

The Five Big Ideas Program Evaluation

An examination of the process and efficacy of an early intervention program for Aboriginal pre-school children, from the perspective of key stakeholders: teachers and program developers

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Report submitted to **Gunawirra** by:

Professor Janette Perz

Professor Jane M Ussher

Professor Kerry H Robinson

Dr Chloe Parton

Dr Christine Metusela

Dr Kate Churruca

Lorelle Metusela

Centre for Health Research, School of Medicine

Western Sydney University

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Report prepared by Lorelle Metusela, Dr Kate Churruca, and Dr Christine Metusela.

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Executive Summary

Background to the Evaluation

Gunawirra, a not-for-profit organisation based in Sydney, has designed an early intervention program, *Five Big Ideas*, which is aimed at supporting preschool Aboriginal children to grow as healthy, resilient and empowered individuals. The program is based on Reggio Emilia Philosophy and is consistent with Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) outcomes. It contains five modules: 'personal health and hygiene', 'nutrition', 'healing and resilience', 'my culture, my identity', and 'my land, our environment'. The *Five Big Ideas* program is taught by preschool staff through a mix of power point presentations, Aboriginal Dreamtime stories, puppets, games, videos, and class and parent-involved activities and is offered in preschools where there are a significant number of Aboriginal children in attendance.

This report details an evaluation of the early intervention program, *Five Big Ideas*, conducted by researchers from the Centre for Health Research at Western Sydney University.

Evaluation Design and Method of the Pre Roll Out

The evaluation of the *Five Big Ideas* program consisted of a two-part process. The first phase evaluated the pre roll out of the program. Seven preschools were invited to take part in a survey about the pre roll out of the *Five Big Ideas*. The seven preschools were selected by Gunawirra on the basis that they worked closely with Gunawirra and were designated to implement the *Five Big Ideas* program over the coming months. Twenty five participants took part in the survey which contained a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions and focussed on the preschool teachers' and directors' perspectives and expectations of the *Five Big Ideas* program.

Findings of the Pre Roll Out Evaluation

The findings of the pre roll out of the *Five Big Ideas* are detailed in the first section of this report: 'Evaluation of preschool staff survey prior to roll out of *Five Big Ideas*'. The findings indicate that participants faced challenges in their roles as preschool workers, particularly in terms of behavioural problems, trauma, isolation, high needs, and disadvantaged backgrounds. These challenges were seen to be exacerbated by parents or carers who did not fulfil their responsibilities or engage with the preschool.

Overall, participants **valued the support Gunawirra provided** the preschools in terms of **preschool visits and weekly contact**, and were **highly positive about Gunawirra's *Five Big Ideas* program**. However, some participants indicated that they would like **more contact and direct training from Gunawirra**, particularly on **implementing the *Five Big Ideas* program** into their preschool.

Evaluation Design and Method of the Post Roll Out

The second phase of the evaluation was conducted when the roll out of the *Five Big Ideas* had commenced. Three regional preschools were selected by Gunawirra as case studies for the evaluation. After receiving consent to visit the three preschools, researchers from Western Sydney University administered surveys and carried out face-to-face interviews with 20 preschool staff members. The three preschools were in different stages of the roll out phase of the *Five Big Ideas*, however they indicated that they had either implemented the *Five Big Ideas* modules or intended to do so. This stage of the evaluation also included a face-to-face interview with a Gunawirra staff member who had been heavily involved with the development, delivery and support of the *Five Big Ideas* program.

Evaluation Findings of the Post Roll Out

The evaluation findings of the post roll out of the *Five Big Ideas* are detailed in the second section of this report: 'Evaluation of preschool staff survey and interviews post roll out of *Five Big Ideas*'. The findings indicate that the preschools had implemented some or all of the *Five Big Ideas* learning modules or had intentions to implement them in the future. Participants reported **facing challenges** in their roles as preschool workers, particularly in terms of **children with additional needs** and in **engaging families and communities** in preschool activities.

Overall, participants were **highly positive about Gunawirra's *Five Big Ideas* program**. In particular, participants **valued the ongoing support Gunawirra provides** the preschools in terms of **weekly contact** through Skype, **regular visitation** with an **art therapist** and the Gunawirra **cultural advisor** as well as **workshops** arranged at various times throughout the year. Some staff indicated that they **would like to receive further training** from Gunawirra, particularly on **cultural awareness** and on **how to implement the *Five Big Ideas* program** into their preschools.

The **Gunawirra staff perceived the central role of the *Five Big Ideas* as being a positive impact on the healing of trauma** within the preschools and the wider community. They also **acknowledged needs** highlighted by the three preschools for **further support in implementing the *Five Big Ideas***, in **cultural training, personal Skype time** and in delivering **art therapy** to children with additional needs.

Recommendations

The evaluation findings from the pre roll out and post roll out of the *Five Big Ideas* program demonstrate that the early learning program has been received in a positive manner and that the support received from Gunawirra is highly valued.

The findings also highlight various needs and requests for ongoing support. These requests are in areas that Gunawirra is already providing support for, however, preschool staff have voiced a need for further and ongoing support to meet the high needs of their preschools; for example, requests for further art therapy classes, ongoing Skype meetings, site visits, seminars and workshops and further funding of projects. Some participants also raised the need for specific training in the *Five Big Ideas*, for further activities to be added to the *Five Big Ideas* hand book and for the 'healing and resilience' module to be re-looked at in terms of greater sensitivity.

The list of recommendations below is an indication of the needs, requests and concerns highlighted by the preschool staff.

- Further training for preschool staff around implementing the *Five Big Ideas* program
- Continued training for non-Aboriginal staff on cultural awareness and how to teach Aboriginal culture as a non-Aboriginal
- More art therapy classes for preschool students with additional needs
- Continued Skype/phone meetings with Gunawirra staff
- Continued preschool site visits by the Gunawirra cultural advisor
- Continued Gunawirra workshops and seminars with preschool staff, particularly around trauma and cultural awareness
- Further examples of appropriate activities on each of the *Five Big Ideas* modules
- Greater sensitivity in the 'healing and resilience' module, particularly in regards to the puppet video
- Continued and further funding to be able to keep carrying out activities and projects in the *Five Big Ideas* program and to help facilitate greater community engagement

Section One: Evaluation of preschool staff survey prior to roll out of *Five Big Ideas*

Overview

Gunawirra has designed an early intervention program, *Five Big Ideas*, which is aimed at allowing Aboriginal children to grow as healthy, resilient and empowered individuals. The *Five Big Ideas* is based on Reggio Emilia Philosophy and is in keeping with Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) outcomes. It contains five modules: 'personal health and hygiene', 'nutrition', 'healing and resilience', 'my culture, my identity', and 'my land, our environment'. These modules will be taught by preschool staff through a mix of power point presentations, Aboriginal Dreamtime stories, puppets, games, videos, and class and parent-involved activities. The *Five Big Ideas* program is offered to preschool children, with a focus on preschools that have a significant number of Aboriginal children in attendance.

Evaluation Design and Method

Prior to the rollout of the *Five Big Ideas* program, a survey was sent to a sample of preschools to be completed individually by their **teachers, educators and directors**. The preschools taking part in the survey were selected as case studies by Gunawirra. The survey was developed through an extensive consultative process with Gunawirra. **Its aim was to examine preschool staff's perspectives and expectations of the *Five Big Ideas* program, and their views on any factors that would inhibit the successful execution of the program.** The survey contained demographic questions, and quantitative and qualitative questions about the needs of staff members, perceptions of their preschool's children and parents, the effectiveness of current support offered by Gunawirra, and perceptions and expectations about implementing the *Five Big Ideas* program. Finally, please note that, in this report, where participants' own words have been used they are displayed verbatim.

