultation with GVRN and evaluation experts from the *All In* Project Reference Group (PRG). It articulates the links between gender-based inequality and violence and the ways in which *All In* addresses the drivers of these problems at a whole-of-service level.

PROBLEM



- 1** Evidence shows that gender-based violence is a deep-rooted problem driven by socially constructed, rigid gender roles and disrespect towards women and girls
- 2** The gendered drivers of violence are embedded in our social and institutional norms for parenting and educating children
- 3** Yet, there is a paucity of formal programs focused on the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) and the promotion of gender equality in NSW early childhood (day care) centre settings

INTERVENTION

A 'whole-of-service' approach, to engage early childhood leaders, educators and families and give them the skills, knowledge and confidence to challenge rigid gender roles and stereotypes that impact on children, supporting young children to develop healthy respectful relationships and value people of all genders





PROBLEM

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS & CENTRE STAFF:

- 1 Understand gender-based violence prevention and the connections to early childhood education and care
- 2 Feel confident identifying and taking actions to actively challenge rigid gender roles and stereotypes that impact children in their care
- 3 Incorporate gender equality policy to support practice



PARENTS/CARERS:

- 1 Understand gender-based violence prevention and the connections to early childhood education and care
 - 2 Feel confident identifying and taking action to actively challenge rigid gender roles and stereotypes that impact children in their care
- 



CHILDREN

- 1 Increase play behaviours that challenge rigid gender roles and stereotypes



WAGEC

- 1 Develop evidence for how GBV prevention can be effectively taught in early childhood settings within the current context of relevant frameworks
- 2 Advocate for the incorporation of gender equality principles into the National Quality Framework



IMPACT

- More early childhood centres adopt gender equality principles and implement whole-of-service programs
- Acceptance of harmful gender stereotyping and rigid gender roles is reduced in society
- Support for social norms and attitudes which promote gender equality and respectful relationships is increased



Meet our *All In* characters

MEET

Flynn



Flynn loves dressing up. His favourite part about dressing up is exploring all the outfits and how they feel.

Wearing the different colours makes him feel happy. When he puts on a tutu and performs with his ballet class, Flynn feels like he can do anything. He loves it when his family come to see him perform. The stage is his calm place.

EVALUATION

The GVRN team drew on a range of data sources including pre- and post-workshop surveys, interviews, focus groups, reflections from educators and the *All In* team, and *All In* program materials.

The evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

- 1** Does the *All In* program increase participants' knowledge of gender equality and gender-based stereotypes and related behaviours?
- 2** Do participants report that their attitudes towards gender equality and gender-based stereotypes and related behaviours are influenced by their participation in the *All In* program?
- 3** Are participant behaviours influenced in relation to gender equality by the *All In* program?
- 4** Were a range of practices to promote and support gender equality in early childhood centres successfully implemented?



Meet our *All In* characters



MEET

Shann



Shaan loves baking. When they bake they get joy from measuring the different ingredients and mixing them with their hands.

Shaan has autism. Dressing up like a dinosaur helps them feel brave, especially before show and tell where they love sharing dinosaur facts. When Shaan gets excited they wave their hands to share it, and when sounds get too loud they cover their ears to look after themselves.

WHAT WE DID *and learnt*

Project planning and recruitment began in July 2022, and the new project team was onboarded by the final quarter of the year. The team included early childhood, primary prevention and project management expertise.

PROJECT REFERENCE GROUP

Early in the pilot, WAGEC formed the Project Reference Group (PRG), an external advisory group comprising experts in evaluation, curriculum, anti-bias and inclusive practice. The PRG met four times over the life of the pilot to provide advice, guidance and support. We're extremely grateful for the contributions of the PRG members who helped to shape the pilot. The PRG members were:

- Dr Sonya Pearce
(Gooreng Gooreng)
Expert in Aboriginal education
- Samantha McGuffie
Project Lead, Innovation, Our Watch
- Dr George Argyrous
Head, Measurement, Evaluation & Learning, Paul Ramsay Foundation
- Dr Tamsin Angus-Leppan
Evaluation and Impact Manager, WAGEC
- Tanya Burr
Pedagogy expert, curriculum advisor and lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Australian Catholic University (ACU)
- Dr Megan Rose
Cultural Sociologist, UNSW
- Anti Stopic
Early Childhood Education expert
- Marly Greenwood
Early Learning Family Diversity Training Coordinator, Rainbow Families

CENTRE RECRUITMENT

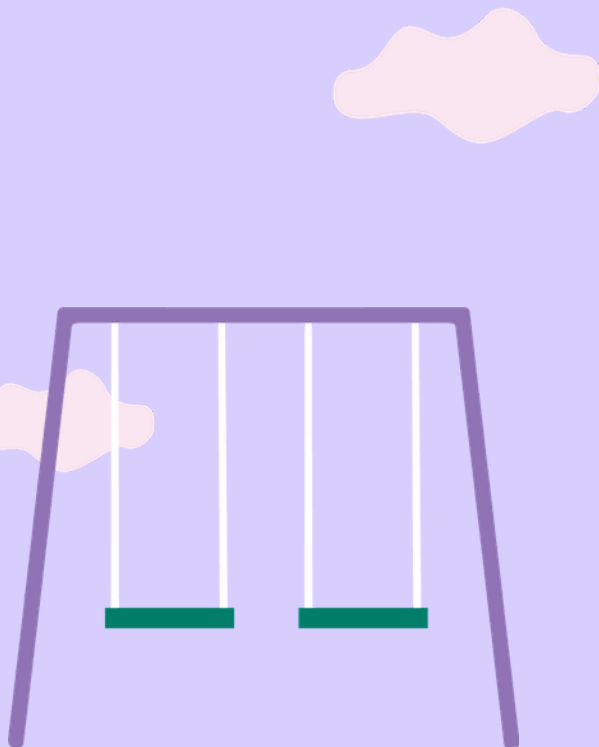
Centre engagement and recruitment was an immediate priority and a key challenge.

