
Communities for Children Bendigo



Gender Equity in the Early Years **Forum** **November 2018**



Report

Background and Rationale

During 2017-2018 the *Communities for Children (C4C) Early Years Family Violence Project* partnered to develop and produce a unique resource called *Rainbow Fox: Gender Equity in the Early Years Resource Kit*.^{*} This picture book and its complementary resources were developed as part of the implementation of the C4C Early Years Family Violence Action Plan for Bendigo, 2016*.

Addressing the first 2 action areas of this Action Plan; Hearing Children's Voices, and Primary Prevention, it is intended that the Kit will be an education and literacy tool to support early years educators to consider how they are creating gender equitable learning environments and engaging in primary prevention work with the inclusion of children's voices. The aim of the Resource was also to create opportunities for conversations with children, parents as well as the early years sector to talk about primary prevention, gender equity, and respectful relationships.

An important aspect of the project was to ensure this Resource Kit was utilised in the way it was intended; an active primary prevention tool used by educators and other early years workers. We therefore needed to provide context for the Resource Kit through educating early years providers in the importance of gender equality in addressing the key drivers of family violence.

To do this it was decided that hosting a community education forum for early years educators and workers would be a good way to start the conversation around gender equity in the early years. A forum would also provide an opportunity to create linkages between the early years, community services and family violence sectors. We would also be able to officially launch the *Rainbow Fox Gender Equity in the Early Years Resource Kit*.

Gender Equity in the Early Years: Why Is It Important?

Creating gender equity plays a significant role in preventing violence against women and children. Early childhood educators have an important part to play in modelling equal and respectful relationships; through curriculum, learning environments and interactions with children. The early years are a critical time when children's notions of gender roles are shaped and the foundations for respectful play, friendships and relationships are established. Rigid stereotypes, attitudes and beliefs about gender are formed at a young age, which can limit and influence children's aspirations, potential and relationships.

Addressing gender equity in early years settings and challenging harmful gender stereotypes will have a long lasting, positive impact on the prevalence of violence against women across the whole community.

Forum Overview

The aim of the forum was to bring early years educators/workers together to start the conversation about why this topic is so important and to highlight the powerful role the sector has in supporting primary prevention and in creating foundations for learning that are respectful and promote positive gender norms.

By the end of the Forum we hoped the participants would have:

- an increased understanding of why gender equity is important in the early years
- an increased understanding about the link between gender inequity and family violence
- learnt about practical ways to support gender equity in early years settings
- first to access our *Rainbow Fox Gender Equity in the Early Years Resource Kit*

We planned and hosted a two (2) hour evening session where we heard from key note speakers with expertise in Family Violence prevention and gender equity, a panel of workers in the field, promoted practical resources, and showcased gender equity intentional play-spaces.

The format of the forum followed the following topics and speakers:

- *Welcome/ set the scene* – Naarah C4C Bendigo (MC for the night)
- *Gender Equity Coalition* – hearing about other gender equity work happening in Greater Bendigo – Vicky Mason CoGB
- *The link between gender and violence*: Overview of the link between gender inequity and family violence and why gender equity is important in the early years. Robyn Trainor, General Manager Centre for Non Violence (CNV)
- *Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years: A Resource for Local Government* Overview of the project, how it was developed and how it can be used - Disa Linden-Perlis and Teneille Summers – Darebin City Council
- *Rainbow Fox Gender Equity Resource Kit – Official Launch* -Naarah
Including the viewing of The Making of Rainbow Fox Video and the reading of Rainbow Fox
- *Panel Discussion*
 1. Belinda Shultz (Shine Bright EYM): *what do you see as the potential challenges and opportunities for early learning centres adopting a gender equity lens?*
 2. Robyn Trainor (CNV): *please share your reflections on the role of early years educators in challenging gender stereotypes?*
 3. Teneille Summers (Darebin City Council): *If an early years centre, educator or service was to embark on this work what are some key pieces of advice that you would give them?*
- *Gender Equitable Intentional Play Spaces* - three themes where on display (Displays provided by Linda Lynch C4C Supported Playgroup Coordinator based at BCHS)
 1. *Transport Theme*
Boy: Car Mat with Cars
Gender Equality: Train set on fake turf with people and animals
 2. *Picnic Set*
Girl: Pink High Tea Theme
Gender Equality: Picnic Mat on fake turf with Picnic Foods
 3. *Imaginary Play with Dolls*
Girl: Pink Themed with girl dolls
Gender Equality: gender neutral baby accessories with red doll's buggy
- *St Luke's Innovative Resources* – provided a stall to promote tools and products and opportunity for participants to purchase the Kit on the night.

