

# STaR Inclusive Early Childhood Association Inc

ABN 62 199 402 048



## **2006 / 2007 Annual Report**

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**STaR Inclusive Early Childhood Association Inc**

**ABN 62 199 402 048**

**6<sup>th</sup> Annual Report for 2006/2007**

**(Prepared 30 June 2007)**

**2006/2007 Committee Members**

Margaret Meaker, Chairman	(MM)	President (till Sept 06)
Jennifer Sweeney, Chairman	(JS)	President from Sept 06)
Jennifer Sweeney	(JS)	Secretary (till Sept 06)
Nicole Grantham	(NG)	Treasurer
Dr Coral Kemp	(CK)	Committee Member & Public Officer
Dr Frances Cunningham	(FC)	Committee Member

**The Annual Report contains the following Reports:-.**

1. STaR Association Objectives, Vision & Mission
2. STaR Association History
3. President's Report
4. Project Director's Report
5. Treasurer's Report

## **STaR Association's Vision, Mission and Objectives**

### **Mission**

***"To empower children with disabilities and/or special learning needs, and those who support them, through research based education."***

### **Vision**

***"To be a highly professional organisation providing research-based education and support to children with disabilities and/or special needs, and those who support them, through research based education."***

### **Objectives**

To assist early childhood services to accommodate children with significant levels of disability within their generic early childhood programs, thereby enabling parents of children with disabilities to access respite and/or childcare services as needed.

To provide individual educational programs to 0 - 6 year old children with disabilities (primarily intellectual disabilities) in inclusive early childhood settings.

To maximise the learning of young children with disabilities across all developmental domains.

To work towards achieving the least restrictive educational environment for children with disabilities.

To work collaboratively with parents and professionals in the education of children with special needs.

To support parents through information sessions and parent workshops, and,

To extend the knowledge of best practices and outcomes through research, teacher training and the dissemination of information.

## **STaR Association History**

In 1992, the Early Years Program was established at Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC). This inclusive program was designed for 3-6 year old children with disabilities and typically developing preschoolers.

The research conducted by MUSEC over the 10 years of operation, clearly demonstrated that this model of inclusive early childhood education, benefits both children with and without disabilities.

In 2001, the University support for the program ceased. It was the success and positive outcomes, witnessed by so many parents and staff, that inspired and motivated them to ensure that the learning opportunity that the program offered should be made available to as many children as possible in the community.

The STaR Association was established at the end of 2001 to assist with transitioning the Early School model from the isolated University premises, to a long day childcare centre within the community. The STaR program commenced at Meadowbank Multipurpose Learning Centre in 2002. It had six children with special needs enrolled for two days per week. It was very successful and was eventually operating five days per week with 10 children enrolled in the program. However, with only 10% government funding, enormous pressure was placed on families to fundraise the remaining amount, and despite its success, the program was not able to continue without further government funding.

In December 2004, under the government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, STaR was one of just 26 organisations Australia wide, funded in the "Early Childhood Invest to Grow" initiative. A grant was awarded to see the STaR program become the STaR Project and expand into up to 12 centres over 3 years.

In March 2005, funding was granted to STaR by the Westmead Children's Hospital, specifically to assist carers of children with special needs. This funding was made available through the NSW Carers program, a State Government initiative established to increase the support available for carers of children with disabilities. We do this through our Caring for Carers program.

## President's Report 2007

The STaR Association continues to develop as a highly professional, innovative and unique organisation providing research based education and support to children with disabilities and those who support them.

Our fourth year of operation has been very positive as our sense of future strengthens. We are a very small organisation compared to most other charities and expenditure on administration and operational costs has been minimal to date, ensuring that most of the funds have been spent on service delivery. It had become increasingly difficult, however, to operate cohesively and effectively without a base from which our services could be administered and where families could come for support and information. As a result, in March 2007 we established the STaR head office in North Ryde. The benefits of this were evident almost immediately as we share the space and resources with The EASIA Clinic (EASing Into Academics) in a very professional and accessible setting.

The most difficult challenge we face as a small organisation is securing on-going recurrent funding so that we can demonstrate our viability to government departments and philanthropic organisations. We are working hard to have our achievements and future directions recognised as an important contribution to the community in order to secure funding.

### Our Services

**The STaR project-** This is our core service, providing developmental and educational programs in community-based childcare centres for children with disabilities and developmental delay. The funding for the project is provided by The Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA), through their Early Childhood Invest to Grow initiative. STaR has operated on an outreach-basis in 11 community based childcare centres across the Sydney metropolitan area, supporting up to 49 children.

**STaR Caring for Carers-** This project focuses on the needs of families through the provision of information, resources, courses, workshops, developing networks and 1:1 support as needed. It was funded initially by the Westmead Children's Hospital for 12 months, to the end of September 2006. It has been through getting to know the families and research of other services these past 12 months that we have become determined to provide a service seen by families and the community as innovative. The Association will continue to fund this important program.