Summary of Pre Roll Out Findings

This report contains a descriptive overview of the findings from the preschool staff survey prior to the rollout of the *Five Big Ideas*. The responses from the preschool staff survey indicated that participants faced challenges in their roles as preschool workers, particularly in terms of behavioural problems, trauma, isolation, high needs, and disadvantaged backgrounds. These challenges were seen to be exacerbated by parents/carers who did not fulfil their responsibilities or engage with the preschool. Overall, participants **valued the support Gunawirra provides the preschools in terms of preschool visits and weekly contact**, and were **highly positive about Gunawirra's *Five Big Ideas* program**. However, some participants indicated that they would like **more contact and direct training from Gunawirra, particularly on implementing the *Five Big Ideas***.

Participant profile

Twenty-five participants from seven NSW preschools participated in this stage of the study. The preschools involved were Little Yuin, Dalaigur, Kinamindi, Gunnedah, Quirindi, Werris Creek and Minimbah.

The average age for participants was 44 years, and ranged from 22 to 62 years. The majority of participants self-identified as Anglo-Australian (64%), while approximately a third self-identified as Indigenous Australian (32%). The participants came from a variety of professional roles within the preschool, with the largest proportion being Preschool Educators (42%). Participants were evenly split between having a qualification in the form of a TAFE Certificate and University degree (48% each). The average time of working in a preschool environment was 13 years and 9 months, with a range between 2 and 33 years. The demographic details of this sample are presented in Table 1.

Characteristic	Average/Count (N)
Age	44 years* (22 – 62 years)
Time working in a preschool	13 years 9 months* (2 years – 33 years)
Time working in current preschool	7 years 10 months (7 months – 28 years)
Cultural Background	
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	32% (8)
Anglo-Australian	64% (16)
Other	4% (1)
Professional role	
Preschool teacher	29% (7)
Preschool educator	42% (10)
Preschool director/manager	25% (6)
Other	4% (1)*
Qualification in Preschool Education	
University degree	48% (12)
TAFE certificate	48% (12)
Private college certificate	4% (1)

Table 1: Participant Profile

* Missing values

Professional role and the preschool environment

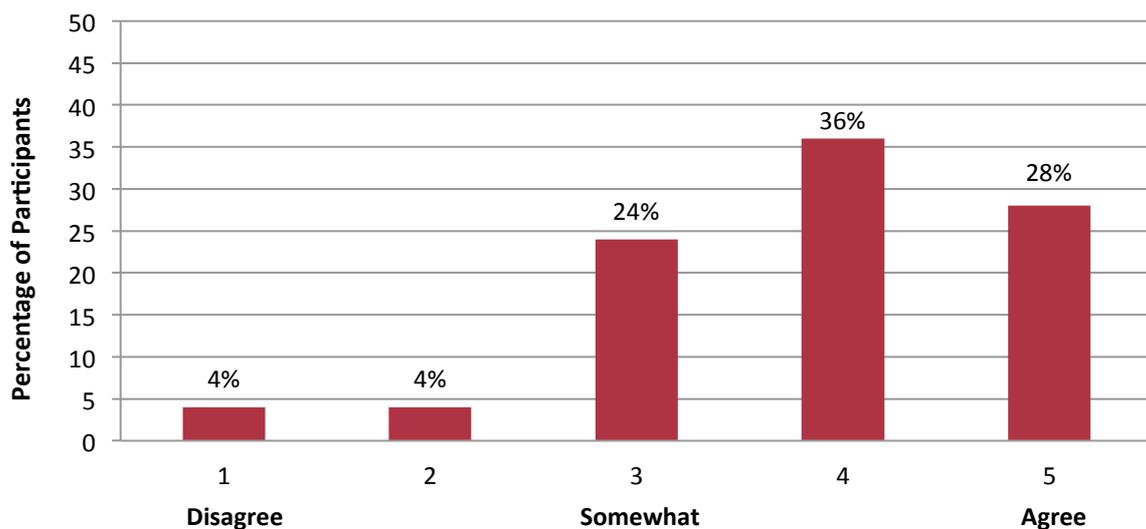
Participants reported on their feelings about their professional role within the preschool: how they communicated with other staff members, the relevance of their past training to current experiences and work, the potential for feelings of isolation when working in a preschool and the effectiveness of supports that attempt to deal with this issue.

The majority of participants indicated that they communicated with other staff members one-to-one (88%), through group meetings (84%), and planning sessions (72%). A couple of participants also suggested that they communicated with staff through email.

Training and preparedness for current experiences

Participants rated how much their training had prepared them for their current work and experiences. The majority of participants indicated that their training had prepared them at least 'somewhat' for their current experiences and work (88%). These results are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Participant ratings of feeling prepared for their role



A few participants were particularly positive in describing how training had prepared them for their role, suggesting that it had given them a repertoire of “ideas” to “deal with situations that I may find difficult” (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker). However, one participant indicated that such training should be an ongoing part of their professional role.

Just need training to keep motivated and new, fresh ideas. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

In comparison, a number of other participants reported that much of their expertise in their role came less through initial training and more through ongoing experiences, “learn[ing] on the job”, particularly as there were always new challenges developing.

Always new and challenging issues occurring. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

You as a professional grow with experience, taking the challenge of change. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

My experience has prepared me for my current experience far more than my training. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

At the same time, learning through experience did not necessarily need to be firsthand, but also through feedback from other staff members.

I have had feedback from my staff that it is the best training they have had. This is a big statement, as staff receive a lot of training and a wide variety of training. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

A number of participants noted specific experiences that their training had not prepared them for. One Preschool Director (Non-Indigenous) reported that their role involved “running a small business... not enough is covered in a teaching degree for this”. Finally, two participants reported that their training had not prepared them for being able to deal with trauma in children:

During my studies to gain a bachelor of teaching in EC there was at no time any training in trauma and grief. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

I feel inadequate sometimes, when dealing with children with trauma and their families. Was never taught anything like this in my university degree. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Sense of isolation at work

Participants rated the extent to which they agreed they ‘ever felt isolated at work’. Figure 2 displays these ratings. The largest proportion of participants (35%) indicated that they disagreed, and therefore did not ever feel isolated at work. However, the majority of participants (56%) rated that they felt at least ‘somewhat’ isolated at work; a further three participants (12%) indicated they agreed that they felt isolated. There was considerable variability in the responses based on the participant’s role in the preschool, with preschool directors indicating that they felt most isolated ($M=3.7$). This is discussed further on page 7.

A couple of participants qualified their responses, indicating that having very supportive colleagues helped to avoid a sense of isolation.

I don't feel isolated at work because we are a family here, we help each other we are there for each other, to show support in what's happening from day to day to week to week. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

The staff are always available in moments of distress or confusion - willing to take over or help with communication/ideas for fixing a situation. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

I have a fabulous team of educators and sharing each other ideas makes you feel connected even when you are a small rural community. Being a member of peak bodies supports your knowledge. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

In describing isolation, a couple of participants interpreted this as a more collective experience of being isolated from the wider community within their preschool.