The project sought to engage centres that represented and served a diversity of families and communities across NSW. These included a mix of different types of early childhood education providers, employing and providing services to a cross-section of families, and ensuring meaningful inclusion of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), LGBTQI+, and First Nations children. Through consultations with



project champions, the PRG, desktop research, and an analysis of NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics data on intimate partner violence, the project team identified a list of centres that might be appropriate for the project.

In the early stages of the pilot we had relatively few tangible resources or promotional materials to share with potential participants. We relied on the strong track record and reputation of WAGEC and our widely experienced PRG, combined with our confidence in the project design, which is firmly grounded in the EYLF, our frontline experience and an evidence-base developed over decades of global research and practice. To recruit centres to participate in the pilot, we connected with them through local councils, used word of mouth, and leveraged our networks. The *All In* team prioritised personal engagement and clear, transparent communication with centre directors and education leaders, particularly regarding the required time commitment and the practicalities of how the project would run. Wherever possible, we visited centres in person to better understand their needs and communities. We formed and maintained strong relationships with directors from recruitment and throughout project implementation, and they became vital champions for project uptake.



DIVERSITY OF CENTRES AND REACH

DURING THE PILOT WE DELIVERED THE PROGRAM TO



5 CENTRES IN THE METRO-
POLITAN SYDNEY AREA

AND



7 REGIONAL
CENTRES

THROUGH THESE CENTRES, THE PILOT REACHED



126 EDUCATORS

AND APPROXIMATELY



557 CHILDREN
ACROSS NSW

ADDITIONALLY, WHILST THE FINAL RESEARCH ANALYSIS
WAS BEING UNDERTAKEN, WE WORKED WITH A FURTHER



4 CITY OF SYDNEY
COUNCIL CENTRES



DELIVERING THREE EVENING WORKSHOPS TO



9 EDUCATORS

THESE EDUCATORS THEN WENT ON
TO DELIVER PROJECT CONTENT TO



**160 CHILDREN IN
THEIR CARE**

OVERALL, THE PROJECT HAS
THEREFORE BEEN DELIVERED ACROSS



16 CENTRES

REACHING A TOTAL OF

135 EDUCATORS + 717 CHILDREN

Considering this is the first primary prevention approach of its kind in NSW, this depth and breadth of reach represented a major success for the project. Further, the evaluation highlighted that with increased resources, the project has significant potential to scale up and expand this engagement in future iterations.

CURRICULUM AND RESOURCES



In collaboration with early childhood education experts (with particular thanks to Dr Red Ruby Scarlet for her expert guidance, wisdom, patience and sense of humour), we developed the essential components of the project: the pilot curriculum and workshops, an educator's workbook with useful resources and references, and an e-library of learning content.

One of our most popular and distinctive resources was born from a relationship with an illustrator specialising in inclusion and equality in the children's literature space, Beck Feiner. Working closely with Beck, the team developed the eight *All In* characters representing children in our targeted early childhood age group, reflecting different backgrounds and abilities. The characters are diverse and relatable and have become recognisable hallmarks of the *All In* project.

The characters feature heavily throughout the project's resources and materials, including those provided to educators to embed within their practice: affirmation cards, factsheets, posters, felt boards, families resource packs, online materials and audit tools.

The *All In* affirmation cards, felt boards and characters have been among the most successful components of the project, embraced by educators as highly effective learning resources that can be adapted for a range of ages to tell stories, challenge stereotypes and promote equality.