### Our Supporters

The Association was established in 2001 and relied almost solely on parents to fundraise. We recognise that fundraising places enormous pressure on families who are already so pressured and this became evident when our Annual Fundraising Dinner/Auction was cancelled due to lack of numbers in June 2006. We can no longer rely on this as a source of income.

We continue to be very grateful to the Stockbrokers Foundation which has supported us as a major STaR sponsor since 2003. Essentially they have taken us under their wing, with their primary interest being in ensuring that STaR continues to make a difference to the lives of the children and families we support. The contribution from the Foundation has been fundamental in assisting the STaR Association to continue to develop and achieve its aims over the past four years.

In January 2007 we were approached by a small group of businessmen who had organised a charity event called the MonSTaR Cup and intended to donate half the proceeds to the STaR Association and the other half to Motor Neurone Disease Association of NSW — another very worthy cause. The MonSTaR Cup was held on 20 March 2007 at Pennant Hills Golf Course and raised over \$125,000.00. This support is contributing to the long-term viability of STaR, as the organisers have committed to

running this event annually. We are grateful to them for making such a significant contribution to the Association this year.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous contribution of Dranoel Pty Ltd who donated the entire office fit-out for the new office premises of the STaR Association. This reduced the cost of establishing the new premises significantly, and the Dranoel team worked hard to ensure we were able to move in and set up as soon as possible.

### **Our future**

We continue to develop the Association's management structure and services. Part of this process involved undergoing a Strategic Planning process in April 2007 using an external consultant. The STaR Board and senior staff members attended. Our future directions are clear and we aim to establish a STaR Centre of Excellence, and to continue the STaR project and the Caring for Carers program — all of which combine to continue the development of an inclusive, responsive and innovative organisation.

The STaR Board members work tirelessly to ensure the continued development of the Association. They are very skilled and dynamic women who give their time so generously. I thank Jennifer Sweeney, Dr Coral Kemp, Nicole Grantham, Catherine Brock, Dr Frances Cunningham, Denise Taylor and Jane Cockburn.

The team of STaR staff are exceptional. Their level of dedication and belief in our children ensures positive outcomes everyday. In turn the families are supported and educated, leading to better understanding and acceptance of their children's needs.

As a parent of a child with disability, I understand the unspoken grief, stress and frustration families experience. We are also privileged to experience the true meaning of unconditional love and are constantly inspired by these children, who continually defy the odds and labels that we place on them.

Margaret Meaker  
President<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> President of STaR until September 2006; now General Manager, STaR.

## **STaR Project Director's Report 2007**

### **Recruitment of Centres and families**

By the end of 2006 the STaR Project model was operating in 11 centres:

- Two private centres in Ryde/Meadowbank owned by Kay Doyle
  - Meadowbank Multipurpose Learning Centre
  - Cressy Road Multipurpose Learning Centre
- Four Blacktown City Council childcare centres
  - Bob Sinclair Childcare Centre
  - Kings Langley Childcare Centre
  - Blackett Childcare Centre
  - Joanne Samarco Childcare Centre
- Three Penrith City Council centres
  - Werrianda Children's Centre
  - Carita Children's Centre
  - Stepping Stones Learning Centre
- Two centres run by not-for-profit organisations
  - Banksia Cottage (Students at Macquarie)
  - St Anthony's Childcare Centre (St Anthony's Family Care)

The decision was taken to withdraw the program from Meadowbank Multipurpose Learning Centre, Blackett Childcare Centre and Kings Langley Childcare Centre because these centres were unable, or unwilling, to meet the requirements of the contract with Access Macquarie. The families of children not enrolling in school in 2007 were offered places in alternative STaR centres. A reduced service was provided to the two Blacktown centres in the early part of 2007 to assist with re-establishing the programs for 2007.

To date the STaR Project has catered for 75 children with disabilities across the 11 centres. In 2006, 11 centres catered for 49 children (Not all 49 were in the program at any one time.). In 2007, to date, 36 children have received the STaR program in 8 centres.

### **Project Management**

The project is managed by Access Macquarie and the STaR Association. The Project Director (also a STaR Association Board Member) is responsible for the oversight of the Project operation and Access Macquarie is responsible for the financial management of the Project including the employment of staff. Progress reports for FaCSIA were completed in August 2006 and February 2007 (copies sent to the STaR Association). These were completed by the Project Director with input from the Project Co-ordinator with a short financial statement contributed by the Access Macquarie Projects' Manager.

#### *Staffing for 2006-2007:*

Project Director (honorary): Coral Kemp

Project Co-ordinator: Dawn Chadwick

Support Teacher: Kathy Hodgetts

Casual part-time release staff: Yuriko Kishida, Debra Drinan, Elise de Jong, Kim Waldron.

All but one of the staff working on the Project (a casual release worker) is a qualified special educator.

In addition to the paid staff, students, volunteers and interns (3 from July 2006-June 2007) have supported the project centres.

### **Collaboration with Partner Organisations:**

- Regular meetings have been held with the managers of all centres to ensure the smooth running of the project.
- Additional meetings have been held with Penrith City Council to explore the possibility of establishing a centre of excellence in the council area in 2008
- The project coordinator is assisting two of the managing agents with their applications for Intervention Support Program (ISP) funding through the Department of Education and Training and the evaluation of programs funded through ISP money.