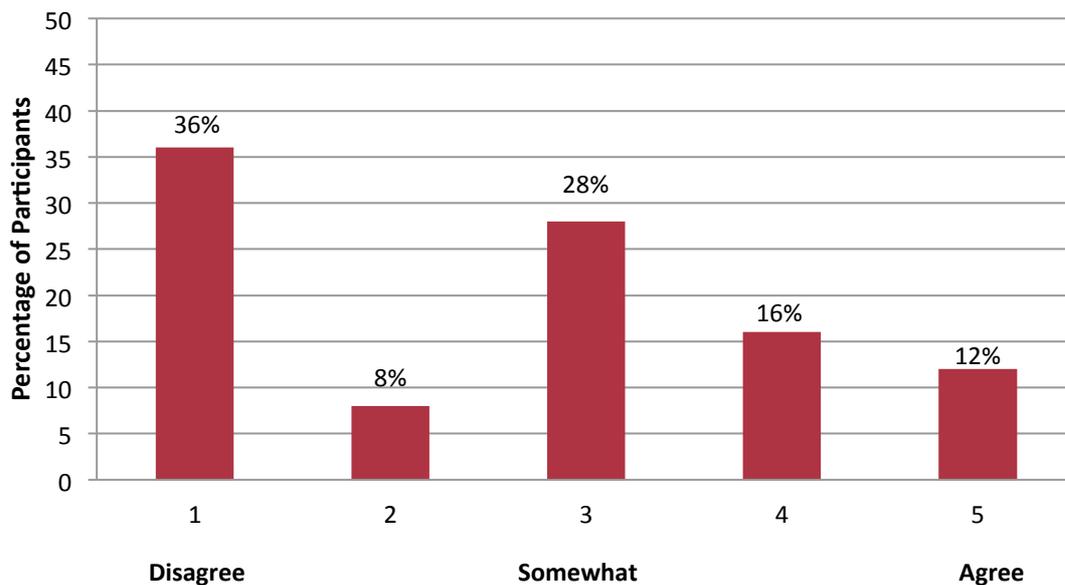
Yes, ours is a small isolated Aboriginal community and our issues are often quite different to anything I have experienced in mainstream community. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Yes we get so involved in our own centre that sometimes feel like we are isolated. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

However, another participant suggested that isolation was particular to the role of management.

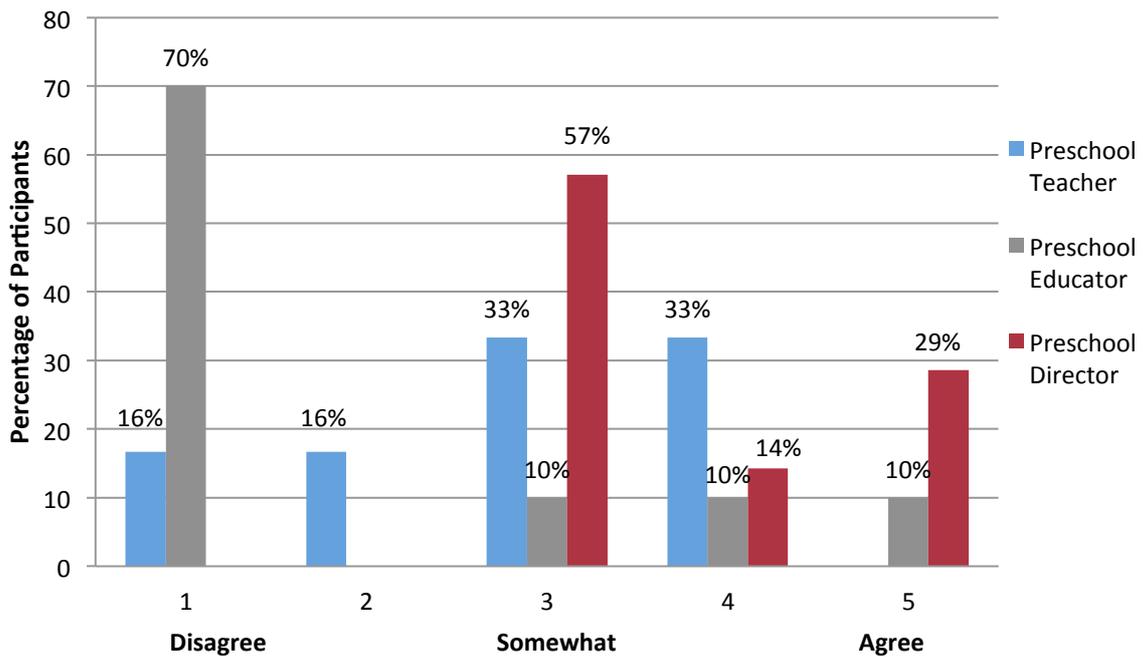
Because I am restricted to my office most of the day, therefore am not having time with colleagues or children. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Figure 2: Participant ratings of feeling isolated at work



The variability in ratings of isolation, as this participant’s response suggests, might be due to participants’ differing roles within the preschool. As can be seen in Figure 3, while preschool educators most often disagreed that they experienced isolation, preschool teachers were more likely to indicate ‘somewhat’ agreement. Further, preschool directors responses ranged from ‘somewhat’ to complete agreement.

Figure 3: Participant ratings of feeling isolated at work by professional role



Effectiveness of current supports for dealing with isolation

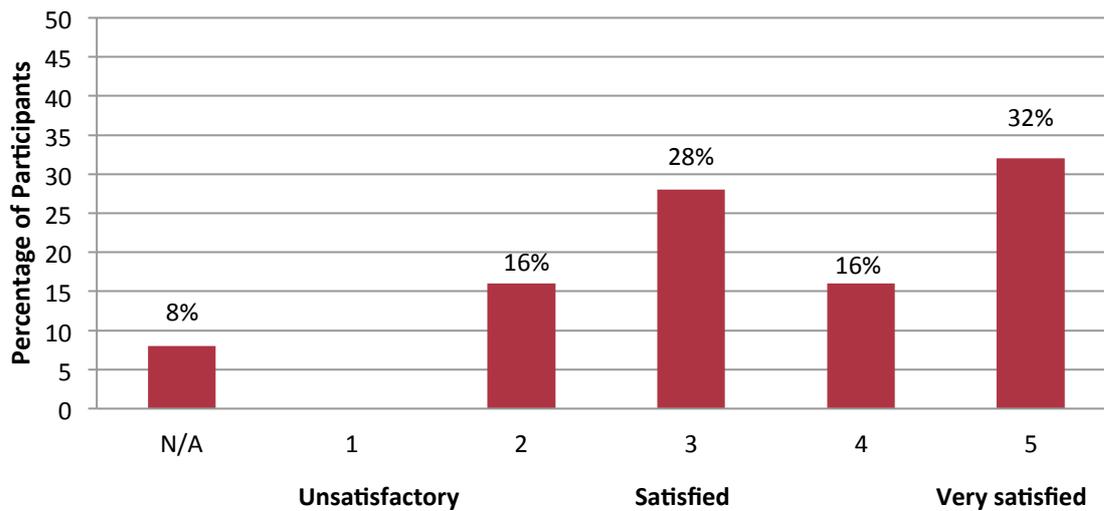
Participants selected those supports they currently received to help with their possible feelings of isolation, and were asked to rate their satisfaction with those they reported receiving.

The ratings for practical support, which involved receiving help with activities at the centre, are shown in Figure 4. This was the most commonly received support against isolation (92%). Participants’ ratings of this support varied somewhat, though the majority who experienced practical support indicated that they were at least ‘satisfied’ with it. A couple of participants, both in positions of management, made further comment about this support, highlighting that being able to deal with workload is also a financial issue.