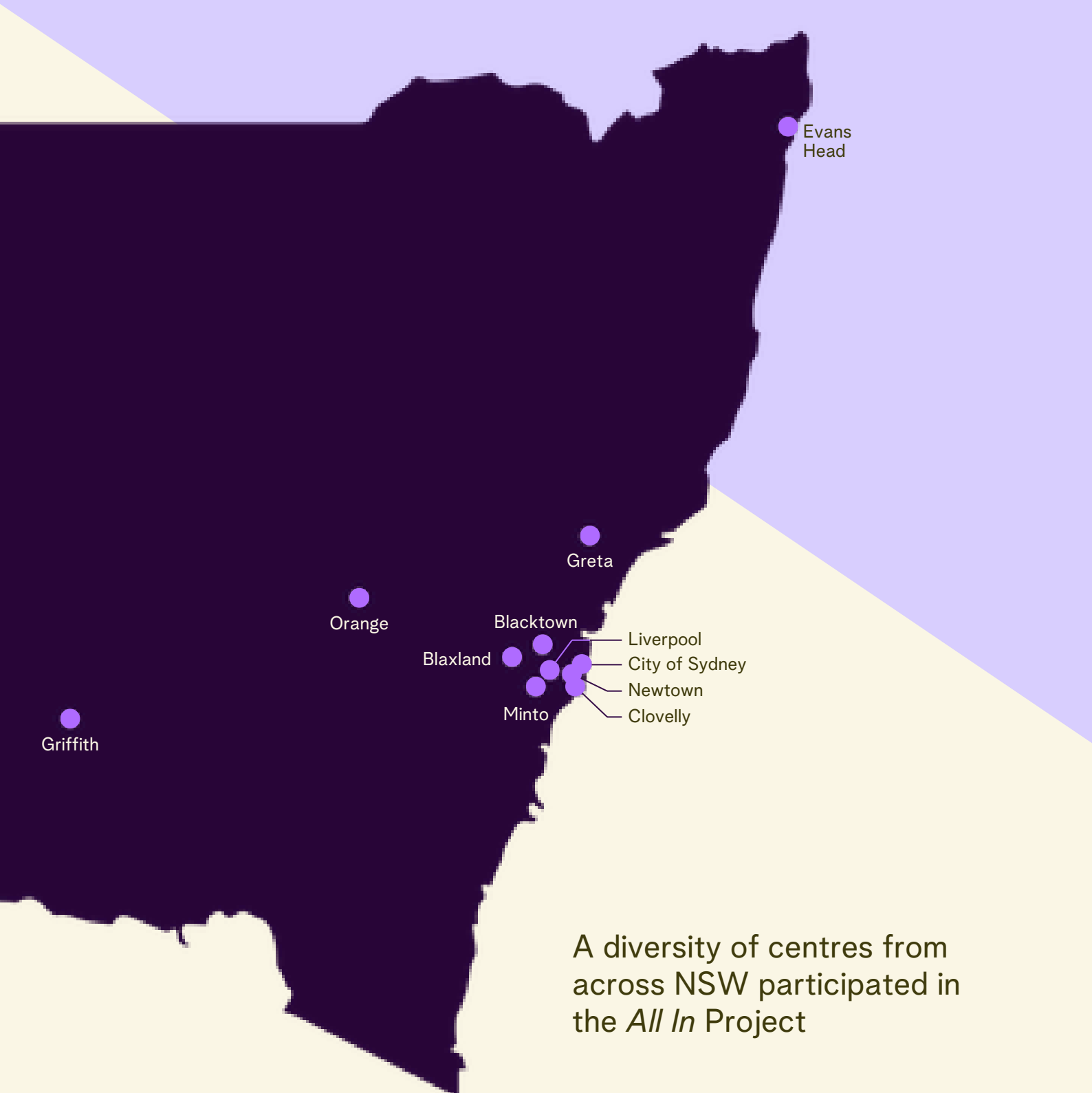


Over the final year of the program, we worked with Mike Mascarenas, a talented animator and illustrator, to create a series of animated explainers telling the story of *All In*. The animations focus on the role of early childhood educators in prevention, highlight the impact of gender stereotypes on children, offer tips for influential adults, and contextualise the intersecting impacts of colonisation, racism and gender stereotypes and inequality on First Nations women.

We're particularly proud of the animation which tells the story of First Nations ways of knowing in primary prevention. The animation combined the expertise of Kimberly Engwicht, an exceptionally talented Bunjalung illustrator, Stephanie Wu from the First Nations-led illustration agency Solid Lines, together with First Nations and early childhood education consultant Aunty Cilla Reid-Loynes, *All In* Senior Project officer Kowana Welsh, and Mike Mascarenas.

Voiceovers for the animations were done by primary prevention expert Matt Balane, Aunty Cilla, and WAGEC's Director of Primary Prevention Moo Baulch. The team at Sonar Music studios spent hours helping us record them. At the time of publishing this report the animations were in the final stages of production, we will share these online once they're completed.

LOCATION OF CENTRES IN PILOT



A diversity of centres from across NSW participated in the *All In* Project

DELIVERY

In May 2023 after months of planning, *All In* commenced project delivery with an initial target of working with 12 early childhood education centres, six across metropolitan Sydney and six in regional NSW.

The curriculum was initially delivered in three in-person two-hour workshops over a period of two to three months.

WORKSHOP 1



Introduced concepts of gender inequality, gender stereotypes and the important role of early years educators in promoting equal, respectful and healthy relationships.

WORKSHOP 2



Explored First Nations ancient ways of Belonging, Being and Becoming, and First Nations childrearing practices, and their influence on the Early Years Learning Framework.

WORKSHOP 3



Focused on embedding gender equality and primary prevention principles in practice and provided educators with the skills and confidence to address resistance within their communities and work.

Interactive activities prompted robust, collaborative, and thought-provoking discussions between participants and facilitators. These discussions helped to strengthen educators' understanding of gender equality, connecting it to existing anti-bias approaches in the early childhood education curriculum, and articulating the pathway from gender inequality to gender-based and family violence.

We quickly learnt that a one-size-fits-all delivery model wouldn't work for centres. This was especially true for centres that were regionally located or had time and resource constraints. To reduce barriers to participation we began to offer centres a more flexible one-day workshop option, delivered on a weekend, which helped to minimise disruption and time commitment from educators and centres.

