



**Meerilinga**<sup>TM</sup>  
promoting positive childhoods



**ANNUAL REPORT  
2015-2016**



*Dr. Anna Alderson*

*Director of Meerilinga 1990-1996*

*Meerilinga Board, CEO and staff express our gratitude and motivation to continue the exemplary work and example of commitment to the teaching profession and young children's education in Western Australia.*

*Rest in Peace.*

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# ABOUT US

## About Meerilinga

Meerilinga is a not-for-profit organisation and registered charity that works to improve the wellbeing of children and families within Western Australia. We provide a range of services to the community including early childhood and industry education, parent and sector support and children's nutrition.

We promote professional excellence in Meerilinga staff and in our early childhood education training to provide the highest quality services for the community. We promote play with purpose to encourage a child's active learning, building the framework for a positive childhood.

Our holistic approach promotes positive childhoods resulting in happy, healthy, resilient children and families.

## Our Vision

To be Western Australia's foremost organisation for children.

## Our Mission

To be outstanding in the development and wellbeing of children and to support their families and community as a local, independent, charitable organisation.



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On behalf of the Board I would like to say thankyou to everyone involved in moving our organisation forward this year, from the invigorated web presence to the feet on the ground at Children's Week and the expanded college, congratulations on a job well done.

With the support of the Board, Meerilinga has invested substantially into future proofing the organisation's Information Technology capabilities, using technology to reduce costly hardware and free up funds for what the organisation prides itself on, making a difference to the lives of children and families around our state.

New technological based solutions such as the 'Community Based Outcome Project', have enabled consistent and coordinated approaches to measurement and evaluation within Meerilinga Parenting Programs resulting in improved outcomes for families.

The College has continued to go from strength to strength with plans to expand classes further in the next financial year. Meerilinga trained graduates continue to be in demand especially our Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students which is a testament to the College's trainers, again, well done.

We have continued to welcome and appreciate the patronage of Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson AC, Governor of Western Australia and look forward to this relationship continuing.

To our sponsors, in particular The Department of Local Government and Communities, The Department of Education, Lotterywest and Healthway, we are grateful for the support you have provided which enables Meerilinga to continue to make a difference in our community.

The year has not been without its challenges but again on behalf of the Board, I applaud CEO Lesley Moreschi and her dedicated staff and volunteers, you have continued to excel and we look forward to working alongside you all again in the coming year.

*Bruno Camarri AM LLB*



# CEO'S MESSAGE

2015- 2016 was another successful year for Meerilinga. We grew our training college and children and family centres activities and advanced 7 key strategic initiatives. This enabled us to improve our services and create better value for clients and stakeholders.

These included;

- Implementing a results based accountability framework
- Implementing a web based case management system
- New website
- Internal process automation
- Services retention
- Early learning program transitioning to Child care and family benefit approved
- Market consolidation and growth for Meerilinga Training College.

Our Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020 identified these seven key elements as critical to achieve over this year to enable Meerilinga to position well for government procurement and partnering over this period, flourish during times of transition and uncertainty and to identify opportunities for growth in revenue and mitigate risk. In this regard while we face uncertainty with continued funding Meerilinga remains in a strong financial and delivery position.

The Executive have worked tirelessly to focus our efforts in 2016 to achieve a better balance of revenue driving services whilst delivering on all contracts with exemplary results.

Led by our long-term vision to improve children's lives, we remain guided by our values and committed to implement our strategies to 'Promote Positive Childhoods'.

While 2017 seems to be a continuation of volatility and a challenging business environment with uncertainty in funding and contracting opportunities we remain optimistic for the Sector and Meerilinga and will continue to lead in children, family and community services.

I extend my appreciation to the Board, staff and volunteers who have all contributed to making 2015 -16 another productive year.

