



Meerilinga™
promoting positive childhoods



ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020



Thankyou

Grace Alexander

for your years of support. We wish you a very

Happy 100th Birthday!

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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.



Promoting Play with Purpose

Children are drawn to new and exciting experiences and have an innate ability to decide their own play based on their individual interests. Meerilinga promotes play with purpose by encouraging children to explore their world and create their own unique learning outcomes.

Promoting Positive Childhoods

Meerilinga aims to build the capacity of families and communities to identify and respond to their own needs and develop strategies for healthy and happy childhoods.

Promoting Professional Excellence

Meerilinga is committed to exceeding industry standards in every aspect of our organisation.

This is achieved through a dedication to continuous improvement, best practice approaches and strategic collaborations with other providers.

Promoting Health and Wellbeing

Meerilinga encourages families and communities to prioritise health and wellbeing and recognise the importance of resilience.

Programs, workshops and other resources are made available to support families and communities in developing knowledge and skills in these areas.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Reflecting on this past year, it's humbling to recognise that while Meerilinga has encountered and overcome many obstacles in the past, nothing could have prepared the team for the unprecedented challenges of 2020. I couldn't be prouder to announce that not even a global pandemic could hold back Meerilinga from achieving its goals. The entire organisation, from frontline service staff, to administration support and the Leadership team, is to be commended on their bravery, resilience and commitment to serving the communities in which they operate.

At the start of the 2019-2020 financial year, as a result of the Empowering Communities tender process, Meerilinga was forced to significantly restructure its business operations to ensure the longevity of its services.

And then, COVID-19 struck and significantly impacted the way Meerilinga could provide its services. In a truly sink or swim situation, Meerilinga powered into a technological revolution by installing new processes and digital platforms to ensure that all future services are capable of delivering key outcomes in the "new normal".

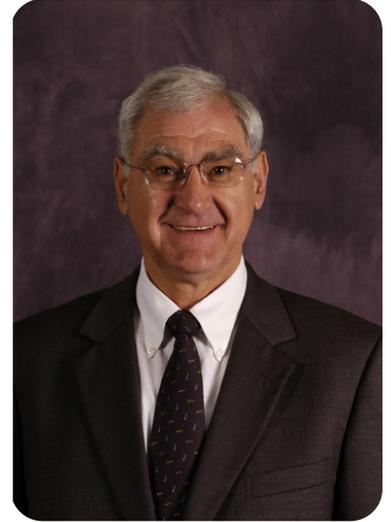
Historically, Meerilinga's objectives have focussed on the goal of promoting positive childhoods in WA. Meerilinga believes that children and their parents must have access to quality education. Meerilinga continues to provide quality and affordable Early Learning Programs at six of its community centres. In addition to these Programs, Meerilinga facilitates over 15 educator supported Playgroups and countless parenting support services for the wider community. These essential services provide a safe place for children to play and learn, a location for families to connect, share information and build their own knowledge on how to best support their child's development.

One exciting event from the year was the Lotterywest grant presentation at Meerilinga's newly acquired centre in Hilton. Meerilinga had successfully applied for a grant of \$270,000 to be utilised in the renovation of the Hilton building. In November, 2019, community members, children and educators from the local primary school, representatives from the City of Fremantle and Lotterywest, all gathered with the Meerilinga team as the Hon. Simone McGurk MLA, presented the grant from Lotterywest. Construction began that November, with completion scheduled for early next financial year.

The first services to be facilitated through the new Hilton building, will be adult education through Meerilinga Training College (MTC). MTC provides students with a local opportunity to study their Certificate III or Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care with a small, quality training organisation. In 2020 & 2021, the Department of Training and Workforce Development announced the Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative. This program allows WA students to complete select courses that have been identified as a high demand for the area, while paying only half the fees. Both the Certificate III and Diploma courses on our scope are listed in these high demand qualifications. What a fantastic opportunity for our students.

Another great opportunity for the State to celebrate, was my favourite time of the year, Children's Week. Children's Week provides the community with the opportunity to highlight and celebrate the skills, talents, views and rights of our children. It's also a great excuse to have some fun! Children's Week in 2019 saw the highest attendance on record for the opening event at Whiteman Park, welcoming more than 12,000 children families to celebrate, play and discover. Thanks to funding from Lotterywest, Healthway, the WA Department of Communities, the WA Department of Education and the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Meerilinga was able to facilitate more than 90 free children's events across the State as part of Children's week.

Finally, I thank members from the Board, David Morrison and Fiona Lander, for their ongoing guidance and commitment to Meerilinga during its most challenging year to date. The Board would like to commend our Chief Executive Officer, Lesley Moreschi, her team and volunteers for their incredible effort in supporting children and families during what has been a health, social, emotional and financial crisis.



Bruno Camarri AM LLB

President

CEO'S MESSAGE

June 2020, marked the end of a financial year that has tested the world. With it came a whole new set of expectations and language. Meerilinga had entered the 2019-20 period re-energised, with clear direction and expectation of great things to come. Like so many others, our small Not For Profit Charity was suddenly thrust into an entirely new uncertainty called COVID-19.

Meerilinga faced multiple new risks to manage and overcome. Foremost in our response: determining the practicality and safety of remaining open for families and staff; investigating working from home options, and; implementing technological solutions to maintain 'business as unusual' by keeping our team and community connected. With detailed risk management plans in place and communicated across the organisation, we were confident in our ability to safely remain open for families working in health, emergency and essential services.

While the last quarter of this period has been incredibly challenging, at every level of our organisations' operation, our team and community have truly risen to the challenge. Displaying resilience, professionalism and the ability to successfully develop new ways to utilise technology, connect and provide services from a distance. The 'new normal' enables the continuation of Meerilinga's services through a variety of digital platforms to support community members to build their knowledge, confidence and skills in managing their lives when dealing with a significant health crisis such as a pandemic. These digital innovations created new opportunities to stay connected, reduce social isolation, identify and support our high risk community members to remain in touch. The messages sent and received between staff, children, families, volunteers and our community groups during this period were truly heartfelt.