Feel like we need more staff but because of the finance it is impossible to employ more staff. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

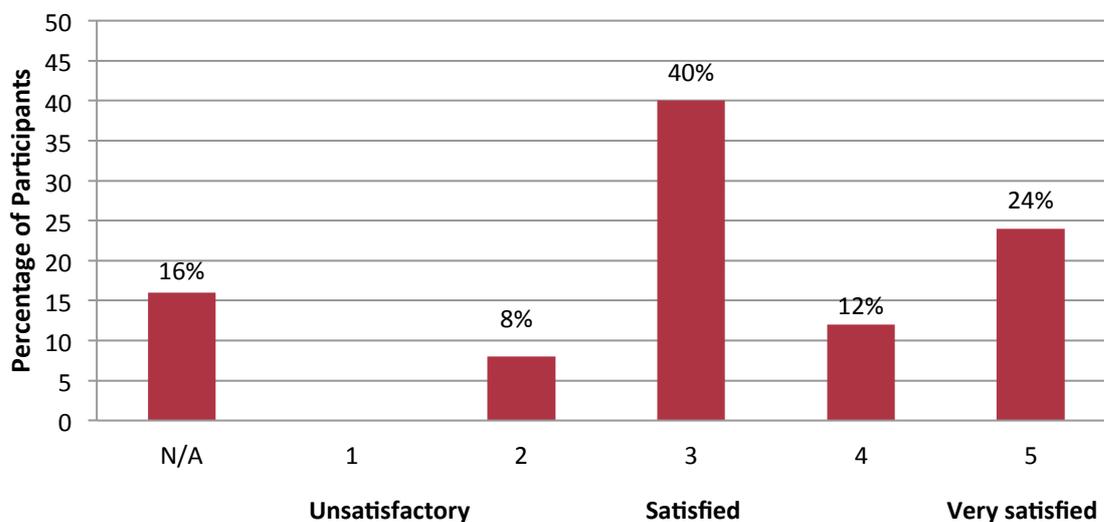
The board are very supportive and have given me the option of employing a PA to reduce workload. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Figure 4: Participant ratings of practical support



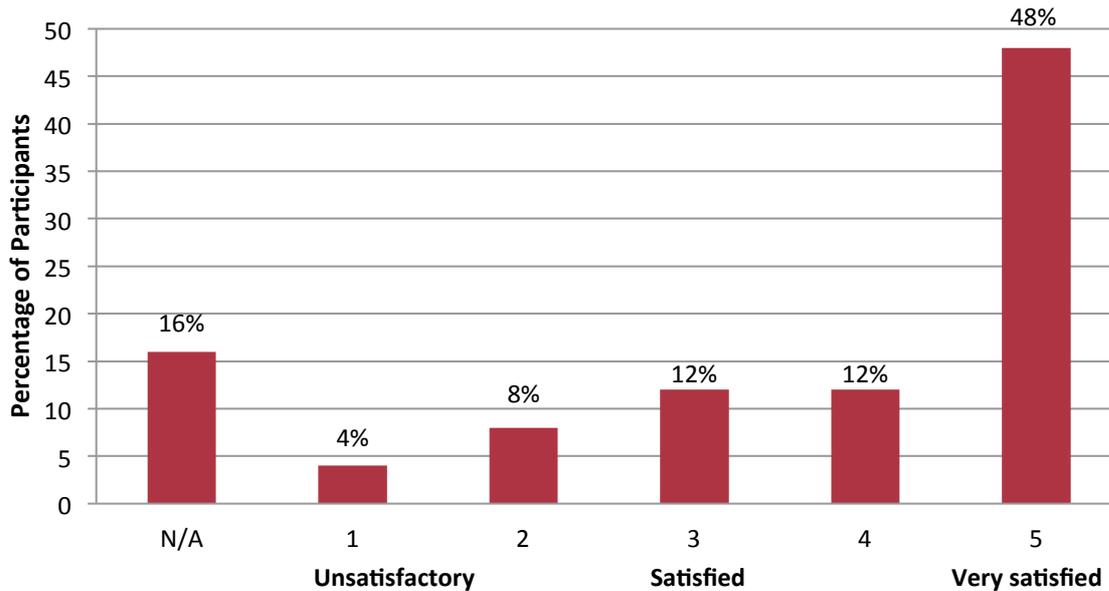
Skills and training (for example new programs, professional development activities) was another support that many participants (84%) received to help with isolation. These ratings are displayed in Figure 5. Most participants (76%) ranged between being ‘satisfied’ to ‘very satisfied’ with this support.

Figure 5: Participant ratings of skills and training



The same proportion of participants (84%) selected emotional support, which included such things as debriefing and having someone talk to, as something they received to help with isolation. This support had the highest level of satisfaction among participants, with the majority (72%) who received emotional support indicating they were between ‘satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’ with it; these findings are displayed in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Participant ratings of emotional support



The high rating of emotional support resonates with earlier participant responses, in which they reported that having supportive colleagues meant they did not experience isolation. One participant made the comment, though, that the emotional support she received came from “only [Gunawirra staff]”.

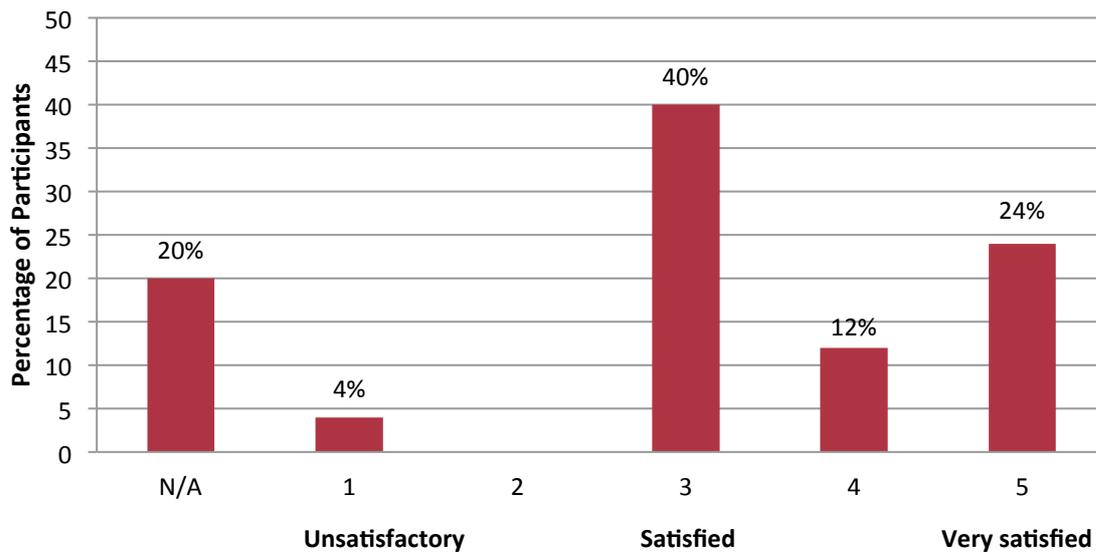
Despite the endorsement this support received in dealing with isolation, one participant indicated that it was difficult trusting individuals to confide in.

Sometimes it hard to find someone to trust if in need of a debrief. You could tell someone something and then the next three staff will find out, especially I find this when decisions are made higher up the team tend to talk about it in a negative way sometimes. [Our director is] fantastic in her role... Very supportive, understanding and caring for us as an employee and being aware of our own family needs. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

The ratings of resources and materials are presented in Figure 7. Twenty participants (80%) indicated that they received resources and materials to help with their isolation. Of these participants, most were between ‘satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’ with this support (95%). However, one participant reported that these resources were not tailored enough to the needs of their preschool.