*Lesley Moreschi*



# PARENTING SERVICES

Meerilinga Parenting Services use a 'strengths-based approach' when partnering with families to meet their identified goals. The use of the 'The Family Partnership Model' to build trust, negotiate changes and share problem solving allows families to explore the challenges they are facing in a safe and supportive environment. By focusing on the families personal skills, abilities & knowledge as well as their social support networks we are able to take a holistic approach to meet the needs of individual families and assist them to reach their identified goals.

Meerilinga understands the need to diversify our service to continually meet the needs of our clients. Our 'in home skill building' continues to be the main focus of our service; with extra support being offered via:

- Parenting workshops
- One to one consultation in our family centre
- Supported playgroups
- Outreach services
- Community events.

Meerilinga Parenting Services commitment to meeting the needs and providing optimal support and assistance to families with children aged 0-12 years has resulted in another very positive 12 month period. Our commitment with providing up to date programs, resources and information has recorded positive feedback from the 2015/16 Customer Perception Survey.

Meerilinga parenting staff have a broad range of experience and qualifications and are provided with extensive opportunities to attend professional development courses, both internal and external. This commitment by Meerilinga ensures staff and volunteers are continually enhancing their skills, knowledge and expertise to ensure they can work effectively and confidently with both families in their home and the community.

## ABORIGINAL PARENT SUPPORT SERVICE

Meerilinga has a strong history of success in the provision of working with Aboriginal families and communities. Meerilinga Aboriginal Parenting Support Service (APSS) operates from the Children and Family Centre in Beechboro and has contributed significant support to hundreds of families.

External and internal customer perception reports continue to rate APSS very highly in terms of our ability to meet the needs of aboriginal families. Significant outcomes are focussed to ensure the wellbeing of Aboriginal children with valued and informed parenting.

At the forefront of best practice and research evidence, Meerilinga has built its service practice around fostering strong relationships and building trust and leadership from within the Aboriginal community. This method informs and guides Meerilinga as a community partner.

Meerilinga has worked collaboratively with other services to improve coordination and reduce risk factors that Aboriginal families may experience. Meerilinga has work as an informed and resourced service to best support parents and link them with the broader community.

The work is based on effective, evidence-based strategies for improving outcomes for children through parental support and early intervention. Aboriginal parents are engaged - through a range of strategies - to develop their knowledge, confidence and skills to strengthen their parenting;

Strategies have included:

- Training and professional support for personnel involved in the provision of this service
- Ethical and non-stigmatising practices
- Working from a strengths-base and starting where the parent is at
- Empowering the parents

- Offering prompt initial response (within 48 hours of being referred)
- Offering frequent maintenance of contract.
- Parents commit to goals and time frames in which goals are demonstrated and celebrated.
- Encouraging their children's healthy development
- Following up when there is no response especially families are highly mobile
- Individualising the service
- Promote crisis and other support services
- Accompanying parent/family when introducing new services
- Linking with employment and educational services in the postnatal period

## COMMUNITY BASED OUTCOME PROJECT

The Community Based Outcome Project implemented a web based case management system whilst simultaneously implementing the Results Based Accountability framework within our Meerilinga Parenting Program. The project ran from August 2015 to June 2016 and was funded through a Lotterywest grant and the Fostering Partnership Program with the Department of Finance.

Meerilinga's parenting data was recorded in a variety of systems which accurately captured output data. The need to measure effectively the outcomes our Parenting Programs were delivering was key driver for this project.

The Results-Based Accountability™ (also known as RBA) was implemented into all the Parenting Programs as part of this project. The RBA is a disciplined way of thinking and taking action that services can use to improve the lives of children, youth, families, adults and the community as a whole. Developed by Mark Friedman, the RBA is enhancing Meerilinga's ability to use a data-driven, decision-making process help us measure the difference we are making to families lives.

