

## Integrated infant and toddler programs

Dear Waiting List Families

Gowrie SA is proud of the quality of programs we offer to children and families. We constantly reflect on our policies and practices to ensure that we base our work on the most current research about children's development and learning. In recent years, we have explored several themes relating to group size and ratios and the impact of these on child interactions and relationships. This research has led to Gowrie SA establishing integrated infant and toddler age groupings for children birth to three years.

The benefits of creating an integrated infant and toddler program are that are youngest children experience fewer transitions between rooms as they get older, as well as offering improved child/staff ratios and have an ongoing and longer relationship with their primary educator. Research suggests that changes and transitions should be minimised when children are younger as they have not yet learned the skills for coping with them. Lower child: adult ratios and smaller group sizes are the strongest predictors of positive (for example sensitive, warm, responsive and cognitively enriching) caregiving (Howe et al 1997; NICHD 2006). From our research we also confirmed that continuity of care (with consistent staff and fewer transitions) benefits children. With fewer transitions, children do not have to cope with the unnecessary stress of adjusting to new people and environments or losing a significant attachment relationship already established with a primary caregiver (Zero To Three Policy Centre 2008). A longer time in a stable group creates more opportunities for children to develop deep relationships, empathy and friendships as well as extended learning opportunities.

Another benefit of an integrated infant and toddler program is the development of consistent and longer family-staff-child partnerships, which will further support individual routines, better understanding about each child's learning and deeper and richer documentation and records of children's learning. From our research we know that children's early relationships are the foundation for social/emotional competence in early childhood (Peth-Pierce 2000), which are central to children experiencing success at school.

Integrated infant and toddler programs also provide opportunities, upon family preference, for siblings to be together, as well the benefits of older children role modelling skills, empathy and cooperation for the younger children. Programs that group older children with younger ones have been shown to have improved levels of educational dimensions (Mathers & Slyva 2007). These groupings can also be considered as closer to 'family' type environments which provide a more natural context in which children can grow and learn through relationships.

These programs have reduced turnover of educators as the rooms are calm compared to programs with larger groups and educators enjoy the increased opportunities to build relationships and learning opportunities with children and families.

Please don't hesitate to contact our Centre on 08 8352 5144 if you have any further questions regarding integrated infant and toddler programs.

Regards

Children's Program Leaders