There are many lessons that can be learnt from any crisis, and Meerilinga's ability to reflect, adapt and excel is what sets our organisation apart. Our new philosophy of 'business as unusual' is directly related to our ability to continue our services through innovation and a redirection of our commitment to community as we all strive for social interconnectedness. The utilisation of social media platforms have created entirely new connections with hundreds of community members that we have not previously been able to engage. The rapid digitalisation that coursed through our organisation also enabled us to reconsider our current business model, particularly relating to our face-to-face course structure in the training college. Finally, the last to resist going 'paper less' really had no choice, as no paper could be found!

This year has truly been one like no other and I would like to give special mention to local psychologist, Dr Emma DeCicco, who guided our messaging on mental health advice and support for families, children and staff during this challenging time. I would also like to thank our information technology partner, Satalyst, who supported and developed our virtual and digital options.

I extend our continued appreciation to all previous and new financial supporters and government initiatives, sponsors, philanthropists and corporate volunteers for their commitment to West Australian children and acknowledge the Board, Executive, Advisory Team, staff and volunteers who have all contributed to make 2019-20 a very different, yet amazing year. I look forward to working together with you all in the coming year.

Lesley Moreschi
Chief Executive Officer



FINANCIAL REPORT

The attributes of the Meerilinga family that I expounded in the opening comments of last year's report, i.e. dedication, foresight and resolve, have proved to be very much in play over the 2019-2020 financial year and most particularly in the final quarter period.

The entire Meerilinga team displayed incredible resilience as they continued to offer services and programs to families throughout the year, while adhering to regulatory and internal restrictions in place to protect the community against the threat of COVID-19. During this time, Meerilinga was required to harness new technologies and develop new processes in order to deliver services in a new distance model. Several aspects of this technological advancement proved to be very effective, providing the impetus to continue to use and develop this area of service delivery.

Once more, the entire team have met all challenges presented, with determination and an unwavering belief that we would overcome. Consequently, Meerilinga managed to achieve an overall end of year financial surplus.



Meerilinga's 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). This includes both Meerilinga Young Children's Foundation Inc. and Meerilinga Young Children's Services Inc.

We thank the Federal and State Governments for their financial assistance initiatives, and also, the Department of Communities, Lotterywest, Heathway and Department of Education, particularly for their continued support and significant funding contributions to various programmes and projects. In addition, we greatly appreciate the support of all of our partners, stakeholders and friends, as it is invaluable to our organisation.

With this continued support, the Board of Governors, Executive and staff are confident the year ahead will prove to be a success for Meerilinga and the community we serve.

Peter Harper

Executive Manager Finance and Assets

OUR COMMUNITY

STAYING CONNECTED TO VOLUNTEERS

Social connection, a sense of belonging and strong community identity has always been at the core of Meerilinga.

In 2020, it has been crucial to continue to build and nurture social relationships in our services, with our team committed to maintaining these connections with our incredible team of engaged volunteers.

This year we instituted a range of alternative methods to creatively connect with volunteers through virtual spaces. Regular email correspondence allowed our team to engage with our volunteers in an informal and conversational manner and Facebook groups encouraged the link between volunteers and families.

Celebrating National Volunteers Week virtually, our children drew cards and illustrations which were mailed to our volunteers. Their vital work was also acknowledged through Volunteering Australia's initiative "Wave your Appreciation," with parents, children and staff participating in the social media campaign as a vehicle to signify their gratitude.

These active lines of digital communication allowed Meerilinga to maintain a strong sense of community and encourage our volunteers to continue to contribute to the lives of our youngest learners.

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM

During the 2019-2020 period, Meerilinga's Early Learning Programs (ELP) have moved to a higher level of integration, from a co-located to coordinated integrated approach. An integrated model allows the children and families associated with the ELP, to also engage with children and families in the Playgroups, students in Meerilinga Training College (MTC) and other services located onsite.

Some of the practices that support this coordinated approach include:

- ELP children join in with the Playgroups and lead the other children in songs
- Pre-kindy Educators facilitate playgroups alongside families
- MTC students set up Playgroups based on the planned curriculum and engage confidently with Families
- MTC students have their practical placements facilitated through the onsite pre-kindy programs
- Playgroups have a planned approach to the term with learning outcomes identified within the same framework as the pre-kindy and agreed to with in partnership with families.

By implementing a coordinated approach between our Early Learning Program and the MTC, Meerilinga has improved both children's and adult students' learning outcomes, and strengthened relationships between the service and community.

Some of the projects implemented in partnership with the MTC students include:

- Teaching children about sustainability
- Sun safety and the 5 points to stay safe in the sun
- Sneeze and cough program
- Social competency.

These partnerships have delivered greater opportunities for the MTC students, as they have real life job experiences before entering the workforce. It has also increased the ELP children's engagement with diverse cultures and language.

Another significant shift this year, was the creation of location hubs. This involved the merging of our Children and Family centres and outreach programs into regional groupings. With wider access to a



diverse skillset, the teams were about to share knowledge support innovations and responsiveness to local needs and upcoming trends.

Effective integration of Meerilinga's educational programs within children and family centres is built on a sound understanding of the local area, the community and its strengths. Community, school and service leaders play an important role in the success of Meerilinga's educational objectives and collaborative community projects.

Working with local Nyoongar woman and Meerilinga Art Smart program coordinator, Julianne Wade, the community joined together to create a shared painting that represents Meerilinga's working together model across all sites. The painting was passed throughout all seven of Meerilinga's service locations, for children and adults to contribute to. With the completed work representing shared knowledge, skills and connections that support the Meerilinga vision of supporting the development and wellbeing of children, families and community.

A DIGITAL REVOLUTION

In 2020, Meerilinga transitioned from paper to digital documentation through the organisational launch of Early Works. Early Works is an digital planning, programming, curriculum & communications platform that families can access at anytime from their digital device. Early Works enables the team to facilitate a deeper level sharing of observations, analysis of play and demonstrating to families how the intentional teaching (play) experienced in the centres links to learning outcomes and school readiness.