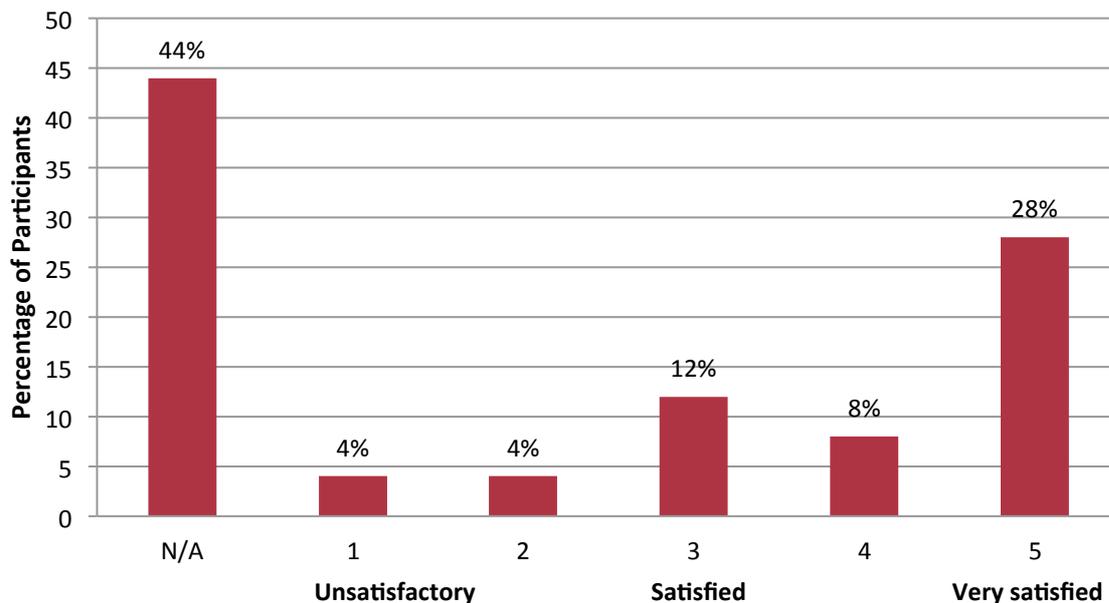
We have very limited resources/books etc. that deal with trauma and grief. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Figure 7 : Participant ratings of resources and materials



Finally, only fourteen participants (56%) suggested flexible work arrangements were available to them. There was some variability in these participants' satisfaction with this support, with seven participants (28%) being 'very satisfied', while two other participants (8%) considered this somewhat or fully unsatisfactory. Overall though, most of the participants who experienced this support tended to be between 'satisfied' and 'very satisfied' with flexible work arrangement. These results are displayed in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Participant ratings of flexible work arrangements

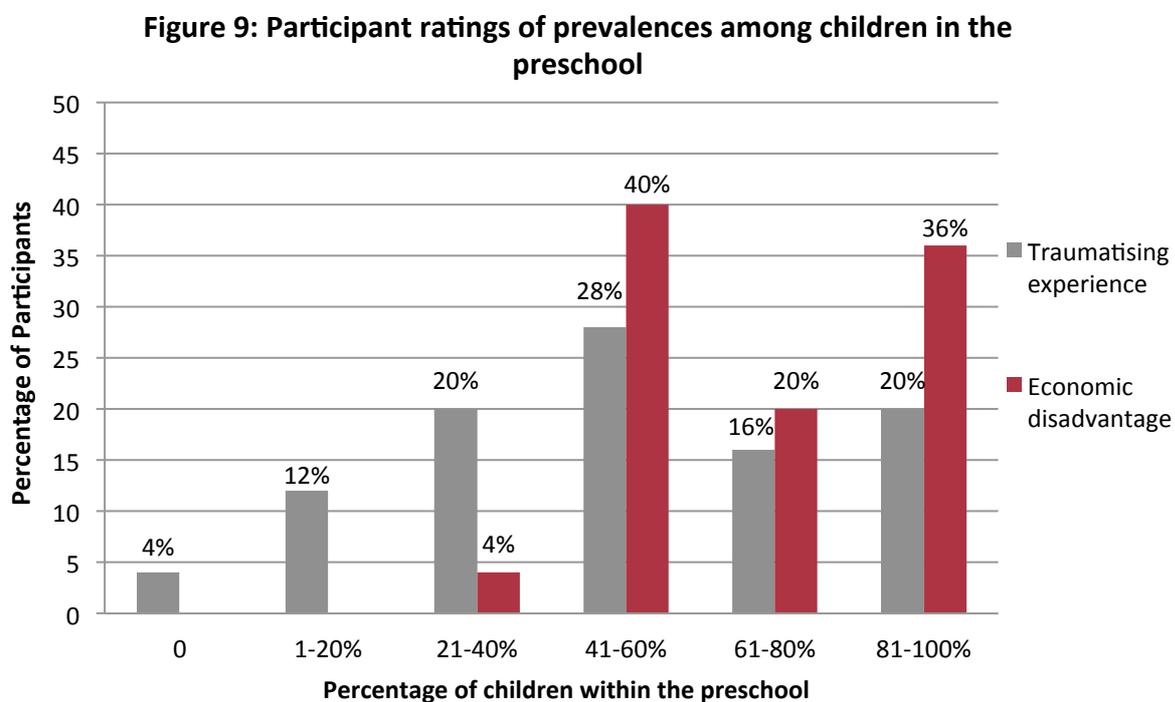


Children in the preschool

Participants described their perceptions about the children in their preschool, their backgrounds and needs in regards to economic disadvantage and experiences of trauma, as well as the best and most challenging things about them.

Perceived prevalence of economic disadvantage and traumatising experiences

Participants gave their 'professional opinion' on the percentage of children within their preschool who came from 'economically disadvantaged backgrounds' and the percentage of children who had had 'traumatising experiences', such as experiencing domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, or severe poverty. Both of these ratings are displayed in Figure 9.



Overall, participants were of the opinion that the experience of economic disadvantage was very common among the students in their preschool, with the majority of participants (56%) judging the proportion of children in their preschool who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to be well over half (61-100%).

In commenting upon the prevalence of economic disadvantage, a couple of participants mentioned other associated demographic factors that characterised the families in their preschool, especially suggesting that being Indigenous was associated with economic disadvantage.

Aboriginal and low income. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

[Our centre] is an Aboriginal preschool within our community. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

*We have a high percentage of single parent families and/or unemployed parents.
(Indigenous, Preschool Director)*

Another participant indicated that an economically disadvantaged background often came with other challenging family circumstances.

Fathers and mothers in and out of jail systems, family home's lifestyles, families living with and on top of each other, same homes, crowded. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Some of these experiences might also be considered traumatising. However, participants' perceptions of the prevalence of traumatising experiences varied more than their perceptions of economic disadvantage. One participant had the opinion that no children were affected, while others indicated most or all of the children in their preschool were; however, the majority of participants (64%) estimated the proportion of children in their preschool who experienced trauma to be above two-fifths (between 41-100%).

This variability in estimations of trauma might be related to participants' own uncertainty with their appraisals, rather than an accurate representation of the number within each preschool, as some participants attempted to select more than one range of percentages. Further, one participant commented that her response was a 'maybe', saying further:

Unless family tell us or the preschool is aware of the situation. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

On the other hand, a number of other participants were more certain of the extent of this issue in their own preschool.