The forum was based on a format that would allow maximum opportunity for early years workers to attend, given this, the event was held afterhours, mid-week, with a 5.30pm super and was at no cost to participants, and held in a large comfortable venue with ample parking. Inspiration was taken from a workshop on Unconscious Bias hosted by the City of Greater Bendigo that was well attended by the Early Years sector earlier in the year. Gender Equity was highlighted as an area of interest in the post forum review for that workshop.

The C4C Bendigo initiative is a collaboration of multiple agencies across Bendigo. For this project specifically, the Centre for Non-Violence (CNV), City of Greater Bendigo (CoGB) and Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS) directly helped plan, develop, set up/pack up, and participated in the event. On the night we also had two workers from the Darebin Shire Council as guest speakers, and the EY Manager at Shine Bright EYM as a guest panelist. The collaboration was informed by a mutual focus of the importance of supporting gender equity in the early years as a primary prevention strategy. Each agency had a priority for the forum and roles and responsibilities of the event.

The City of Greater Bendigo provided the venue and catering and C4C Bendigo received a community grant that went towards the purchase of a full Rainbow Fox GE in the EY Resource Kit for every local Kindergarten/Early Learning Centre, provision of 20 copies of the resource developed by Darebin City Council, and the purchase of a set of gender equality focussed children books (n=15) to be available on the evening (and for future use).

Reflections and Learnings

The forum was very well received and we had a really positive response to the event. We had to cap the registrations at 100, with 75 people attending on the night. It brought together 75 early years educators, school and family service representatives, counsellors and interested parents, who otherwise would not have access to this information. Holding the session of an evening meant early years educators could attend. A beautiful food spread provided by the Bendigo Tennis Centre was also noted as a welcome treat.

The format of the evening worked really well. It wasn't too content heavy and there were opportunities for questions along with interactive activities. People seemed to be listening and watching intently and were engaged. There was enough diversity in the format to meet the needs of the participants and feedback suggested they particularly appreciated the interactive small group activities and networking opportunities. It would have been good to be able to explore curiosities people had with the play spaces, but we couldn't have gone any longer than we did (2hrs) as there was a lot to fit in.

Practical and accessible resources (including a teaching resource) were also provided to the participants and all Early Learning Centres in Bendigo which was recognised as highly beneficial and helpful for when they go back to their work environment. We were also able to provide reference to other resources, activities and programs relating to gender equity in the early years.