During COVID-19, the Early Learning Programs saw a massive decline in child attendance in the services. The Meerilinga team was determined to remain connected with families from wherever they were isolating, creating private Facebook Groups to engage with children and parents that were not currently attending Playgroups and Early Learning Programs. The additional Facebook groups provided families at home with an opportunity to connect with light hearted posts from the day's activities. Facebook also provides a simple platform for families to engage with and share what their child has been doing at home, and how that links back to the ELP. This proved extremely popular to families and now have the Facebook Groups have more than 360 members. The Facebook Groups continued to share communications with families, long after the services returned to their 'new normal'.

Both of these online platforms have provided families with instant access to their child's observations, assessment, and daily happenings at the service.

A RENEWED FOCUS ON SCHOOL READINESS

School readiness is about the development of the whole child – their social and emotional skills, physical skills, communication skills and cognitive skills. Children cannot thrive at school if they have not developed a variety of basic skills, such as: getting along with other children, following instructions, and communicating their needs.

A high-quality pre-kindergarten curriculum builds a strong holistic foundation for children's development that will support them through their more formal school years.

Meerilinga utilises a balanced approach to teaching and learning, using play-based pedagogy to engage and empower children, and intentional teaching to focus on literacy, numeracy and scientific investigation skill development. Learning occurs through sustained shared thinking, active investigation, listening and responding to children and making learning visible.

Through the Early Learning Program, children are encouraged to wonder, ask questions, and to strive to explore the world around them.

This approach includes strategies to develop effective communication, creativity, problem-solving and thoughtful risk-taking to enable children to become



increasingly independent and confident learners as appropriate.

Meerilinga continues to place a strong importance on providing a rich and vibrant learning environment, which allows fluid transition between indoor and out environments. The nature based outdoor environment is highly valued to extend and develop thinking and investigation skills in all areas of learning. The benefits to each child's health, wellbeing and ability to build self-resilience are promoted through connections created within engaging play spaces.



COMMUNITY ART PROJECT



267

**CHILDREN ENROLLED IN
EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM**



100%

**PARENTS SAID THEY
FELT WELCOME AND
ACKNOWLEDGED BY STAFF
MEMBERS IN THE ELP**



100%

**FAMILIES SAID THEY WERE
SATISFIED WITH THE
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN
EDUCATORS AND THEIR
FAMILY**





87%

FAMILIES FELT SATISFIED OR VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICE



89%

MET PEOPLE THEY COULD TALK TO & ASK FOR HELP IF THEY NEED IT

MEERILINGA FAMILIES MOST APPRECIATED

IDEAS/STRATEGIES

INFORMATION & MATERIALS



STAFF

OPPORTUNITIES TO DISCUSS WITH OTHERS

OTHER





PLAYGROUPS

It takes a village to raise a child. Unfortunately, in an increasingly isolating digital world, compounded by events like the pandemic of 2020, villages have become much harder to find. Families have experienced social isolation like never before, with little companionship and almost no physical support.

Meerilinga Playgroups provide safe places for parents and caregivers to gather with their babies and young children to learn together through play. Meerilinga Playgroups not only provide a range of developmental benefits for children, they also provide an essential lifeline for parents and caregivers. While children play together, they are developing fine and gross motor skills, language and literacy. As they learn to share, co-operate & take turns, their parents are also learning from one another. Bonding over their children as they chat and play encourages parents to learn more about the needs of their children, develop new parenting skills and gain a local social support network of friends who can be the modern-day village when needed.

When families who attend the Playgroups indicate there is an interest or need in a particular topic, Meerilinga works with its network of qualified service providers to offer workshops, presentations, courses and even counselling or support to those in need. During this period, Meerilinga Playgroup families enjoyed visits from: the Child Health Nurse, Heart Beat First Aid, Red Nose Australia, and many more.

Meerilinga Playgroups have always been an environment where the community can be accepted and supported through times of need. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all Meerilinga Playgroups were forced to close to protect the safety of our community. Meerilinga kept in touch with families by email, phone and the creation of location based private Facebook groups. These groups allowed parents to share their experiences at home, remain connected with their friends and gain some inspiration on activities they could do with their children at home. A series of three "Learn & Play at Home" guides were created to support parents with age appropriate activities that would keep them learning through play until it was safe to return.

Once Playgroups reopened, it was evident that carers had desperately missed the contact with each other. Every Playgroup was almost immediately at capacity, with waitlists taken for future vacancies and several new groups established.

Every Playgroup was almost immediately at capacity, with waitlists taken for future vacancies and several new groups established.

While we hope to never see another year like 2020, we look forward to spending one-on-one time with our families in 2020-2021.



630

THE NUMBER OF
PLAYGROUP SESSIONS AT
MEERILINGA CENTRES



1200+

CHILDREN AND CARERS
ATTENDED MEERILINGA
PLAYGROUPS

VOLUNTEERING

Although the Volunteering Program looked a little different towards the end of the year, Volunteers continue to provide essential support to programs and services at Meerilinga.

Meerilinga Volunteers come from all experiences and backgrounds, sourced from the rich communities in which we operate. Meerilinga partners with Volunteering WA and local government Resource Centres, such as the City of Swan Midland Resource Centre, City of Melville and City of Cockburn Resource Centre, to support the recruitment of new volunteers and skills development through volunteer training courses.

Thanks to Volunteering WA, Meerilinga received support through multiple Corporate days. Generous Volunteers from Woodside transformed the gardens and playgrounds and garden areas our Beechboro and Woodvale Children and Family Centres. Along with the enthusiastic team from Deloitte who supported staff with various tasks at five service locations for Annual International Impact Day. These corporate days were supported by the City of Swan, Kennards Hire and Bunnings, who donated materials and resources on the day.

A highlight of the year, was celebrating International Volunteers Day with Meerilinga Volunteers at the Garden party at Government House organised by Volunteering WA. Sadly, there was no opportunity to celebrate National Volunteers Week in person this year. As an alternative, Meerilinga connected with our Volunteers through the Wave Your Appreciation to Volunteers campaign from Volunteering Australia. Meerilinga also sent each volunteer a small gift and voucher to show our appreciation for their commitment to our organisation.