A lot of our children come from domestic violence homes, and a lot of our children's parents have or are affected by drug abuse and alcohol abuse. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

I feel it is more prominent than ever. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

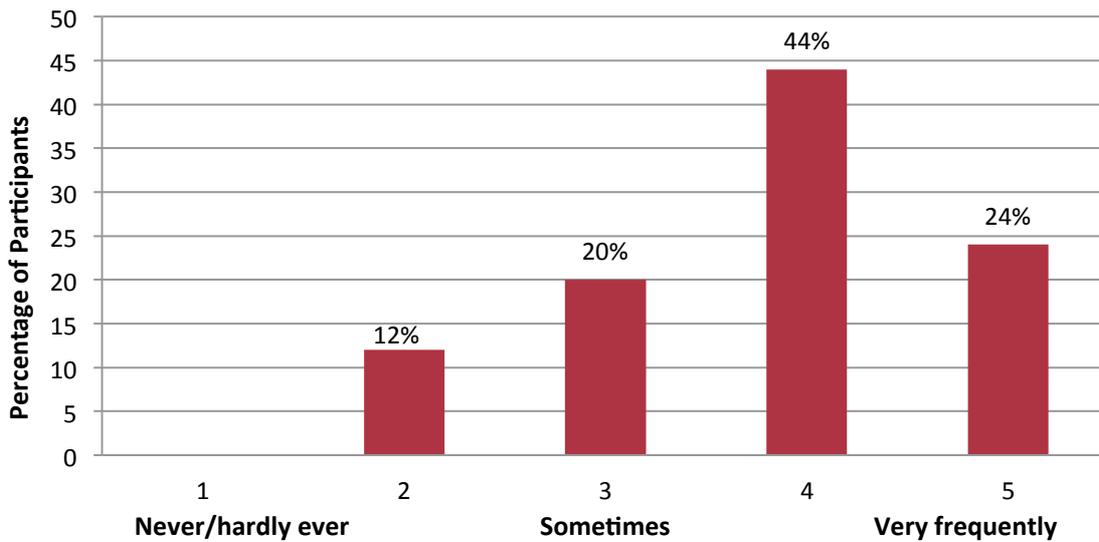
Finally, one participant reported that economic disadvantage and traumatising experiences were not the only issues faced by the children in their preschool.

*In addition to the needs stated above we also have a high number of additional needs children e.g. autism, developmental delay, speech problems, otitis media ear infections.
(Indigenous, Preschool Director)*

The impacts of trauma on the children

Participants rated how often those children they thought experienced trauma exhibited emotions or behaviours that fit with their own understanding of the effects of trauma. Figure 10 displays these ratings.

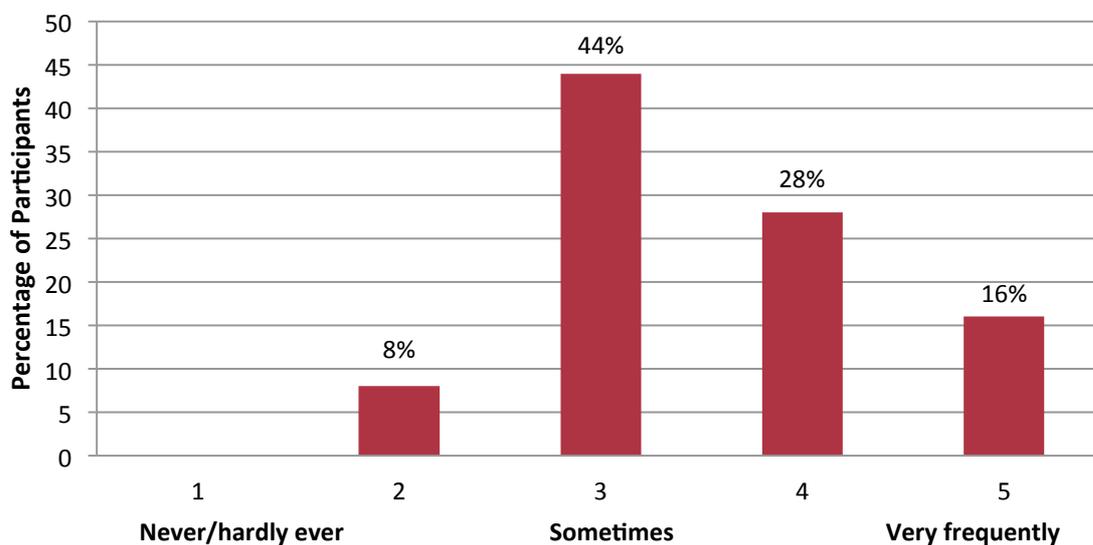
Figure 10: Participant ratings of the effects of trauma



The majority of participants (68%) reported that these children frequently (44%) or ‘very frequently’ (24%) showed emotional or behavioural signs that fit with the effects of trauma.

Participants also rated how often these children demonstrated age-appropriate self-care. These ratings are displayed in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Participant ratings of age-appropriate self-care



The largest proportion of participants (44%) indicated that children only ‘sometimes’ displayed age-appropriate self-care; just sixteen percent of participants rated children as ‘very frequently’ displaying age-appropriate self-care.

The best things about the children

Participants described the best things about the children in their preschools. A number of participants mentioned that these children had **unique qualities**.

That they are individuals. That it is never a boring time, they make it exciting, challenging, an overall wonderful time. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Honest, Funny, Strong sense of individuality, Caring, Strong personalities. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

In particular, a number of participants described their children as **resilient**, and suggested that despite difficult personal circumstances they were “willing to learn new things”.

Our children are amazing, they are dearly loved by all of our staff and are some of the most resilient children I have ever worked with. Our centre provides a very nurturing and safe environment for our students and they feel very much at home here. We provide a little oasis, where the children can leave their cares behind and this is the most rewarding part of our work. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

They are capable. They are resilient. They are survivors. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Beautiful positive children, uninhibited and natural, curious and innocent, resilient and capable. They love coming here, which is our reward. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Quite a number of participants picked up this theme of the preschool as an ‘oasis’, and further suggested that their preschool’s children had a **strong sense of belonging to their centre**, and a great deal of mutual affection with the staff.

This is their happy and safe place. As they build trusting and secure relationships, they often give back far more than we consider we give to them as they forge ahead in their early childhood education. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

They love to be here at the preschool... they love to be in our room and be a part of our group. We like to do things/decisions together and this enables us to feel we belong. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Children become familiar and gain a sense of belonging to the service. We work from this basis, all goes well. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

The most challenging things about the children

A large number of participants suggested that when the children engaged in **negative behaviour** this was the most challenging thing about them. It was a challenge that required considerable expertise on their part to deal with.

*The children's behaviours, not being nice to each other fighting, hitting swearing.
(Indigenous, Preschool Educator)*

Educators asking the questions why? What is triggering the behaviour. Asking the question what can we do as a team to support the behaviour. What teaching strategies do we need to implement and reflect on. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

In mentioning children's poor behaviour, participants often sought to provide context to why some children behaved badly, indicating that **home-life impacted** upon their **abilities to concentrate and cooperate** at preschool.

*Many children have little routine at home and given too many rights but no responsibility. They grow up with no rules or borders. Parenting skill does not seem to be very good...
(Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)*

High level of behaviour issues due to circumstances of home environment. Inconsistent parenting strategies by young parents therefore some children do not know how to listen, wait, share, cooperate... (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

As these responses show, parents were suggested to be both an influence on their children's bad behaviour, and a further challenge to addressing it, being inconsistent and difficult to communicate with.

A number of participants reported that the possibility some children had traumatising experiences posed a challenge, either because of the participants inability to adequately identify or help with it.