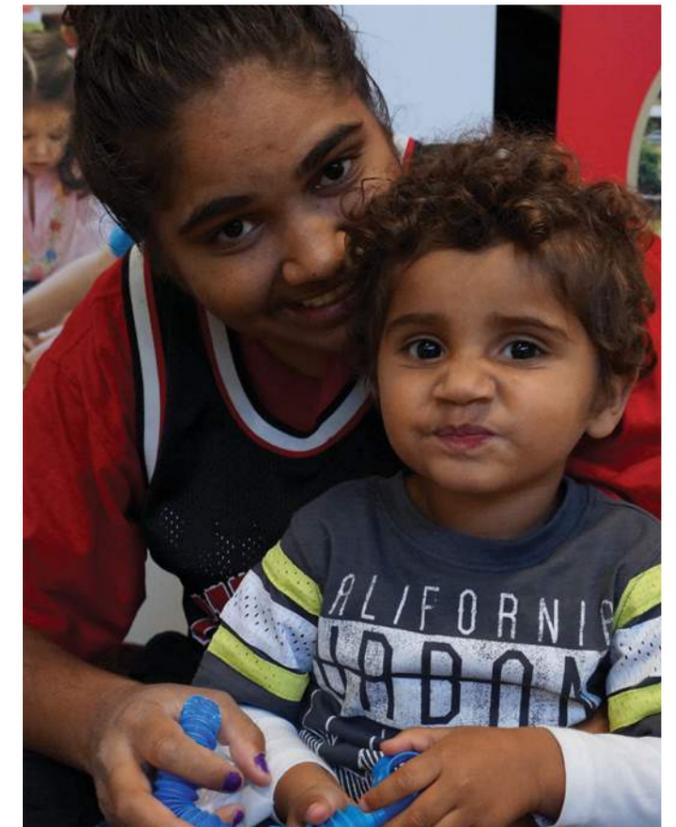
The "Me as a Parent" framework was developed by the Parenting Research Centre in Victoria and implemented into the Meerilinga Parenting Service. It is used throughout Australia and helps us measure the following aspects of parental attitudes:

- how parents feel they manage challenges and solve problems
- the extent to which parents feel they can influence their children's development.

The solution delivered was based on the Microsoft CRM (Customer Relationship Management) tool, integrating seamlessly with other Microsoft products such as email. An external product was used to integrate surveys into the tool as well.

The collaboration between Meerilinga, Department of Local Government and Communities, Linkwest and Satalyst to embed the RBA in the delivery of Meerilinga Parenting Services was a key part of the projects success.

The Community Based Outcome Project has added value to existing mechanisms and capacity, enabling consistent and coordinated approaches to measurement and evaluation within Meerilinga Parenting Programs and will result in improved outcomes for families.



*“This parenting service has allowed me to learn more about my child and our relationship. It has given me the opportunity to understand what is happening to him and why he does the things he does. I believe it has given me the skills to build trusting relationships with my children and given me and my partner the confidence to parent in a positive way.” Parent quote*

**MEERILINGA**



96%

PARENTS SAID THEY OBTAINED USEFUL INFORMATION FROM MEERILINGA PARENTING SERVICE.



85%

PARENTS SAID MEERILINGA PARENTING SERVICE HAD MADE A GOOD DIFFERENCE TO THEIR LIVES.



89%

PARENTS SAID THEY WILL CONTINUE TO USE THE THINGS THEY LEARNT FROM THE SERVICE.



100%

FAMILIES WOULD RECOMMEND MEERILINGA'S SERVICE TO OTHERS.

# TRAINING AND EDUCATION

## MEERILINGA TRAINING COLLEGE

Our college continues to consolidate and ended this financial year achieving substantial growth of 58%. Meerilinga Training College promotes professional excellence in the early childhood education sector by developing educators who inspire children's curiosity and learning.

We are a Registered Training Organisation (6000) with more than 30 years experience in early childhood education and community services. Our expertise and passion for delivering children and family services throughout the community informs our training practice and ensures students receive a unique insight into best practice in the early childhood sector.

The focus of the College remains to train students in the Education and Care Sector through traineeships and classes and to manage all professional development courses throughout Meerilinga.