Meerilinga is currently supported by 21 registered Volunteers, with up to 29 Volunteers during the last twelve months. Due to COVID-19, the Volunteering program was paused for three months to ensure the safety of our children, staff and volunteers. As some volunteers are elderly or immunocompromised, they have since re-evaluated their ability to volunteer for the time being.

As an organisation, we are extremely fortunate to have a number of long-serving volunteers who have contributed their time and efforts to our organisation for more than 10 years. One of Meerilinga's past Volunteers, Grace Alexander, recently celebrated her 100th birthday! Grace supported Meerilinga from 1990-1997 and the team were excited to be able to acknowledge her incredible milestone by sending flowers and a card full of birthday wishes from the

Board and staff.

As in all areas of Meerilinga's services, this year has seen a marked change in our Volunteering program. This pause and re-evaluation has only strengthened our relationship with our volunteers, as they return to make a positive difference in our our Early Learning Program, Playgroups and community events.

As always, we thank and commend our Volunteers for their support and for all that they achieve in their community.



CHILDREN'S WEEK

Children's Week is a annual, national event held in October right across Australia. This week is dedicated to celebrating children across our State and highlighting their achievements. It is a time to promote awareness of the United Nations Rights of the Child, established in 1954, and is an opportunity for the community to engage in a variety of activities that facilitate, support and encourage children and their families to play, learn and grow together. Needless to say - it's our favourite time of the year!

In 2019, the National Theme was based around Article 24: Children have the right to good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food and a clean environment so that they will stay healthy. Richer countries should help poorer countries achieve this.

The theme was integrated with the Child's Right to be Safe and Happy and these focuses were considered throughout our planning and implementation of activities.

TARGET AUDIENCE

- Children from birth to 12 years.
- Youth, Parents, Carers and Grandparents 13+ years.

OBJECTIVES

- Celebrate children and the importance of a positive childhood
- Promote the importance of play in early childhood
- Encourage affordable access to the Arts for WA children
- Promote positive health outcomes for children by spreading the Go for 2 & 5 message throughout metro, regional & remote WA
- Empower children and families to make healthier choices with access to healthy food options
- Increase inclusiveness within the community
- Celebrate diversity, safety & health
- Provide free activities and events for families to have fun together while increasing their connection with their community
- Strengthen families by providing free access to informative and relevant community information
- Raise awareness of the Rights of Children

Each year, Meerilinga hosts in excess of 10 free events for Perth families, with more than 85 events hosted throughout the state.

Kicking off with the signature opening event at Whiteman Park, the Go for 2 & 5 Children's Week Family Fun Day provides children and families with a huge range of free activities to enjoy. From inflatable mazes to circus skills workshops, acrobatic trampolining displays and learning about sustainability - there really is something there for everyone. This year, Meerilinga experienced

its busiest year to date, attracting more than 12,000 families to celebrate and play together at the event. Watch a video of the event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sQRxK5eQ4Y>

Equally enjoyable were the seven Puppet Play Days, facilitated by the Spare Parts Puppet Theatre and held in our children and family centres. Once again, these workshops were oversubscribed, with hundreds of children heading to their local centre to use their creativity and imaginations to bring their hand puppets to life.

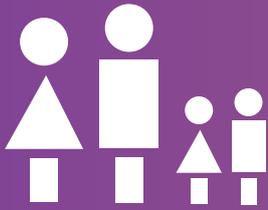
This year, Meerilinga was excited to distribute its largest community grant funding pool, with more than \$60,000 awarded to 70 Regional, Remote and Metro NFP and Local Government organisations to host their own local Children's Week events. All events focused on celebrating the Arts while exploring the child's right to be Healthy, Safe and Happy. Children's Week events stretched from Broome to Albany and inland to the Goldfields - all gathering in unison to celebrate the children of WA.

In 2019, Meerilinga welcomed a new partnership with the WA Maritime Museum. The Museum hosted two separate Children's Week events. Children were invited to visit the As Eye See It photography exhibition, where young people in care expressed themselves through images and words. Followed by a Museum wide family fun day with shark themed craft activities to share information in celebration of the new shark exhibition.

This year's Professional Seminar was once again held in the State Library of WA, welcoming Victoria based parent educators, Parents of Gender Diverse Children to share their views on the topic of gender diversity. A thought provoking presentation encouraging attendees to challenge their habits, understandings and biases, in a presentation surrounding gender diversity and inclusivity in the early years. Educators were empowered to support all children to feel Healthy, Safe & Happy in their care through inclusivity.

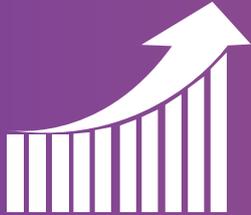
Ending the week, Nature Play WA returned to host the Children's Week Get Out and Play Day in Armadale. The event welcomed hundreds of families to enjoy mud kitchens, a Nature Bingo app and nature crafts with real life Eco Fairies! Attendees said that "it was a worthwhile event, especially with the focus on nature play and mindfulness".

Meerilinga could not have achieved any of these terrific events or outcomes without the generous support of Lotterywest, Healthway promoting the Go for 2 & 5 Message, the WA Department of Communities, the WA Department of Education and the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. Thank you to our sponsors, partners and the WA community for making Children's Week the most wonderful event on our annual calendar.