We paid centres to have their staff attend the workshops – not all of them took up this option but it was a critical element of the pilot and made participation possible for some in an underfunded and time-poor sector.

We ran several online learning sessions that offered participating staff the opportunity to connect with other centres implementing the program. Peer learning and networking across centres provided deep opportunities for professionals to share practice wisdom and helped build the beginning of a community of practice.

Flexibility was critical for implementation, and it allowed us to engage a community of practitioners in regional areas, thereby broadening our reach in a way that would have been otherwise impossible given our tight timeframe.

WHAT WE LEARNT

Throughout project design, implementation and evaluation, we learnt a great deal about the early childhood sector, their local communities and the incredibly challenging environment in which educators operate.

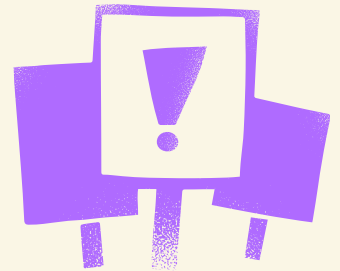
We've also learnt how to best support each other in the critical work that we all do in promoting healthy and respectful relationships and gender equality in the early childhood years.



Some of the critical lessons learnt:

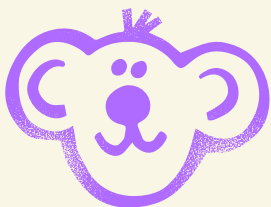


Australia's Early Childhood Education sector is under extreme stress. Staff are overworked, under-resourced, and poorly compensated, despite invariably being highly qualified and experienced. Staff retention is a huge challenge for centre directors and management but every person we met does the job because it is a vocation. They love helping children learn and make sense of their worlds and are deeply committed to professional development and supporting the children and families they work with.



Participation in training is costly and involves a substantial time commitment for centres. We addressed this by offering flexibility and financial compensation to participating centres for attending workshops after hours.

Centre directors and project champions were key to centre engagement, trust-building and promoting the project amongst educators, families and their communities.



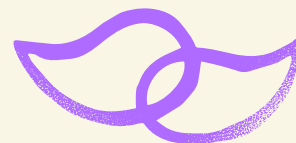
Having early childhood education professionals/practitioners as facilitators for the training workshops was critical for the success of the project. Our facilitators had an excellent understanding of the early childhood education context and used a pedagogical approach that the workshop participants reported was knowledgeable, warm and approachable.

Long term engagement is fundamental to success, including providing ongoing support, mentoring and connection to help embed gender equality and reduce bias in practice.



Families are time-poor and have other priorities. For some families, gender equality and anti-bias content are culturally sensitive issues or aren't at the top of mind, making engagement with the project challenging. We addressed this by building a suite of online resources to support informed, respectful and safe discussions in family settings.

The All In resources are a critical component of content delivery and the *All In* characters are a distinctive, recognisable feature of the project. Activities that incorporated these resources and storytelling were particularly successful.



Like all of us, educators had their biases and prejudices. We worked through these gently and respectfully and we learnt something from every centre with which we worked. Our team encountered some resistance and casual racism in a handful of centres, but the safe space created by the facilitators allowed educators to interact with the content and challenge their beliefs and biases in gentle and thoughtful ways.

There is a strong appetite from centres for additional training relating to gender-based violence, specifically active bystander and ally training and connection to local support services.



There is strong desire to learn more about further embedding Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander culture in educators' practice. The First Nations Workshop which was designed by Aunty Cilla Reid-Loynes (Gamilaroi, Yularoi) and Kowana Welsh (Dharawal, Gumbaynggir, Gamilaroi) was particularly well received and popular amongst educators.

Meet our *All In* characters

MEET

Aliyah



Aliyah loves reading, doing magic tricks, and watching science shows. When she grows up, Aliyah wants to travel to the moon.

Aliyah's mum tells her that even in her tummy she was a tumble turning astronaut. When her mum reads to her at night, Aliyah feels the new baby tumbling in her mum's belly. She wants to be the first kid to go to the moon... with the new baby!

OUR *successes*

Over the life of the pilot, the *All In* team delivered education and training on gender equality, respectful relationships, and primary prevention to 16 early childcare centres across regional NSW and metropolitan Sydney.

The GVRN evaluation highlighted the importance of programs like *All In*: “in supporting educators to embed gender equality principles in the early years and the role of early childhood settings in influencing children's understandings of gender roles and stereotypes.”



“ The *All In* program has demonstrated promising potential in promoting gender equality and challenging traditional gender norms and stereotypes within early childhood education settings. The evaluation highlights the program’s success in raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and encouraging gender-equitable practices among early childhood education centres. However, for the program to achieve its full potential, sustained effort, enhanced support, and broader community engagement are essential. Demonstrating the role of early childhood education in preventing GBV requires longitudinal research. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the provided recommendations, the *All In* program can continue to build on its successes and make a lasting impact on gender equality in early childhood education.”

– GVRN Evaluation, UNSW, page 72

POSITIVE FEEDBACK FROM EDUCATORS



INCREASED EDUCATORS' KNOWLEDGE OF GENDER EQUALITY AND PRIMARY PREVENTION

Most participants surveyed reported a positive impact of the project on their knowledge on gender equality, gender-based violence and gender stereotypes, and the influence of First Nations knowledge and practices on early childhood education, with newer staff benefiting the most.