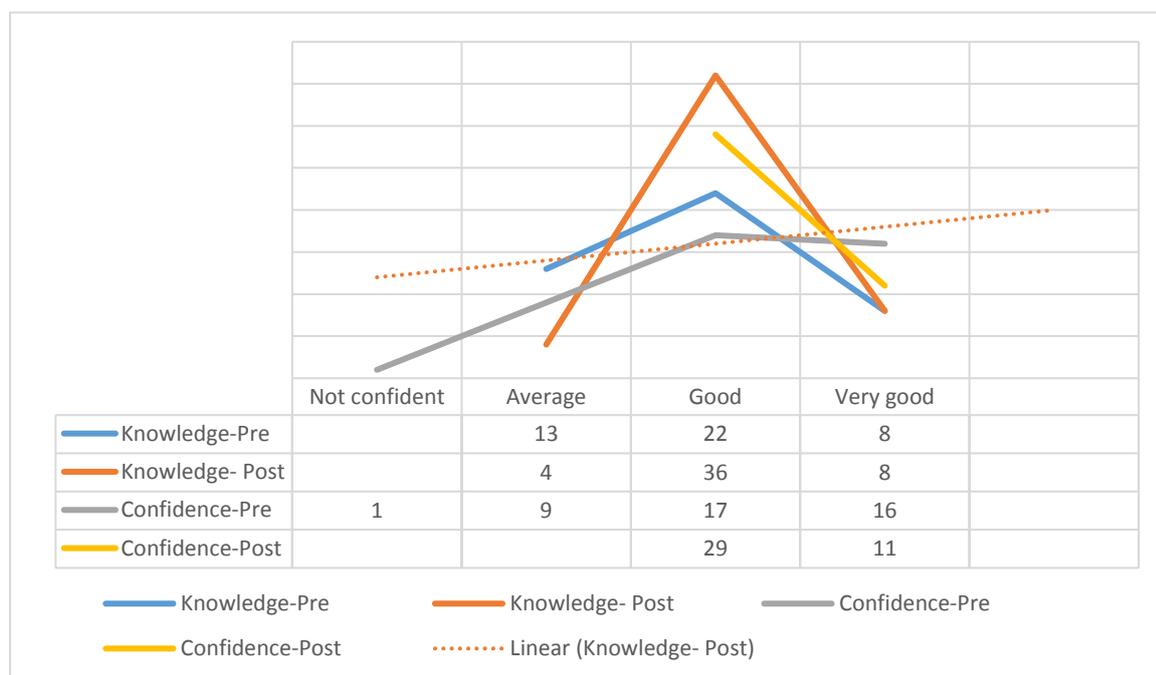
We learnt that people are passionate about supporting children getting the best start in life and that our local early years educators are a tireless group of people (mainly women). They are eager to learn more skills and proactive in seeking resources to engage with the issue.

We learnt that the topic and information to support gender equity conversations needs more resources and attention in our community, especially around having 'difficult' conversations/ responding to backlash/resistance. Participants need to understand the link between gender inequality and family violence and have an environment to explore this in a way that supports curiosity, learning and putting it into practice.

Forum Evaluation and Feedback

A session evaluation & feedback form was provided to each participant on the night which included two pre/post questions and six additional post forum questions seeking feedback on the night, key takeaways, and future needs. We received 50 completed evaluation & feedback forms.

Pre/Post data summary: **[re-do graph or just use the raw numbers]**



This pre and post forum data shows there was some increase in *knowledge of the connection between gender equity and violence*, and a significant increase in the participant's *confidence to engage children in conversations/activities around gender*.

The feedback also showed participants learnt new information and felt that the contribution that they made in their practice was validated. They really appreciated and engaged with the format of the forum, with a mix of interactive activities, content/information, resources and a panel discussion.

Participants valued receiving practical resources and the Rainbow Fox Kit (for ELC's), the GE Audit tool, and seeing the visual displays of GE play spaces.

“We can influence practice in the literacy space ...in our messages and use of language.”

“The forum reinforced that we need to continue to deconstruct gender norms.”

The feedback also indicated the participants would make a lot of different changes to their practice as a result of the information they heard about, learnt about and/or received. For example, creating intentional play spaces and having conversations about unconscious bias were identified as areas that participants wanted to implement into their practice.

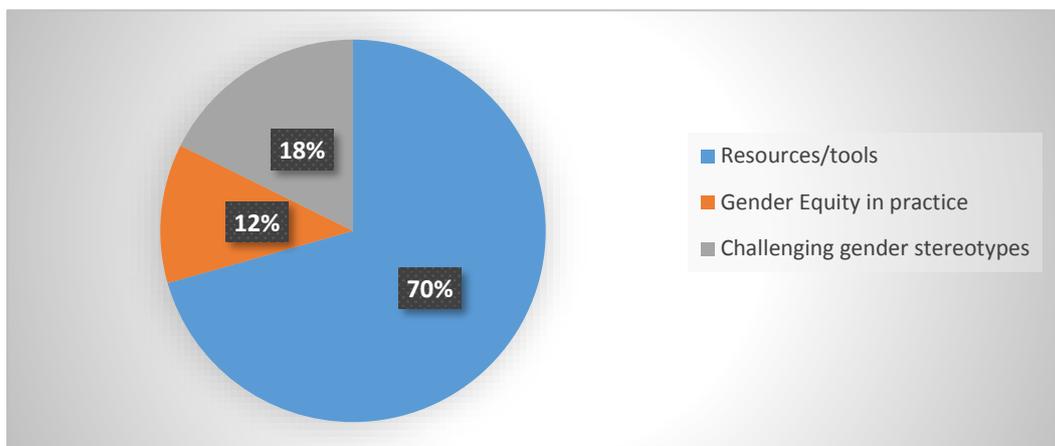
Some of the messages and resources that participants wanted to share within their own centres, organisations and communities post the forum included the Rainbow Fox book and teaching notes, exploring how adults role modelled gender equity, auditing story books for those containing rigid gender stereotypes and using the Darebin audit tool as a conversation starter to what centres and organisations were already doing.