Audits from the Department of Training and Workforce Development during this financial period have achieved compliance and the Senior Coordinator of Quality continues to drive the compliance of the College, which includes the adherence to the new Registered Training Organisation standards.



## MEERILINGA TRAINING COLLEGE STUDENT SATISFACTION



## DADS IN THE EARLY YEARS

As men increasingly become more involved with raising their children, they are seeking assistance from organisations to successfully navigate this important role in their lives. In 2006 Meerilinga Young Children's Services, with funding from the Department for Local Government and Communities, put together Dads in the Early Years – a set of resources primarily designed to support family service organisations in their work with fathers and father figures.

Dads in the Early Years provides training, information and online resources to WA family services organisations as part of our commitment to capacity-building. Several hundred services staff have participated so far in the full-day professional development training session we run - Working With Dads - as well as shorter information sessions.

### Working with Dads Training

We have taken the Working With Dads session to most of the larger towns around the state and have noticed that - despite some regional and cultural variations - there are fairly common fatherhood-related issues that families and services try to deal with.

These include:

- The need for more flexibility in providing services for dads, particularly at the times and on the days men tend to be more available.
- The importance, for fathers, to be recognised and acknowledged for the roles they play in families, such as providing income, often at the expense of spending time with their families and being 'kept in the loop' by services.
- The need for services to continue to become more welcoming and 'easy to use' for fathers and father figures.
- The recognition that fathers are typically a little different to mothers, such as in parenting styles and in the way they communicate or how they would prefer to be communicated with.
- The relative rarity of dad-oriented services,

such as dedicated playgroups, evening courses, and seminars/discussion sessions.

- Entrenched suspicion of men as caregivers and educators, even though the vast majority are capable, responsible and nurturing with children.

Though direct-to-father service provision is not the main focus of the Dads in the Early Years service, the Playdads playgroup and Circle of Security course provide us with ongoing feedback on what fathers want and need.



# CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Meerilinga Children and Family Services provide programs that are accessible, engaging and supportive of the needs of the community. We aim to improve the outcomes of those who access our services providing a highly efficient service in a safe, friendly, supportive and non-judgemental environment. Staff and volunteers aim to build the confidence of families and subsequently the capacity to manage their own lives.

Organisation and community outcomes reported have been:

- gaining new skills and knowledge.
- individuals have had opportunities for job and career prospects.
- sharing enjoyment and a sense of achievement and fulfilment.
- individuals developed personally and self-esteem improved.
- individuals enjoyed better physical and mental health.
- connecting with and better understanding of community

Families and communities are supported to build on their knowledge, confidence and skills through a range of groups and activities offered at the Centres/Services. These are diverse to meet the local needs of each centre and service.

Through the centres and services we have delivered a range of workshops for families and the community, these include Building Resilience, Asthma Management, Protective Behaviours and Circle of Security to name a few. By providing these workshops it has supported our families to build on their knowledge and given them the necessary skills to manage their own lives.

## HIGH WYCOMBE

During this period we successfully obtained a new Children and Family Centre in High Wycombe. This services is funded by the

Department of Local Government and Communities. Community consultation in the form of qualitative and quantitative research was held with families in the initial phase to determine the needs of the community.

Meerilinga has upgraded the High Wycombe centre with internal and external refurbishments including repainting, garden refresh to encourage children to engage with nature, new furniture, purchase of educational games and toys and the installation of new signage.

The new Children and Family Centre in High Wycombe is progressing well with multiple workshops and services being offered at the Centre and lasting community connections established.

## CONNECTING FAMILIES IN BULLSBROOK

Meerilinga's Bullsbrook Family Support Service works in cooperation with the Bullsbrook community to assist families to develop and maintain relationships with community organisations and other community members.

Family Circle at Lowery Park Bullsbrook meet weekly enabling parents to connect with other families, reducing the risk of social isolation for parents and children. Information is provided about other organisations in their community to assist parents to make informed choices and also to assist with networking, linkages and if applicable referral. This group continues to grow with new families enrolling each term.