40 000+

Adults and children celebrated at events during Children's Week in WA

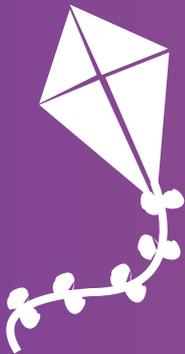


21 460+

Visitors to the WA Children's Week website



Increase in engagement with Social Media events



85+

Children's Week events celebrated across Western Australia



300 000+

People viewed Children's Week events across social media platforms

MAJOR SUPPORTERS:



as convened in WA by



Department of Education



Government of Western Australia
Department of Communities

MINOR SUPPORTERS/PARTNERS:



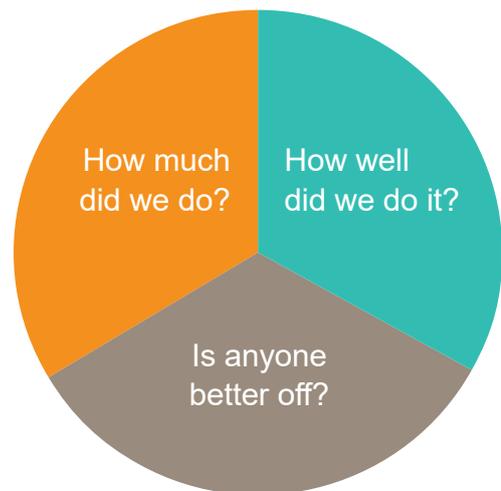
Australian Government
Department of Education,
Skills and Employment

PARENTING SERVICES

Meerilinga continues to be a leader in the provision of high quality parenting services in WA. We use a strengths-based approach, based on The Family Partnership Model, to support parents in their parenting journey and to meet their identified parenting goals.

Meerilinga Parenting Service (MPS), located at Meerilinga Cockburn Children and Family Centre, works with families in the local government areas of East Fremantle, Fremantle and Melville. Over the past year, MPS delivered 14 courses (three sessions or longer in length), 20 information workshops, one ongoing supported playgroup and two ongoing parent support opportunities.

MPS also provided individual support with 25 families, delivering one-on-one support over the 12 month period. In excess of 450 parents have engaged in parenting courses, workshops and individual support. Topics covered in the two-hour information sessions include Playful Parenting, Wellbeing for Mums and Dads, Dads Make A



into Kids, Tuning into Teens, Dads Tuning Into Kids, FAST (Families and Schools Together) and Baby FAST.

Feedback from participants continues to be very positive, with over 95% of people stating they were happy or very happy with the course they attended and would recommend the course or workshop they attended to other people.

At Meerilinga's six Children and Family Centres, Centre Directors work in partnership with service providers to deliver parenting information and programs. Some examples include Circle of Security Parenting courses at Meerilinga High Wycombe in partnership with Communicare, Managing and Guiding Children's Behaviour at High Wycombe facilitated by Communicare, Heartbeat Club at High Wycombe and facilitated by Royal Life Saving Society WA, the FAST program at Beechboro lead by Clan Midland and the delivery of the Sing and Grow program at the Cockburn Centre.

In late March 2020, in response to the rapidly developing COVID-19 pandemic, Meerilinga Parenting Service suspended face to face delivery of parenting workshops and individual support. In early April, MPS commenced delivery of workshops and courses using the online meeting platform Zoom. The first workshop was titled Kids and Anxiety, attracting 20 participants and on April 8 MPS delivered a workshop titled "Meeting the Challenges of Coronavirus, attracting 17 attendees. From April to June 2020, MPS delivered a total of five online parenting courses, 12 online workshops, weekly Parent Support calls and three sessions of Family Fun Time.

Results-Based

Accountability™ (also known as 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. RBA is also used by organisations to improve the performance of their programs. Developed by Mark Friedman, RBA uses a data-driven, decision-making process to help communities and organisations get beyond talking about problems to taking action and making difference.

Difference, Building Resilience, Sweeter Sibling Connections, Helping Holiday Meltdowns, Getting Ready for School and Toddlers and Tantrums.

The parenting team are trained to deliver a range of evidence-based programs including Circle of Security Parenting, Parenting by Connection, Tuning

SOUTH WEST METROPOLITAN PARENTING SERVICE (SWMPS)

The South West Metropolitan Parenting Service (SWPMS) is a partnership between Meerilinga, City of Cockburn and Kwinana Early Years Service (KEYS) and is funded by the Department of Communities. Meerilinga is the lead agency in the partnership. The partnership delivers parenting support, education and information to families with children birth to 18 years, with a focus on Aboriginal families, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse families, fathers and young parents. The partnership aims to assist parents to manage and meet the challenges of parenting by building knowledge, skills and confidence, understanding child development and identifying local community supports and relevant networks.

Across the partnership, the SWMPS team engaged with over 900 parents in the 2019-2020 financial year. SWMPS delivered: 33 parenting programs (three sessions or longer in length) 50 information sessions; 18 term-by-term groups such as: My Time, Sing and Play, Parent Circle and Willagee Community Playtime; three professional development sessions for educators working in Education and Care services and primary schools and one event for parents. SWMPS co-facilitated and/or participated in more than six community activities and workshops including: First Aid for parents, Cockburn Family Dance, Teddy Bears Picnic and Children's Week Family Fun Day. Feedback from participants indicates a very high satisfaction rate with over 95% stating they are very happy or happy with the course they attended and are happy to recommend the service and courses to other parents. Parents indicate an increase in parenting confidence following their participation in SWMPS services.

The SWMPS partner agencies continue to develop and maintain connections with other agencies working in the region and more broadly with services that strengthen and enhance our work with families and community. SWPMS work closely with local government authorities, agencies, local schools and community groups. SWPMS also participate in a range of networks and forums such as the Family Support Networks, Early Years networks in Kwinana, Rockingham and Cockburn and key community projects such as Connecting Community For Kids and Paint Kwinana REaD. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the partnership suspended face to face delivery to parents and moved to online deliver from April to end of June 2020. In that time, SWPMS facilitated 24 workshops and courses online, supporting in excess of 400 parents through a crisis.



PARENTING SUPPORT THROUGH 1 MINUTE VIDEO SERIES



MEERILINGA PARENTING TEAM COLLABORATING ON THE CO-OPERATIVE CROSS LOCATION COMMUNITY ART PROJECT



THE SOUTH WEST METROPOLITAN PARENTING TEAM IN DECEMBER 2019

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Meerilinga continues to maintain a strong working and supportive relationship with Aboriginal families and community. Feedback from community indicates our service provision to be very effective in supporting families and meeting their needs.