One educator said:

“... before the workshop I thought sex and gender were similar, not very different. The workshop gave me more information, more understanding about gender identity and gender expression, the difference between these two concepts.”

IMPROVED EDUCATORS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ROLE IN PREVENTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

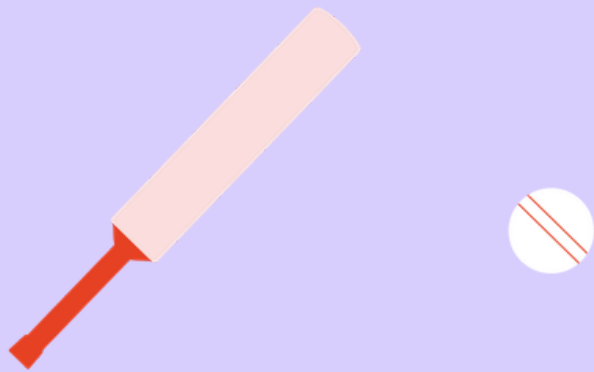
One of our main project aims was to strengthen educators' knowledge of gender inequality and stereotypes as drivers of gender-based violence in Australia. We know that early childhood is a critical life stage for the prevention of violence, as children are discovering and forming their identities and as gender roles become embedded. Therefore, early years education is an important setting for primary prevention work, and educators are key allies in this work.

Encouragingly, the project evaluation found that *All In* helped to solidify educators' understanding of their role in promoting healthy and equal relationships amongst children and how this can also help in the prevention of gender-based violence more broadly.

“Some of the most powerful (parts of the workshops) ... were the statistics shared about gender-based violence ... to then be able to draw that link to early childhood – “So where do we fit in this? What’s our role?” – and reflect on what would have been the norm in the past, the way that we treated boys and girls.”

– Educator





SUPPORTED EDUCATORS TO CHALLENGE THEIR OWN BIASES

Some educators initially held biases or were resistant to parts of the program content. After participating in the *All In* project, directors noted improvements in attitudes towards gender equality and gender stereotypes at their centres. Participants mentioned how *All In* helped them challenge their usual way of thinking regarding gender, especially around language and how it can reinforce gender stereotypes in early childhood education practice.

“Part of development for children is understanding their own gender and what that means to them. [...] we still get the conversations around “only boys can do this”. But the educators feel more confident to say “in our place everyone is invited, it’s a safe space for everyone, girls can do that too, girls can be part of this space too”. So it’s just changing the dialogue and giving boys an understanding that, for everyone, it’s about inclusion.”

– Educator

HELPED TO INTEGRATE LEARNINGS INTO PRACTICE

Project participants reported that they have already or intend in future to integrate the *All In* insights and learnings on gender equality into their practices and interactions with children, colleagues and families. Participants reported that the project equipped them with language and tools to open conversations with children and families on gender equality and challenging stereotypes.

We learnt that centres also implemented changes to their learning environment after the project, including using *All In* resources such as posters and affirmation cards, adding non-gendered resources to play areas, reviewing centre policies to ensure inclusive language and developing scripts for having conversations with children.

“It has brought an awareness to all staff and for me personally it has given me the confidence to challenge gender stereotypes, provide more open discussions with the children and also outside of my work with friends and family.”

– Educator





INCREASED INCLUSIVE PLAY BEHAVIOURS IN CHILDREN

All In was designed with the best interests and safety of children as paramount, therefore our project team did not have direct interactions with children. However, a key objective was to positively influence play behaviours in children through their interactions with educators. The evaluation found that *All In* succeeded in positively influencing some play behaviours and interactions in children, as observed and reported by educators.

“...before the [*All In*] workshop we noticed some of the children will say “if you are not girls you can’t come into this playground area” and things like that...And later on we talked about that and realised, now, not many children have been talking about it anymore. And also they didn’t say “you can’t come in because you are girls” – things like that.”

– Educator

INCREASED EDUCATORS’ CONFIDENCE TO CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES

A key goal was to equip educators with the knowledge, skills and confidence to apply gender equality norms in their practice and to challenge gender inequality and stereotypes within their centres. Survey data shows that the percentage of educators who felt supported by the project “to challenge gender stereotypes and gender inequality” increased from 51% at the start of the project to 78% at the end of the project. As observed by one educator

“We feel more confident to challenge and take action against bias when necessary.”

– Educator

Another educator observed, after using *All In* resource materials:

“When looking at the card with ‘Flynn’ who ‘loves dancing’ and wears a tutu and butterfly wings in his illustration, the children had said that ‘boys don’t dance’. [The Director] was aware that the children had to be challenged so she showed them images of male ballerinas to prove that men and boys do dance. She said the children were very interested in looking at the images on the iPad and she saw that many of them wanted to zoom in on the men’s ballet shoes and tutus.”

Meet our *All In* characters

MEET

Cyan



Cyan is obsessed with superheroes and often goes on adventures with dollies that their dads got them.

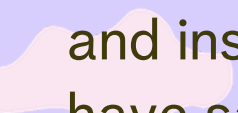
Cyan has many amazing powers. With their imagination, they create bright new worlds full of brilliant characters and exciting stories. Cyan loves having a rainbow family, it's like being part of a whole superhero team! They love to put on shows for their dads and play pretend with their friends.