The Connecting Families in Bullsbrook works closely with the Bullsbrook College to create awareness of service providers that may be of assistance to parents and linking them to the appropriate support and thereby reducing isolation and improving social inclusion.

## PLAYGROUPS

Our supported playgroups continue to play a significant role in reducing isolation and forming a community link for families to receive additional support and increase their social networks. The playgroups also enable families to receive information regarding not only Meerilinga but community programs, events and activities.

The supported playgroups provide an opportunity for Meerilinga staff to engage with families, provide support and role model positive parenting and play for families who require extra assistance. Information sessions within the playgroups provide parents with relevant and current information on a range of topics including smart steps, toilet training, introducing solids, dental care and nutrition.

Visits from many other organisations such as the Royal Life Saving Society covering topics on water safety and first aid have provided parents with additional support and information to keep their children safe.

## EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM

Meerilinga's Early Learning Programs are guided by the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Standards (NQS). The EYLF is a national framework for children from birth to 5 years.

The framework's vision is for all children to experience play-based learning that is engaging and builds success for life. Educators work in partnerships with families to develop programs that are responsive to children's ideas, interests, strengths and abilities and recognise that children learn through play. By using this framework our Educators will promote children's learning through play by planning stimulating environments and interesting learning experiences to enhance their learning opportunities.

Our Early Learning Programs have been assessed by the Department of Local Government and Communities and have been rated as Exceeding National Quality Standards. We continue to meet these high standards by providing innovative programs and engaging with the community.



# CHILDREN'S WEEK

Children's Week is a national annual event held around the fourth Week of October and aims to recognise the talents, skills, achievements and rights of children and young people under the banner of 'Celebrating Children.'

It is based on the articles expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, emphasising play, wellbeing and protection. 2015 was the 25th anniversary of Australia's signing of the United Nations Charter for the Rights of the Child, and this was recognised and celebrated.

A wide range of community events and activities were organised at national, state and local levels to focus community attention on the needs and the achievements of children and young people. Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation has proudly convened Children's Week in WA for 30 years.

The three major events Meerilinga coordinated for 2015 Children's Week were

- WA Children's Week Awards
- Children's Week official Opening Event and EXPO including Promotional Activities
- Children's Week Art Exhibition at the State Library of Western Australia

The overarching theme of Children's Week is 'Celebrating Children' and the Children's Week Art Awards in 2015 reflected the Right of the Child to Discover.

The WA Children's Week Family Fun Safe Day was held at Whiteman Park on Sunday 25 October 2015 and was enjoyed by an estimated 10,000 participants. The awards launch was held at the Perth Zoo on the 28 October and was attended by

- Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson AO Governor Western Australia.
- Hon Tony Simpson MLA, Minister for Local Government; Community Services; Seniors and Volunteering; Youth

- Hon Peter Collier MLC, Minister for Education; Aboriginal Affairs; Electoral Affairs
- Ms Jenni Perkins, Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Shane Pavlinovich, Sponsorship Director – Healthway



**10 000+**  
People celebrated Children's Week at Whiteman Park



**1200**  
Children participated in the Children's Week Awards



**20 000**  
Rights of the Child posters printed

# WEB DEVELOPMENT



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The new Meerilinga website was launched late last year and continues to adapt our web features for increased service to families as the technology evolves.

