

2007 National Excellence In Teaching Awards

State and Territory Teaching Excellence Award Recipient



Maree Sheehan

Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood), Graduate Diploma in Special Education (Early Childhood)

Audrey Brooks Memorial Pre School, West Heidelberg, Victoria

Nominated By: Youth & Family Services, Banyule City Council

Position: Kindergarten Teacher • Level taught: Early Childhood • School type: Government • Town: West Heidelberg • Category: Early Childhood • State: VIC

Using strength-based approach to develop learning and relationships

Audrey Brooks Kindergarten is located in West Heidelberg, one of the most disadvantaged communities in metropolitan Melbourne. To overcome these challenges, Maree Sheehan has instigated several strength-based learning programs that have boosted attendance and participation at her preschool.

Recognising that many of the preschool's students were arriving at 9am without having eaten breakfast, Maree began a program whereby the preschool now offers a nutritious breakfast in a setting that fosters learning and communication skills.

'Learning Journals' are employed to depict each child's learning experiences and these are often translated into the child's first language by Maree's bilingual staff. This greatly increases the opportunity for families to become involved in their child's early education.

The *Local Community Discovery* program gives small groups of children the opportunity to explore their local community. They are accompanied by one of the kindergarten assistants to ensure the excursion is focused into a learning experience.

Recently Maree's work in her preschool was recognised when she was invited to showcase her preschool at the 24th Congress of the World Organisation for Early Childhood.

Insight

Q: *In your opinion, what makes a good teacher?*

A: Having respect and understanding for each child and family, and exploring how to best meet their needs. Being an advocate for children and speaking up for their rights.

Q: *How do you maintain your enthusiasm for teaching?*

A: Through the uniqueness of each child and family, and witnessing the difference you can make. I'm constantly learning along with the children.

Q: *In hindsight, what do you wish your training provided you with more of?*

A: It took me a long time to realise that my training was simply that, training. It was the beginning of my journey as a teacher. I'm continually learning.

Q: *What is the most difficult aspect of teaching today?*

A: Juggling the time needed to meet the needs of all the children, families, staff, and administration duties.

Q: *What is your greatest challenge as a teacher?*

A: Being able to implement all the things I would like to do to help engage children, families and the community.

Q: *How has teaching changed over the years?*

A: There has been a movement away from traditional approaches that focused on children's deficits to a more strength-based approach that includes children, families and staff, and builds on these relationships.

Q: *What is the single most important thing you, as a teacher, can do to connect with individual students?*

A: Spend time with each child. Value, respect and listen to each student. Get to know each child, their strengths and their family, and build your teaching and relationship around these.

Q: *If you were the Minister for Education, Science and Training for a week, what would you try to change?*

A: Provide access to free pre-school education for all three and four year olds from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Ensure support services for families are readily available, well resourced and free.

Q: *What keeps you awake at night?*

A: Reflecting on things that have happened during the day, such as how I might have done something differently or how I might implement something in the future.

Q: *If your students could describe you in three words, what would they say?*

A: Funny, good and happy.

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