Our successes





“A little boy came to me and said “Those girls won’t let me play.” So I walked over and said: “Girls, is there a reason why he can’t play?” And one of the girls said: “I just don’t want him to.”



And [before] I would have probably shut it down and instead of questioning that extra bit, I would have said, “Let’s be inclusive, be really kind and let everybody join in, it’s not boy/girl.” But I was kind of pushing a little bit... and I asked, “Can you tell me why specifically you don’t want him to play?” She said “He’s been hitting me. He’s pushing us and I don’t feel safe.” ... So I turned to the little boy and said “Can you hear what the girls are saying? They don’t feel safe. That’s the reason they don’t want you to play. It’s not because of you personally, it’s because of your actions.”...

I believe if I hadn’t done the program and sat with it, I would have said “Everyone must play together. Everyone must be inclusive.”

– Educator

KEY *challenges*

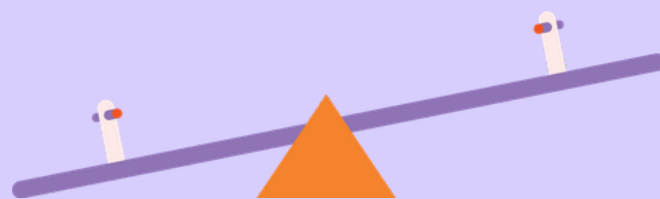
CENTRE RECRUITMENT

The project team embarked on an ambitious plan to recruit centres for the pilot, involving desk research, cold-calling and leveraging networks through partners and communities. However, it became clear that a number of participating centres were already familiar with social justice issues and anti-bias and inclusion work. This meant that like-minded centres had effectively self-selected into the *All In* project and came to it with good self-reported knowledge of key concepts and issues around gender equity, gender-based violence and gender stereotypes.



FLEXIBLE DELIVERY MODELS

Australia's early childhood sector is understaffed and overworked, with high rates of staff turn-over, chronic skill shortages and low pay despite high rates of qualification and huge personal commitment from workforce professionals. In this environment, a project like *All In* can be a significant time and resource commitment for participating centres. Centre recruitment efforts were often hampered by concerns around time commitment, the cost and logistics of pulling educators off the floor and lack of alternative staffing arrangements. Given these challenges, particularly regarding costs, the pilot offered financial incentives to cover overtime or afterhours wages for less-resourced centres to ensure all staff could attend workshops.



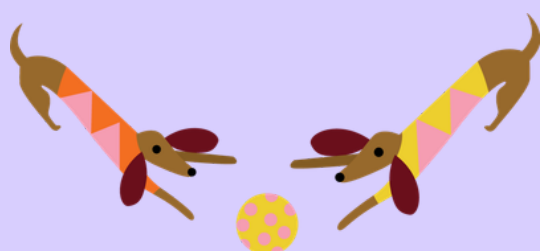
IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT WITH FAMILIES

An ongoing challenge for the pilot project has been engagement with families. Like centres themselves, we found families too time-poor to commit to family specific workshops in the evenings or during the day. Some centres preferred to lead family engagement themselves, which made it difficult to determine the level of involvement and impact of the project on families. We also found that some families were resistant due to a lack of knowledge around gender equality concepts, or their own personal or cultural beliefs around gender equality and inclusion. In a couple of instances both the project staff and centre leadership faced backlash from families who did not want their children interacting with *All In* content even though it was well grounded in EYLF concepts.



ENGAGING WITH OTHER INFLUENTIAL ADULTS

In the pilot phase of *All In*, our primary focus was on educators and centre families as the key stakeholders in this work. Providing accessible and practical resources for these groups were key deliverables of the pilot. However, we know that it genuinely takes a village to raise children. To be effective in this work it is critical to engage with as many influential individuals and groups as possible. In our modern busy lives, grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings and other influential adults often play important roles in caring for children before and after school. UK research has found that even when parents and carers want to raise their children from the early years with principles of gender equality, other family members and influential adults can have more rigid and potentially harmful ideas about gender roles.



RESISTANCE AND BACKLASH

The concept of gender equality can provoke strong feelings because it challenges long-held social norms. Some people benefit from the status quo and others stand to lose power and privilege as gender equality becomes the norm. This is why primary prevention projects like *All In* face resistance and backlash. We acknowledge that often it is early childhood education professionals who are at the forefront of receiving backlash and resistance when doing this work. During the pilot, we learnt from educators who shared multiple examples of how they are already managing resistance from some families on similar issues. This reinforced the need for projects such as *All In* and for people undertaking the work to be prepared to meet and respectfully challenge backlash. The *All In* team undertook significant training provided by prevention experts from Safe and Equal and Our Watch to ensure everyone involved in project delivery was well equipped to support centres to deal with backlash. This was a critical enabler of the work.



Meet our *All In* characters

MEET

Sophia



Sophia had been sick for a while. Now that she is in remission and feeling better, she loves spending time in nature.

Her favourite things to do are hanging out with friends, hula hooping for three minutes nonstop and gardening with her mum. During group time, Sophia loves helping her friends learn their alphabet and numbers so they are all ready for big school.

5 KEY LESSONS FOR FUTURE WORK IN *early childhood settings*

UNSW's evaluation and our design and implementation of the pilot allowed us to capture important learnings for future primary prevention work in early childhood settings.