The days when you can see that they are struggling to deal with their home environment and [are] not able to leave their cares behind. Knowing about the cycles of trauma and abuse and knowing that many of our children will either grow up being victims or perpetrators of violence. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Not knowing family background in regards to traumatic experiences they may have been involved in. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Not to help or support the children when they leave the pre-school environment. It's out of our control when children return home. Not all children have a bad home environment, it is just when they are going through bad times. We as a preschool educator know when this is happening because we live within our community and became aware of issues. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Finally, a number of participants reported that some children in their preschool had high emotional or developmental needs, disabilities, poor diets and illnesses, that made their work challenging.

Interacting with parents and the community

Participants provided information about the parents and carers in their preschool, how they communicated with them, and how receptive and engaged parents and carers were with the preschool, and meeting their children's educational needs.

Communicating with parents and carers

The participants reported how often they communicated with the parents/carers of children in their preschool, and by what means. Participants most commonly communicated with parents/carers on a daily basis (60%), and a further 28% communicated less than once a day, but at least weekly. Only three participants (12%) indicated that they communicated with parents less than once a week.

All participants reported face-to-face contact as a means by which they communicated, followed by telephone (96%) and the preschool newsletter (84%). While communication via email was much less common (only 28%), a couple of participants reported that they utilised other online mediums, such as Facebook and a preschool website, and suggested that they were valuable both for staff and parents.

A number of participants also reported that their preschools operating a bus service had affected their potential to communicate with parents or carers.

Most travel to and from school on the bus run therefore limiting communication with families. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

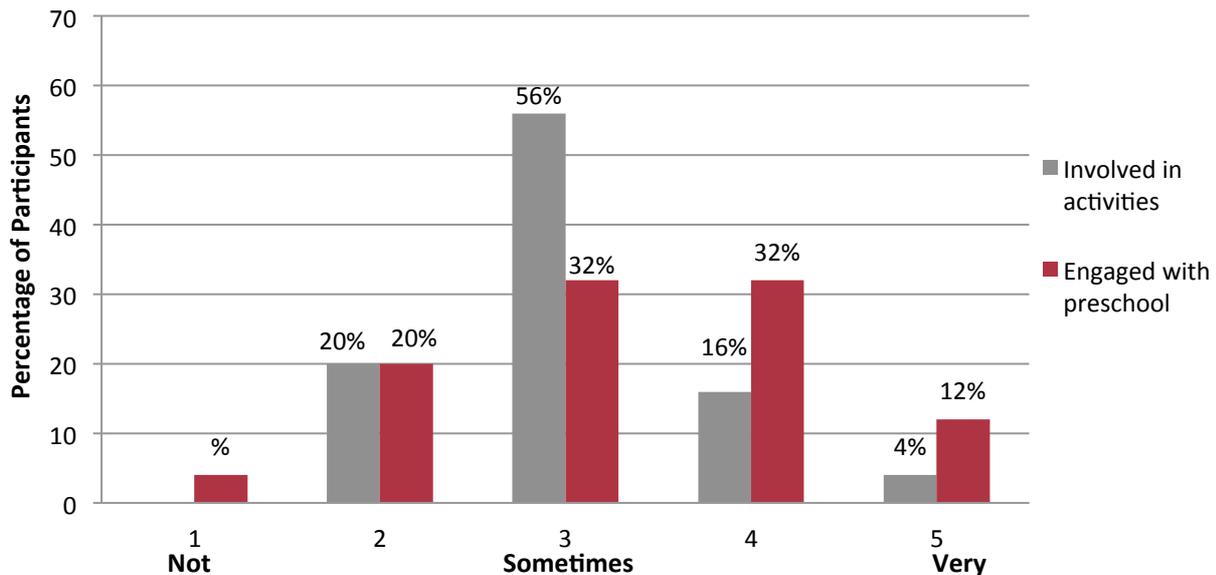
We run a free door to door bus service, so I miss out on much of the face to face communication with parents and carers. My assistants see our families every day and they pass on any messages and communicate any concerns with me. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Parent and carer's engagement in the preschool, and involvement in activities

Participants rated how engaged parents and carers were with the preschool, and their level of involvement in preschool activities. Engagement with the preschool might include parents bringing their children to school and asking about their child's day. Overall participants rated parents as more engaged than not, with most (76%) indicating parents/carers were at least 'sometimes' engaged. However, there was considerable variability across the sample. Figure 12 displays these results.

The majority of participants (56%) rated parents and carers as only sometimes involved in the preschool's activities, such as cultural activities, special parent/carer days, theme days, excursions and picnics. Only one participant indicated that parents were very involved in these activities.

Figure 12: Participant ratings of parents/carers engagement and involvement



Similar to previous responses about communicating with parents, some participants suggested that the way children were transported to and from the centre affected the possibility of engaging parents with the preschool, with the bus limiting this potential, while having parents drop-off and pick up children allowed for face-to-face engagement.

Some participants, further, reported that they had attempted to encourage parents and carers to become *engaged* with the preschool by holding community activities and holiday celebrations.

Following on from this, a number of participants' responses indicated that parents 'sometimes' *involvement* in preschool activities might be the result of their willingness to contribute to some types of activities, such as festive or cultural ones, but not others (i.e. those requiring time and responsibility).

If we provide cultural activities, food and special activities we find our families get involved. Parent and community involvement is very poor when seeking volunteers or assistance at other times. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

I have never had a parent come in, wishing to help out or just play with their child. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Some participants' responses suggested that parents who were not engaged in their preschool viewed their parental responsibilities as temporarily relieved when children were at preschool.

You have some parents who just want to know how their child is going and if they are enjoying their time here, then some parents who look like they just want to get rid of their children, it's like they are stressed and need a break. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Parents often seem to want to be rid of their children. They pay us to care for them and don't feel they should have to do anything. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Finally, a number of participants indicated that parents approved of the preschool’s work, but did not generally feel the need to come into the centre.

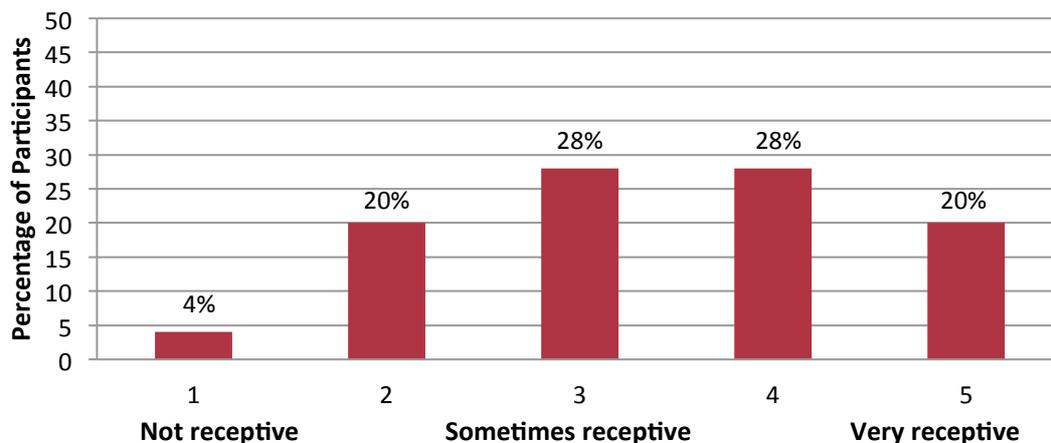
The parents/carers trust us so sometimes it's very hard to engage parents to come to the centre. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

When parents do attend they love what we are presenting them but it is hard to get them here. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Parents and carers receptiveness to concerns about their child

Participants rated how receptive their preschool’s parents and carers were to any issues or concerns staff might raise with them about their children, such as the children’s behaviours, individual development, following up referrals to paediatricians or speech therapist. There was a fairly even spread of ratings, though the majority of participants (76%) rated parents and carers as at least ‘sometimes’ receptive to these issues and concerns. These results are displayed in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Participant ratings of parent/carers receptiveness to concerns



Again participants suggested that receptiveness to issues or concerns varied considerably depending on the parents.