A key milestone in Meerilinga's work with and commitment to Aboriginal families has been the development of Meerilinga's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The RAP was developed through a consultative process both internally with Meerilinga staff, students and volunteers and externally with community, families and service providers. The RAP was endorsed by the CEO and Meerilinga Board in September 2017.

A key focus for 2019-2020 has been to engage in further reflection of the RAP and to ensure that all parts of our organisation understand and are engaged with our RAP. Meerilinga maintains a strong commitment to reconciliation and cultural inclusion and each year the RAP is reviewed to ensure that actions have been completed or there is a plan in place to continue working on actions. In 2019-2020, Meerilinga extended the scope of some actions and added a variety of new actions to be completed over the next 12 to 18 months.

In partnership with local community organisations, like Otitis Media Group, also known as Earbus Foundation, to provide free ear health screens for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in Meerilinga services. Collaboration with this service provider not only supports Meerilinga's vulnerable communities with their ear hygiene, but also helps the Earbus group to achieve their operational objectives.

Meerilinga continues to work with Aboriginal families and community through the continuing coordination and delivery of Kadadjiny Waabiny (Thinking, Learning Listening Playtime). This group runs each school term at Meerilinga's Children and Family Centre in Beechboro. This service is a partnership between Meerilinga and Ngala's Ngalang Moort Ngalang Kurlangah (Our Family, Our Children). Over Term 3 and 4 of 2019 and Term 1 of 2020, 16 families and 18 children were registered and attended the playgroup, with most families having attended for years. Transport has been provided by Ngala to support families to attend. The focus of the program is play with purpose, building cultural knowledge in families and enhancing parent child relationships and school readiness for both children and parents. Feedback from families indicates

both children and adults enjoy attending Kadadjiny Waabiny.

Meerilinga also coordinates the delivery of a Maori focused playgroup, Kura Kohungahunga, at Meerilinga Ballajura Children and Family Centre. Over the 2019-2020 period, six families and eight children attended the playgroup.

In the spirit of Reconciliation, Meerilinga's six family centres celebrated NAIDOC Week in July and National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day in August. Each centre celebrates in unique ways, coordinating events and activities that best engage with their community. Common across all activities and celebrations, was role modelling and embedding the principles of Reconciliation.

In late March 2020, Kadadjiny Waabiny and Kura Kohungahunga were suspended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Cultural Engagement and Liaison Officer (CELO) maintained weekly contact via phone, text or email, with families enrolled in both playgroups to ensure they remained connected with Meerilinga and one another. We encouraged families to stay connected by joining Meerilinga's closed Facebook groups that were established for each Children and Family Centre. We also encouraged families to connect with Playgroup WA's Facebook initiative - Playgroup at Home WA.

Other priorities that have been completed are:

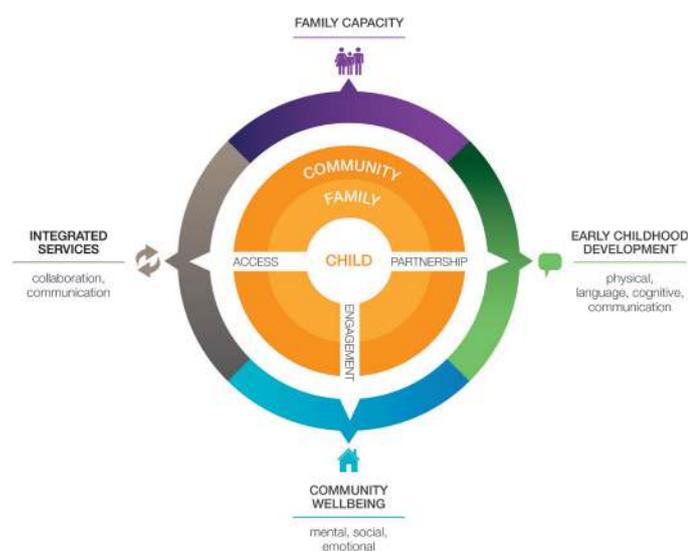
- Translation of Meerilinga's 'Children's Acknowledgment of Country' into Noongar. This has been approved and endorsed by our Elders Reference Group.
- Yarning Circle / Mat sessions run throughout each centre to stimulate conversations and learning with our children
- Best Practice Guide linked to EYLF and QIP

The development of the RAP has been a significant achievement for Meerilinga and provides further evidence of our ongoing commitment to work with and alongside Aboriginal families and community.



CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

In 2019-2020, the vibrant Meerilinga Children and Family Centre network continues to grow. Late last year Meerilinga, in partnership with the City of Fremantle, acquired an old building in Rennie Street Hilton, previously funded and used for Aboriginal Early Years Programs. Meerilinga got straight to work, partnering with Volunteering WA to get a team of Woodside volunteers to began tidying up the grounds. Supported by funding from Lotterywest, Meerilinga was the able to plan and implement a complete renovation of the dilapidated building to make it fit for facilitating child, parent and community



services in the near future. Local adult students from Meerilinga Training College will be the first service users once the newly renovated building is complete.

The Hilton centre adds a vibrant new service location to the six existing Children and Family Centres situated in Ballajura, Beechboro, High Wycombe, Cockburn, Kingsley and Woodvale, and the outreach service Connecting Families in Bullsbrook. Safe and welcoming environments for children, parents and the wider community to connect and belong, Meerilinga Children and Family Centres continue to operate through a child centric integrated model. This model is based on the knowledge that: each community is unique; that families may need support to identify and access services; healthy partnerships with service providers strengthens service outcomes, and; we work in partnership with families and the community.

Consulting and collaborating with community groups, local government and service providers,

Meerilinga Centres provide a place to connect families, provide information and resources, and offer educational services to children and adults. This collaboration helps to identify community needs and supports the delivery of relevant, responsive services, while minimising barriers to access. From this information, Meerilinga is able to partner with relevant agencies to provide individualised services that are engaging, easily accessible and supportive to families. Services currently delivered through the centres include: educator facilitated child and parent educational activities (playgroups); affordable children’s pre-kindy programs; free and low-cost parenting programs, workshops and presentations; community events and school holiday activities; life and practical skills development activities for adults.