The overall design of the website is structured to allow individuals quick and intuitive access to information they require and can be used on multiply devices. We have introduced community room hire bookings, online playgroup membership, an event calendar and increased client contact points. The changes to processes are designed to increase efficiency and provide greater customer service by,

- Assist with statistical recording/reporting
- Allow greater service delivery to our families
- Reduce Finance invoice and receipt production
- Reduced administration

- Allowing families to join a playgroup or customers to book rooms online
- Centre Coordinators receive automatic notifications
- Reduce Centre Coordinators dealing with financial transactions
- Automate generation of Playgroup Attendance Records

# VOLUNTEERING

Meerilinga volunteers continue their important work across all our programs and services including;

- Aboriginal Parenting Support Service
- Parenting
- Early Learning Program - supporting 3 & 4 year old children that require additional support
- Playgroups - examples include: New Migrants, Australian Dads, Parents with Post Natal Depression and Twins playgroups.
- Community Events

Meerilinga continues to support volunteering within our organisation and all costs relating to their role as a volunteer are fully reimbursed. Meerilinga volunteers are coordinated through Senior Coordinators. They attend organisational professional development days and regular training is conducted at their monthly meetings and volunteering meetings. Intensive training is delivered for Family Support workers within the parenting areas.

All Meerilinga volunteers are screened for a National Police clearance and Working with Children Card and all costs are covered by Meerilinga.

We thank the volunteers for their work which is critical across so many aspects of the organisation and have a significant positive impact on the families that we serve.



# FINANCIAL REPORT

This year we focused on positioning Meerilinga strategically to ensure we continue to be well placed to value add to our core business and services to the community. To this end we were successful in acquiring an additional Children and Family Centre, at High Wycombe in Perth's Eastern corridor, which had ceased to operate. Substantial refurbishment of the Centre was undertaken and it is now rapidly becoming an integral part of the local community. During the year a number of strategic projects, identified in the prior year, were undertaken the benefits of which will become evident over the coming year. The year ended with a nominal operating surplus, after the extraordinary expenditure on the strategic projects.

Meerilinga's overall financial position remains sound and our existing capital resources remain sufficient to fund expansion of operations as opportunities arise. All required statutory and compliances have been met for the year.

The 2016-17 Financial Year will be one of challenge for Meerilinga, due to environmental factors such as changes within Government policy in respect of areas of funding, to the sector in which Meerilinga operates. However, we are confident that Meerilinga is well placed to face and overcome the challenges which may be presented

We thank the Department for Local Government and Communities and Lotterywest for their continued support of and significant funding for our various programs and projects.

In addition, the support of all of our partners, stakeholders and friends is greatly appreciated and invaluable to our organisation.

With this continued support the Board of Governors, Executive and staff are confident the year to come and future will prove to be a success for Meerilinga and the community in general.

Our annual financial audit was conducted by Ray Woolley Pty Ltd who verified that the financial reports fulfilled the financial reporting requirements under the Associations Incorporations Act 1987 (WA) and the constitutions of both Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation Inc and Meerilinga Young Children's Services Inc.

**Meerilinga Children and Family Centre Cockburn**

219 Winterfold Road, Coolbellup WA 6163  
9331 2211  
cockburn@meerilinga.org.au

**Meerilinga Children and Family Centre Ballajura**

2 Community Mews, Ballajura WA 6066  
9249 6980  
ballajura@meerilinga.org.au

**Meerilinga Children and Family Centre Beechboro**

106 Amazon Drive, Beechboro WA 6063  
9377 4749  
beechboro@meerilinga.org.au

**Meerilinga Children and Family Centre Kingsley**

48 Peregrine Drive, Kingsley WA 6026  
9309 4174  
kingsley@meerilinga.org.au

**Meerilinga Children and Family Centre Woodvale**

30 Chichester Drive, Woodvale WA 6026  
9309 3462  
woodvale@meerilinga.org.au

**Meerilinga Children and Family Centre High Wycombe**

104 Edney Road, High Wycombe WA 6057  
9454 7198  
highwycombe@meerilinga.org.au

**Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation Inc.**

22 Southport Street  
West Leederville WA 6007  
PO Box 1177 West Leederville 6901  
9489 4022  
mycf@meerilinga.org.au  
[www.meerilinga.org.au](http://www.meerilinga.org.au)  
[www.childrensweekwa.org.au](http://www.childrensweekwa.org.au)