“I will be using gender equity in practice through books, conversations and activities.”

“I’m thinking about spaces, types of colours and fabrics used as the back drops in creating play spaces now.”

The areas of professional development highlighted for future workshops or forums included more on intentional play spaces, handling behavioral issues in children, how to support those children already impacted by family violence and information or training on how practitioners and educators could communicate ideas on gender equity to families.

Three key areas emerged in what the participants were going to implement in practice. 1) resources/tools, 2) gender equity in practice, and 3) challenging gender stereotypes.



Summary and recommendations

The forum engaged early years professionals in a conversation about the importance of engaging children early in challenging stereotypes, provided tools and resources and validated their key roles in implementing gender equity in the early years sector. The forum provided the opportunity to explore the links between gender inequity and family violence and provided practical ways to support gender equity in early years settings. Feedback indicated we hit the mark in terms of all of the above and we were able to provide a resource (Rainbow Fox GE in the EY Resource Kit) so that we can continue to capitalise on to support further conversations.

The project outcomes evidenced the needs of the early years sector and their need for resources, tools and support to further understand why gender equity is important in the early years and what they can do in practice. The forum participants discussed the importance of being aware of and challenging gender stereotypes, especially at a young age. Highlighted also were the valuable voices educators have in this space and the contribution they can make towards ending violence.

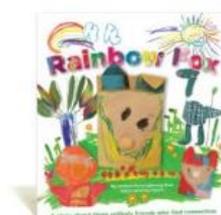
Early childhood educators have an important part to play in modelling equal and respectful relationships; through curriculum, learning environments and interactions with children. To honour the valued contribution early years workers make to our community it was important to have inclusive forums to allow both educators and workers to attend. A free afterhours event was the best option to support this and the healthy supper and spacious venue were greatly appreciated by all participants. There are limited opportunities for intersections between EY staff and the community sector, so the forum was a great networking opportunity. Having Innovative Resources present helped co-ordinate the distribution of the Rainbow Fox Kit.

The evaluations and feedback show that there is a great interest in ongoing professional development and opportunities to integrate gender equity in the early years theory into practice, **through conversations, practical tools and early years resources**. The forum provided a great engagement strategy for the Early Years sector and we recommend ongoing forums, workshops and/or networking events to keep the conversation of gender equity on the agenda and building collaboration across C4C projects and the Early Years sector.

From this positive response, feedback from the sector and the importance of this topic in helping to prevent violence against women and children, the C4C Early Years FV project is committed to supporting ways to embed gender equity into early year settings. We will do this through the exploration and development of further tools, resources and/ or interactive workshops/training.

Ky Gregg
C4C Early Years FV Project Worker

Naarah Dawes
Communities for Children Bendigo – Coordinator



**Rainbow Fox: Gender Equity in the Early Years Resource Kit*, is a project of Centre for Non-Violence and Communities for Children in Bendigo. The project forms part of the implementation of the *Communities for Children Bendigo Family Violence Action Plan*.

Innovative Resources (publishing arm of Anglicare Vic) is pleased to support the distribution of both *Rainbow Fox—Picture Book and Teaching Notes*, and *Rainbow Fox Kit* (including 4 posters and DVD) on behalf of Centre for Non-Violence and Anglicare Victoria’s ‘Communities for Children’ program. *(Click on the titles of the Kit above to link to the Innovative Resources website for a copy of the Kit.)*

* Click here for a copy of the [Communities for Children Bendigo Family Violence Action Plan 2016](#)