Overall outcomes for the Services are:

- Parents develop their knowledge, confidence and skills to improve their parenting.
- Individuals and families build on their knowledge, confidence and skills to efficiently manage their own lives.
- Individuals and families increase their participation in the community and have the opportunity to build on – or are linked to – community support networks and other community resources.
- Relationships are established and maintained with child health services or relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services, education services and the school community.

In order to achieve these Service Level Outcomes, Meerilinga collaborates with local service providers such as: Communicare, Anglicare, Nglala, Meerilinga Parenting Service, to deliver a range of workshops, presentations and courses that support the community to build on their knowledge, confidence and skills. During this period, Meerilinga has partnered with: Royal Life Saving Society of WA to provide Heart Beat First Aid workshops; Meerilinga Parenting Service to provide a Toilet Training presentation; Red Nose Australia to facilitate SIDS Safe Sleeping workshops; Foodbank WA to promote healthy diets through Food Sensations courses; CLAN Midland to host a term based FAST program, and; the list goes on. During 2019-2020, Meerilinga centres hosted more than 50 informative workshops, reaching over 1000 community members.

By attending these, often free, workshops, the Meerilinga community is able to build on their knowledge, improve their parenting confidence and acquire the necessary skills to manage their own lives effectively. Not only providing places to learn, the centres also offer a safe place to build social support networks in their community. Meerilinga centres are home to a wide range of co-located services. These services are often small local services, social and religious groups that support their individual communities in unique ways. Further assisting centre users to build their knowledge, confidence and life skills.

From 2019-2020, Meerilinga housed: craft groups such as Stampassion; singing classes through Perth Singing Academy; mental health advocates Brake the Psychol; Kumon Tutoring services; senior groups Friendship Cafe & Cuppachinos; German Playgroup; Speech Pathologists; Child Psychologists; Child Health Nurses and more. Each group uniquely supports their communities to form friendships and achieve their goals.

During the last 12 months, there have been more than 150 organised events hosted by Meerilinga and open to the community. These events have welcomed the participation of tens of thousands of community members, with more than 170,000 people viewing the events on Facebook alone.

The Department will continue to progress with the divestment of Department of Communities owned or leased neighbourhood and family centres and child care centres. Through the Empowering Communities tender process, Meerilinga was successful in securing service contracts through High Wycombe and Bullsbrook. All other existing service agreements extended to 30 June 2021. Negotiations are in place with the local governments in our remaining communities to allow Meerilinga to retain the buildings with a new contract and continue offering a wide variety of community determined services long into the future.

CONNECTING FAMILIES IN BULLSBROOK

Connecting Families in Bullsbrook is a valued outreach service. Under its new funding model, Empowering Communities, the program provides tailored services to families. Connecting Families has a dedicated Service Coordinator who works in consultation with families and the local community. These services empower and equip families to face everyday challenges. This highly mobile service facilitates activities in a range of Bullsbrook venues.

Including:

- Family Circle group, (Mondays 10am -12pm at Lowery Park Hall).
- Mums, Bubs & Tots Playtime, (Wednesdays 10am – 12pm at Ethel Warren Community Centre).
- Bullsbrook Babies (Wednesdays 10am – 12pm at Ethel Warren Community Centre).

The Bullsbrook programs allow parents to connect with other families in their neighbourhood and gather information about support agencies, access to workshops, local events, and general community information.

All Playgroups continue to be well attended, with 70 families registered in the 2019-2020 period. The babies groups in particular experienced a boost in numbers, following an increase in Bullsbrook births over the past 12 months. In partnership with the local child health nurse's bi-monthly Early Parenting groups, the Mums, Bubs & Tots Playtime was so heavily attended by new mothers, that a second Playgroup was established to welcome the overflow. In late 2019, we introduced the new Bullsbrook Babies Playgroup, which is already at capacity.

Meerilinga continues to strengthen partnerships with the City of Swan community development officer and the Ethel Warren Community Centre Rural place manager. These connections allow us to secure venues at a low rate or free, providing safe and accessible spaces for community events. The Bullsbrook service, in partnership with City of Swan and a variety of other local service providers, has delivered a variety of events and workshops in the last 12 months reaching over 400 participants. These included: Bullsbrook Community Movie night; the Go for 2 & 5 Children's Week Puppet Play Day with Spare Parts Puppet Theatre; Bullsbrook Bring & Swap (pop-up Op Shop) with CLAN Midland, Bullseye Youth Centre and the City of Swan; a youth cup cake decorating activity; Food Sensations cooking workshop with Foodbank WA; a Heartbeats First Aid toddler drowning prevention presentation from Royal Lifesaving Society WA; and Play in the Park, a four-week activity to reconnect with community following the COVID-19 lockdown period.

If anything, this year has shown us the strength of the Bullsbrook community. Supporting one another through life's big excitements and challenges and forging a strong community network than ever before. It's been a privilege to be a part of it.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

MEERILINGA TRAINING COLLEGE

After 35 years, Meerilinga Training College (MTC) continues to deliver quality training to students in the early childhood sector. Through the West Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD) and their Future Skills WA program, MTC is funded to deliver CHC50113 Diploma and CHC30113 Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care.

In January 2020, the DTWD announced the Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative. Through this initiative, students are able to access a selection of priority courses and pay half price student fees. This had led to an increased interest in the course, resulting in higher numbers of enrolments. During the 2019-2020 financial year, Meerilinga Training College enrolled 113 new students in the Certificate III & Diploma courses.

With the interests of current students paramount, the global crisis caused by the pandemic forced Australia's higher education sector to consider new models of course delivery. As industry leaders, Meerilinga responded by using challenges presented by (COVID-19) as a watershed moment for transformative change in course delivery.