1

BROADEN THE REACH OF THE WORK

Future iterations of this type of work should develop strategies to engage stakeholders who aren't as familiar with the key concepts and issues, while broadening geographic reach to encompass more culturally, religiously and economically diverse communities to better reflect the makeup of society.

To move the needle on this important issue, work should focus where gender-based violence and primary prevention is poorly understood and/or where communities are inclined to hold more conservative views on gender equality and diversity.

Deeper engagement with First Nations communities requires different approaches and must be designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners and experts. This means developing specific content and identifying locations where First Nations children and families are connecting outside the early childhood education environment, including playgroups, family and community settings, child and family services, and medical services.

2

FLEXIBILITY, PARTICIPATION OPTIONS AND FINANCIAL COMPENSATION FOR CENTRES

The *All In* pilot proved that a flexible approach works best. To scale up the impact and reach of the program we recommend offering a broader range of options to stakeholders to better meet their needs.

This might involve expanding training delivery options to include short online self-directed learning modules and a 'train the trainer' component to build ongoing capacity within centres and ensure new staff are trained when they join. This is particularly important given the high rates of staff turnover in centres.

Financial compensation for participating centres should continue to be offered – the independent evaluation strongly supported this approach and for some centres it was the only way they could engage their staff after hours or on weekends. Not all centres will take up the option, for example local government centres tend not to be able to receive payment due to probity requirements, but for some small independent and not-for-profit services it means the difference between being able to engage, or not.

There are limitless possibilities to engage with sectors and parts of the community not yet reached in the *All In* pilot, including men's/dad's groups, mainstream and LGBTIQ+ parenting support programs, First Nations community groups, playgroups, and training with students studying early childhood education at TAFE or university.





ENGAGEMENT WITH FAMILIES AND OTHER INFLUENTIAL ADULTS

Future work in early childhood settings should consider ways to engage with families with messaging, resources and flexible engagement options.

Projects such as *All In* can play a powerful role in empowering families and other influential adults to take practical actions at home and in the community to challenge gender stereotypes and support children to develop concepts of respect and healthy relationships. Families should be able to easily access evidence-based,

simple information to help them build on the work being undertaken in centres and thereby amplify its impacts.

There are significant opportunities for future prevention work with children in the early years that include exploring new ways of engaging people who may hold either supportive or resistant attitudes to gender equality and respect. This could include audience research which builds on Plan's *Gender Compass* research and the development of communication strategies that speak to individuals in a way that suits their understanding of gender, respectful relationships and equality.

MANAGING BACKLASH AND RESISTANCE

It is well accepted in the primary prevention sector that we are making progress and doing the work robustly when we meet resistance.

We understand there are different levels of understanding and awareness about gender, equality and inclusion, and we're always ready to have conversations, even difficult ones, about the evidence regarding the impacts of stereotypes on children in the early years. These discussions must be undertaken with care, humility, and above all, evidence.

Combining research and robust evidence, workshop content, community of practice peer support, factsheets and coaching, future work with early childhood educators should continue to equip participants with the confidence, language and knowledge to effectively respond to resistance and backlash in their settings. *All In*'s framing, curriculum and content was designed to reinforce the existing Early Years Learning Framework. This helps educators understand that we are supporting them to meet their professional goals rather than introducing a new way of working with children in their care.



5

ENHANCED TRAINING AND CONTINUOUS SUPPORT

Any work targeting prevention in the early years will require comprehensive long-term strategies to engage with centres, families and influential adults.

This work contributes to creating a supportive community more broadly, increasing community literacy around primary prevention and actions that everyone can take to build a safer, more inclusive environment where people of all genders are valued. We developed a number of resources for educators¹⁰ and families¹¹ but there's always more to do in this space.

GVRN's evaluation strongly recommended ongoing training and professional development with educators in the centres which were already engaged in the project. Centre directors also reported they wanted more training on practical actions they can take as active bystanders, allies and champions in their communities against gender-based violence. GVRN also recommended longer term engagement with the centres for impact – the length of the pilot only allowed relatively short engagement with the project team, but this work is relational and transformative and requires trust and reciprocity to be sustainable.

Meet our *All In* characters

MEET

Linh



Linh is energetic, deaf, and can always be found playing sports. After her dad migrated to Australia from Vietnam he fell in love with cricket and passed it on to her.

Linh's favourite time of year is the Lunar New Year. She loves spending time with family, eating lots of food, and having an audience to share her jokes with. Linh always has the loudest personality in the room.

CLOSING *reflections*



In September 2024 as we were finalising the *All In* pilot, the New South Wales government launched *Pathways to Prevention*,¹² its first dedicated Primary Prevention Strategy.

It sets out a vision where place-based programs of prevention are focused across the four high impact settings of local communities, schools and early childhood education, workplaces, and sporting clubs. Ultimately *All In*'s 'whole of centre' model will have the most impact if it is complemented by evidence-based work in other key settings in a place-based, lifelong model. We believe every child should receive consistent messages about respectful relationships, strong cultural identities, and equality, from the early years throughout their educational journey, and into adulthood in workplaces and community settings where we live, work and play.



