

Improving gender equity in early childhood centres: how a local program works to prevent violence against women

One in three Australian women will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime, but we know that violence against women is preventable.

Rigid gender roles and stereotypes are one of the underlying drivers of gender inequality that leads to violence against women. This means women and men are limited to the stereotypical roles, behaviours, activities and interests that are expected of their gender.

Children as young as two or three years old start to learn and identify gender roles and stereotypes. If we challenge gendered stereotypes and roles in the early years, then those beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that drive violence against women are less likely to develop.

Early childhood educators have an important role in helping to shape children's understanding of gender and roles, and to create an environment where children are not restricted by their gender.

Access Health and Community (AccessHC) is working with 8 early childhood centres across the cities of Boroondara and Manningham to implement a gender equity program called Free to Be Me (F2BM). The program aims to create an environment where children can grow up to be whoever they are, without the restrictions of gender stereotypes.

Early childhood centres are already doing a lot of good work in this space. The F2BM program is about helping to capture and promote that great work as well as identify areas for improvement.



We support each centre to complete a series of 5 resources. The resources provide a snapshot of their policies, practices, language use and the learning opportunities they provide the children.

The results of the resources will be used to create an action plan – this is where we plan what practical changes they want to make and how we are going to promote the good work they have already done.

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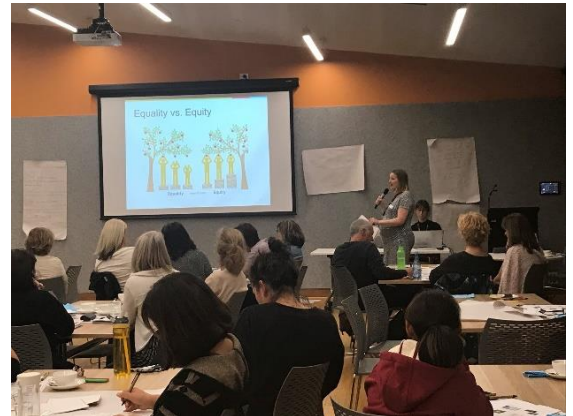
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We also provide gender equity training, which is an important part of the program. The training will help educators understand how gender equity in the early years works towards the prevention of violence against women. It is also a good opportunity for educators across different centres to learn from each other by sharing stories and experiences.

We are working with 82 educators and reaching 391 children attending these centres. Educators have told us the program helps them to have conversations and reflect on their own practices.

“We have been applying more of a gender lens to our practice and it is something everyone is more mindful of. Language is something which has been a challenge for us.”

“I think many educators are coming on board and starting to really think and explore the topic. We had a great discussion at our last staff meeting.”



F2BM will support early childhood centres to:

- Deliver more gender equitable programs through play, spaces, language and toys.
- Consider gender equity principles across all learning activities.
- Develop a culture and environment that promotes equity and diversity.
- Involve children in creating an equitable future that is free from violence.

For more information about the Free to Be Me program and resources contact us at health.promotion@accesshc.org.au or call 9810 3000.