The adaptability of our training team was clearly evident, as trainers embraced the challenge to provide distance education effectively, through the introduction of a virtual classroom. Trainers have successfully segued into the digital world, and over the last few months, students have enjoyed blended learning along with all of the possibilities it provides.

The combination of virtual classrooms with online interactive learning and face-to-face classes, has given trainers and students flexibility a great way to engage and interact with each other.

This model facilitated the commencement of new classes at Hilton and Ballajura in April, with students returning to face to face classes during third term. Hilton students were welcomed as the inaugural class at Meerilinga newly renovated Hilton Children and Family centre.

MTC remains committed to supporting our diverse cohort of students with differing needs and abilities.



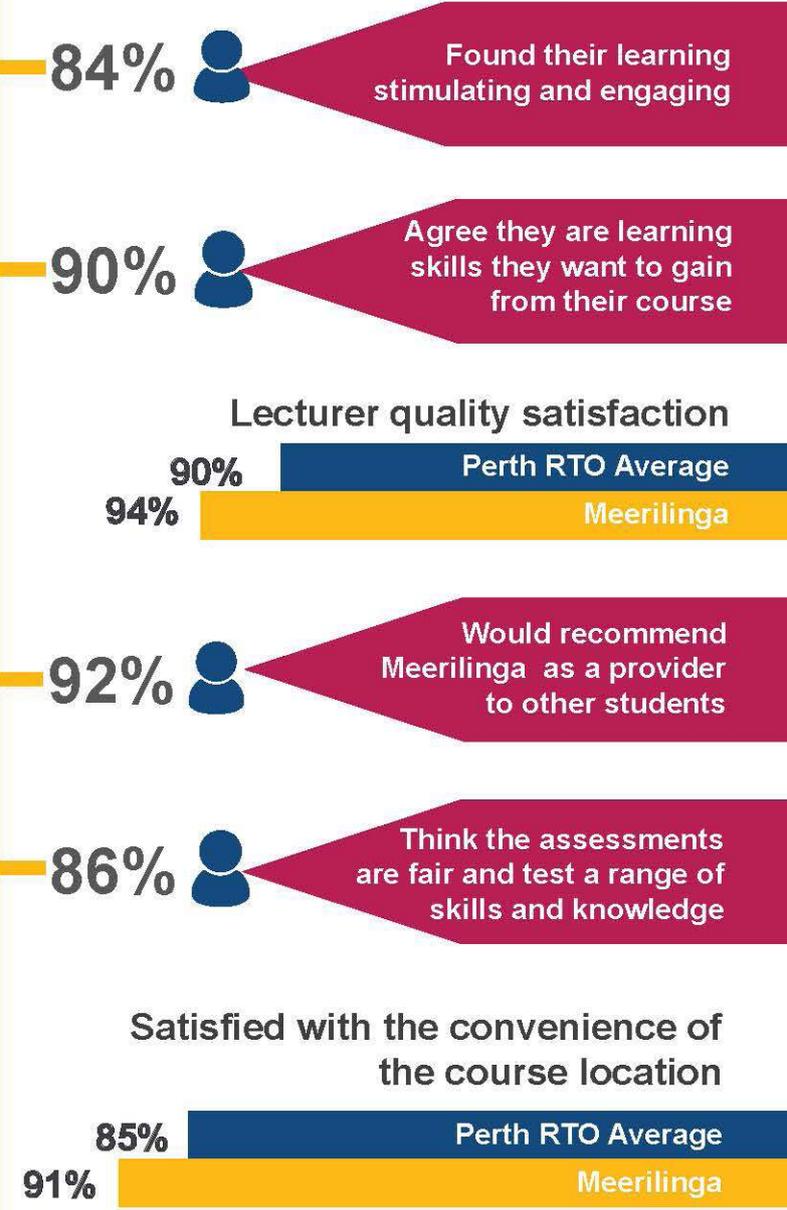
MEERILINGATRainingCOLLEGE STUDENT SATISFACTION





Meerilinga Training College

Student Satisfaction Survey 2019



"As a mother, I have found the course structure extremely helpful. The hours work well with the school day"



"I really enjoyed the practical placement. It was good to apply the theory I learnt in class to a real classroom"



To ensure every success for each student, MTC offers teaching and academic support tailored specifically for their learning.

In 2021, MTC will continue this digital approach and further expand Meerilinga's delivery of training excellence. In the new year, courses will offer blended virtual and face to face learning experiences, with 'hands on' in service instruction within our suburban Children and Family Centres. This model realizes Meerilinga's vision of a holistic and truly integrated approach to education services.

Through the integration of MTC and Meerilinga's Children and Family Centres, theory-based participation classes are enhanced by opportunities for students to spend time in service. Interacting with the children and engaging in 'value added' experiences, in addition to compulsory placement attendance for assessment purposes. Such experiences could include: ongoing sustainability projects, setting up environments to facilitate play experiences, completion of health and safety checklists management plans, and participation in celebrations such as Harmony Day, National Simultaneous story time, Children's Week and NAIDOC.

Students aren't the only ones who benefit from this new integration services model. Students bring innovative ideas, enthusiasm and energy into the children's program and embrace the opportunity to practice their newfound skills in delivering to the children. The children engage in a variety of learning experiences with students and benefit from the increased adult to child ratio.

Educators and trainers foster mutually respectfully relationships and share the process of supervising, guiding and mentoring students. Experienced trainers are a valuable resource available to support and mentor educators whilst educators are duly positioned to identify and communicate industry needs and demonstrate the physical applications of best practice.

This unique opportunity for students to actively engage in Meerilinga's Early Learning Program offers students an insight into industry best practices, and a positive start to their career path. Recognised as a preferred training provider, Meerilinga continues to graduate highly skilled, quality educators who are industry ready.

Meerilinga trainers and assessors support the integrated service model and facilitate opportunities to share knowledge and collaborate on best practice whilst contributing to Meerilinga's culture of ongoing professional learning.



CLOSE KNIT COMMUNITY



LEARNING ABOUT CULTURAL DIVERSITY



USING CREATIVITY TO INSPIRE YOUNG IMAGINATIONS

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