This vision demands long term commitment by all stakeholders and all parts of our communities. It's ambitious but so is the goal to end gender-based violence in a generation, as outlined in the National Plan to End Violence 2022-2032. No adult wishes for their child to be exposed to harm, discrimination, inequality or disrespect, or to grow up feeling less than others. We all owe it to the next generation to do what we can to make our communities safer. Every child should be able to grow up strong in their identities and be honoured and celebrated for their unique possibilities.

We're deeply proud to have played a small part in testing a new approach to preventing gender-based violence. We are forever grateful to the women who paved the way for us to do this work, to the people who have championed intersectional practice and led approaches to anti-bias in the early childhood and prevention sectors, to those who have shared their culture and traditional ways of knowing, and particularly to the centres and educators that partnered and learnt with us along the way.

WHO WE *collaborated with*

We're deeply grateful to the many people who helped bring the *All In* project to life and nurtured it from its beginning.

- Sharn, Zoe and all the staff at Moore Park Gardens Early Childcare Centre
- The *All In* pilot early childhood education centres
- Beck Feiner
Illustrator, graphic designer and co-inventor of the *All In* characters
- Women, Family and Community Safety team, NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- Stephanie Wallace
- Dr Red Ruby Scarlet
Activist, early childhood teacher-researcher, consultant, academic, anti-bias expert and boundary-pusher

PROJECT REFERENCE GROUP MEMBERS

- Dr Sonya Pearce
(Gooreng Gooreng)
Expert in Aboriginal education
- Samantha McGuffie
Project Lead, Innovation, Our Watch
- Dr George Argyrous
Head, Measurement, Evaluation & Learning, Paul Ramsay Foundation
- Dr Tamsin Angus-Leppan
Evaluation and Impact Manager, WAGEC
- Tanya Burr
Pedagogy expert, curriculum advisor and lecturer in Early Childhood Education, Australian Catholic University (ACU)
- Dr Megan Rose
Cultural Sociologist, UNSW
- Anti Stopic
Early Childhood Education expert
- Marly Greenwood,
Early Learning Family Diversity Training Coordinator, Rainbow Families

WAGEC'S ALL IN TEAM

- Nirvana Chetty
All In Project Manager
- Aunty Priscilla Reid-Loynes
(Gamilaroi Yularoi)
Indigenous Education Consultant and expert, artist, co-creator, facilitator, teacher
- Kowana Welsh
(Dharawal, Gumbaynggirr Gamilaroi)
All In Senior Project Officer
- Claudia Gray
All In Project Coordinator
- Rebecca Cini
Prevention Creative Lead
- Moo Baulch
Director of Primary Prevention
- Aunty Dixie Link-Gordon
(Gooreng Gooreng)
WAGEC's Aunty in Residence and sexual, domestic and family violence expert

PREVIOUS WAGEC EMPLOYEES WHO MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO ALL IN

- Nat Webster
(Gamilaroi)
- Sasha Brown
- Marisol Marquez
- Rachelle Scott
- Helen Silvia Waters

THE EVALUATION TEAM FROM UNSW'S GENDERED VIOLENCE RESEARCH NETWORK

- Professor Jan Breckenridge
- Georgia Lyons
- Mailin Suchtin
- Sally Hanna-Osbourne

THE ALL IN ANIMATED EXPLAINERS PRODUCTION TEAM

- Mike Mascarenas
Animator and illustrator
- Kimberly Engwicht
(Bunjalung)
Illustrator
- Stephanie Wu
Solid Lines Agency
- Paul Rhodes
Music and sound design
- Matt Balane
Primary prevention expert and voiceover
- Aunty Priscilla Reid-Loynes
(Gamilaroi Yularoi)
Voiceover, creative director and script writer
- The Sonar Music team
– especially Josh, Joel, Haylee and Ellie
- The All In team
– Moo, Kowana and Rebecca

APPENDIX

1. Scarlet, R.R, *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood Education*, <https://redrubyscarlet.com.au/the-anti-bias-approach-in-early-childhood-4th-edition>
2. Bian, L, Leslie, S and Cimpian, A 2017, 'Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests', *Science*, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aah6524>
3. Due to time constraints only 12 of the centres participated in the evaluation, another four participated whilst the evaluation data was being finalised
4. Our Watch, *Change the Story*, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/change-the-story-framework>
5. Our Watch, *Changing the Picture*, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/changing-the-picture>
6. ACECQA, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-law-regulations/approved-learning-frameworks>
7. Scarlet, R.R, *The Anti-Bias Approach in Early Childhood Education*, <https://redrubyscarlet.com.au/the-anti-bias-approach-in-early-childhood-4th-edition>
8. Zero Tolerance, 'Early Years Research', <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/early-years-research>
9. Plan International Australia, *Gender Compass*, <https://www.plan.org.au/our-work/gender-compass>
10. All In Educators Resources, <https://allinproject.org.au/educators-resources>
11. All In Families Resources, <https://allinproject.org.au/families-resources>
12. NSW Government, *Pathways to Prevention*, <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/service-providers/supporting-family-domestic-sexual-violence-services/domestic-family-sexual-violence-plans-and-strategies/nsw-strategy-for-the-prevention-of-domestic-family-and-sexual-violence.html>



**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW
NEEDS SUPPORT IN AUSTRALIA CALL
1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732) OR
GO TO WAGEC.ORG.AU**



wagec.org.au



Proudly supported by
NSW Government