### **Staff Training:**

*University Course:* Three Special Needs Managers (2 from Penrith centres and 1 from Blacktown centres) have now completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Early Intervention from Macquarie University. Another is expected to complete the course by the end of 2007 (One director who has just resigned due to ill health will also complete at the end of 2007) and 2 more are expected to complete by mid 2008. Four other SNMs who had Macquarie special education qualifications were recruited to work in centres. Three of these are still working in project centres.

An analysis of the 2003 database of services funded through the Department of Education and Training, which funds most early intervention programs in NSW, found that of 521 personnel employed specifically by early intervention services, 23.4% were trained in special education and only 7.7% were qualified in both early childhood and special education (Kemp & Hayes, 2005). Of the preschools funded, only 7% employed staff with any special education qualifications. There is no reason to expect that the level of special education training in these programs would have improved since 2003. No data are available regarding the qualifications of those working in the childcare sector but historically this area attracts more poorly qualified staff. The surveys collected from centre staff have established that approximately one third of all staff working with the children in the 11 STaR centres have no training at all. The fact that STaR has an early childhood special education qualified staff member in 6 of the centres is truly remarkable. Spread across eight centres this already represents more than the 7.7% of qualified early childhood special educators in comprehensive early intervention programs (at this stage approximately 12.5%).

*Onsite training:* In addition to the member of staff nominated to enrol in the university course or with qualifications in special education (10 trained as SNMs over the life of the project) 11 additional teachers have been trained on site (five of these as special needs managers who did not enrol in the university course). This has been necessary because centres have had children with disabilities in different class groups within centres. To date, 14 of the teachers given onsite training are still working in project centres

### **Research and Evaluation**

The draft initial evaluation has been completed by the local evaluator Dr Mark Carter. A copy of this document has been sent to the STaR Board. Although limited data have been collected to date, the results have been promising in relation to: (a) parent satisfaction, (b) centre staff attitudes and perceived skills and knowledge, and (c) the developmental progress of the children with disabilities.

The engagement data collected in 2006 has been coded and some has been analysed and used for publication. The remaining data are currently being entered into a database for analysis.

## Conference Presentations and Publications

Three oral papers relating to the STaR Project were presented at the second conference of the International Society on Early Intervention in Zagreb in June 2007: The papers are as follows:

Presenter: Dawn Chadwick

The use of the Assessment Evaluation Programming System (AEPS) in an Inclusive Early Childhood Model.

Presenter: Coral Kemp

A Model of Support for Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Childcare

Presenter: Yuriko Kishida

Measuring the Engagement of Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Childcare Settings: A Tool for Practitioners

One paper based on data collected at Meadowbank was published in a peer reviewed journal in 2006 (Kishida & Kemp 2006). Two other papers, one based on Meadowbank data ( Hong & Kemp, in press) and one based on data collected in the Project (Kishida, Kemp & Carter, in press) have been accepted for publication in peer refereed journals. An article describing the StaR model was published in the Early Links magazine (Kemp, 2006)

**Coral Kemp**

**STaR Project Director**

## References

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- Kemp, C. (2006). The STaR Inclusive Early Childhood Project: An innovative model of service delivery. *Early Links*, 11(2), 13-21.
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- Kishida, Y., & Kemp, C. (2006). A measure of engagement for children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood settings: a preliminary study. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 31, 99-112.
- Kishida, Y., Kemp, C., & Carter, M. (in press). Revision and validation of the *Individual Child Engagement Record*: A practitioner-friendly measure of learning opportunities for children with disabilities in early childhood settings. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*

## **Treasurer's Report**

The STaR Association generated a surplus of \$68,919 in the 2006-07 financial year and as at June 2007 held cash of \$117,856 providing a good financial base to implement its strategic plan in the coming year.

Income from fundraising was boosted through participation in the MonSTaR cup, which generated \$62,500, while the STaR charity auction yielded \$15,000. Additionally, an address by the STaR Association General Manager to the Stockbrokers Association annual charity auction in August 2007 resulted in a donation of \$55,000 (compared to \$25,000 in prior years).

STaR was able to continue to fund the Caring for Carers program despite the initial government funding running out in September 2006. The cost of this worthwhile program for the 2006-07 year was approximately \$18,000.

STaR contributed \$7,700 in support of the on-going delivery of the core STaR project.

In December 2006, the STaR Association leased premises in Delhi Road, North Ryde to enable the delivery of services from dedicated office premises for the Association. The EASIA clinic also operates from these premises, and pays the STaR Association half of the rental and office set up costs. The net cost to STaR (including office set up and a three month rent free period) for the 2006-07 year was \$7,244.

Overall, the 2006-07 year was one of consolidation for the STaR Association, and this sees the organisation well positioned to expand its service base to enable delivery of research-based inclusive education and support to children with disabilities or special learning needs and their carers.

**Nicole Grantham**  
**STaR Association Treasurer**