

## Arika's story



Arika was greeted warmly by Sarah, the director of her child's preschool. "I was wondering if you have some spare time for a chat?" she said. Arika wondered what it could be about but Sarah often ran ideas past her and this time was no different.

"We are developing our story book corner," explained Sarah, "and I was wondering if you would mind helping us choose some stories that would help the children learn about local Aboriginal culture".

Arika smiled. She knew of some fantastic story books that the children would really enjoy. She also had an idea. "Aunty Jane is an elder and storyteller in our community—I'm sure she would love to talk to the children and share some wonderful stories with them". Sarah thought this was a great idea.

Aunty Jane was a real hit with the children as they sat hanging off every word of her storytelling. Sarah thanked Aunty Jane and Arika warmly.

Collaboration is about early childhood services and families working well together. When families, staff and local communities collaborate with each other it involves more than routine everyday contact. It encourages everyone to play a part and feel a sense of service 'ownership'. Collaboration between home and early childhood services is based upon good communication and respectful relationships.



## Collaboration supports mental health and wellbeing

When families and staff work well together it helps to create a positive sense of community, which supports children's mental health and wellbeing. Research has shown that when families and staff within early childhood services work together it helps to improve outcomes for young children. For example, studies have shown that greater family involvement can have a positive impact in areas such as children's early learning skills and behaviour.

Family involvement shows children that the service is highly valued, a safe place to be and promotes feelings of belonging and connectedness. Also, both families and staff have valuable information about the child and sharing this information helps to make sure children's needs are met effectively.

## What services might do

Services encourage collaboration when:

- ✦ they provide opportunities for children and families to be involved in a range of service activities
- ✦ they encourage families to be involved in decision making and all parts of the service's program
- ✦ families and staff exchange information regularly in various ways that cater for individual family needs
- ✦ they provide opportunities for extended family members to get involved.

When staff work closely with families it helps families to feel connected to the service and valued for the information they provide about their child, their family and the community in which they live.

## What families can do

Families can play a part in supporting collaboration, for example:

### Get involved

- ▶ Find out about opportunities to help out or take part.
- ▶ Look out for opportunities to play a role in the service program.
- ▶ Share ideas or offer to help organise events and get together.
- ▶ Suggest special experiences you or the service could set up for the children.
- ▶ Talk to other families about your experiences and encourage them to get involved too.
- ▶ Share ideas and information that could help staff understand your child's individual characteristics.

### Keep in touch

- ▶ Make time to talk regularly with staff and ask questions about your child's day.
- ▶ Share ideas and information that could help staff plan appropriately for your child and help connect your child to the service and the service to your child and family.
- ▶ Talk to staff about events and celebrations and share information about your family values and culture.
- ▶ Feed back to staff outcomes of any suggestions they have made to you.

Family involvement enriches early childhood experiences for all involved—children, families, staff and the community.

**This resource and further information on the national KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative is available to download at [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au). The team at KidsMatter Early Childhood also welcomes your feedback which can be submitted through the website.**



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