It varies quite a bit, where some families are very pro-active for their child's health and development, where others we need to chase up constantly each step of the process. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Further to this, a couple of participants suggested that parents were often unreliable with keeping appointments.

Our parents can be a bit slack, with follow ups and meetings. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

A number of participants also reported that, when bringing up issues, parents and carers might be initially unwilling to accept them, and, therefore, preschool staff might go to considerable effort to get them to understand the significance of their child's issue.

Most parents are in denial and need several instances of where staff raise the issues and concerns that they have before parents act. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Preschool is the first time a parent will be told about concerns for a child. Most parents require massive input - some will even pull the child out so they do not need to acknowledge concerns. Some parents do not have the cognitive skills to understand our concerns. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

The best things about the parents and carers

In describing the best things about the parents and carers in their preschool, many participants reported they were generally **friendly, approachable** and **interested** in their children's experiences at preschool.

The large majority are quite friendly and open about their children. They are interested in what their children are learning about and how they are progressing in the classroom. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Some parents bring in information about the children's holidays and culture when approached. Most are approachable, friendly and receptive of the carers. Parents are willing to carry on processes from the preschool at home or explain what they do at home so it can be followed at preschool e.g. routines, dealing with concerns/behaviours. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

As the above response indicates, many parents were described as **willing to share their cultural knowledge**, and also collaborate with the preschool in ensuring their children's needs were addressed.

They trust us to care for their children. Families feel welcome and value this centre being an Aboriginal preschool and half our staff are Aboriginal people, therefore are connected with community members. Some have a lot of knowledge and skill that they share with us. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Participants reported that parents collaborated with the preschool not only by offering practical support, but by developing a **sense of connection to the centre**.

Support they give to the centre based on building respectful relationships. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

We strongly advise the parents [of their] ownership of the preschool. The preschool is there service and we are the educators but for it to work we all have to work together in collaboration. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

A number of other participants' suggested that parents and carers genuine love and concern for their children was one of the best things about them.

They are doing the best job that they can for their children. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Most are easy to get along with. Will say hello down the street. Most want what's best for their children. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Finally, some participants indicated that one of best things about parents and carers was that they entrusted their children to the care of the preschool and its staff.

They support their children by sending them to preschool. The majority of our children are enrolled at age 2 and attend our service for three years prior to starting school. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

That our families trust us with their children. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

The most challenging things about the parents and carers

While a couple of participants reported that the main challenges with parents and carers were around **raising their confidence**, and giving them **time to settle into the preschool**, as might be expected from earlier responses, many other participants reported that the challenges involved parents **not contributing to the centre**, and **being difficult to communicate with**.

Lack of communication. Commitment to meetings is inconsistent. Constant details change and don't get passed on to us. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Getting parents involved in activities which concern the children e.g. excursions. Their lack of interest in involving the kids in activities at home or interests in the preschool program. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

The lack of engagement with staff regards to educating their child. The lack of attendance at most excursions, unwillingness to join the governance board and what seems like a lack of involvement in "helping" to educate their child. It's like it is our job to do it all. Poor skills of parents can be challenging. We are often unable to contact them as they won't answer mobiles. They can be extremely abusive if they don't get their own way. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

A number of other participants suggested that many parents did not have a very high opinion of staff or the role of preschool in educating children, and that this might affect their willingness to be involved.

That parents/carers only see us a babysitter. Parents not open to speaking about their children. Parents not wanting to sit down or come into our centre. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Lack of interest or response in helping out at fundraisers, working bees. Little respect for teaching/educator early childhood qualifications. (e.g. I'll see what the kindergarten teacher thinks next year). (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Some participants reported that parents were often unable or unwilling to take full responsibility for the child's education and wellbeing.

Social and interactive engagement and taking responsibility for their children's wellbeing and their own wellbeing. Not jumping to conclusions and getting angry... (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Complacency. Not open to learning basic parenting skills where needed. Little involvement in the centre. Keeping up to date with payment of school fees. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Finally, a couple of participants suggested that concerns associated with cultural difference and the experience of trauma made it difficult for non-Indigenous staff to effectively communicate with Indigenous parents.

Some of our parents are racist towards non-Indigenous people and this extends to our non-Indigenous staff members. Many of our families are suffering from trauma, they will occasionally say inappropriate and hurtful things to us. The most challenging thing of all is knowing that many of our students will also suffer this trauma through exposure to family violence and drug and alcohol abuse. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Not being open when I approach them (as I am not Aboriginal) - sometimes I need to get our Community Worker to do this for me. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

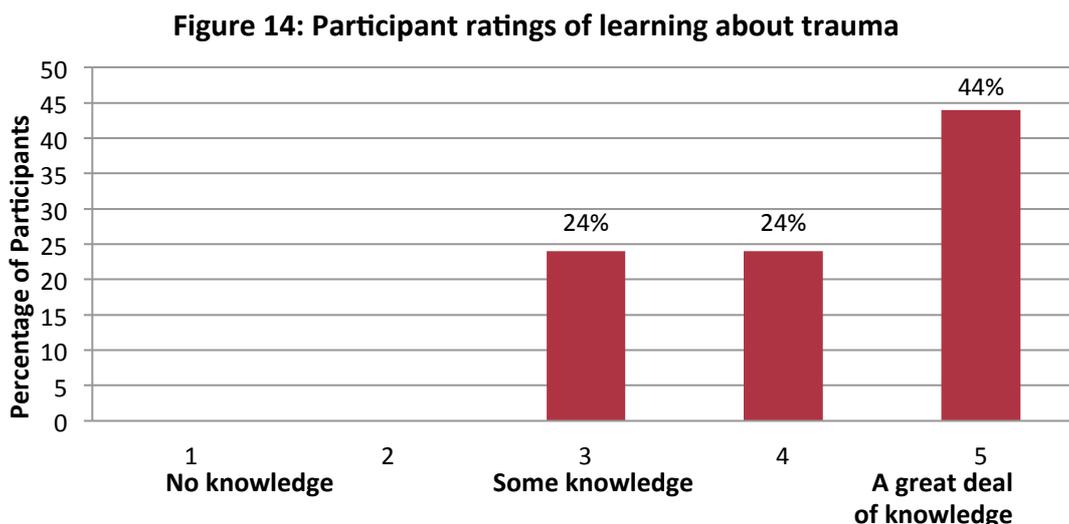
Understanding trauma and its impacts

Participants reported on the role of Gunawirra in helping them understand trauma and how play and art might be used to help children cope with it. Participants were also asked about their experiences witnessing trauma, and the effects this had on their own lives.

Gunawirra and understanding trauma

Participants rated how much they had learned so far about the experience and effect of trauma on children through the presence of Gunawirra in their preschool.

All participants rated that they had gained at least ‘some knowledge’ through working with Gunawirra. The largest proportion of these participants (44%) indicated that they had learned ‘a great deal of knowledge’ about trauma and its effects on children. These findings are displayed in Figure 14.



A number of participants elaborated that they had learned that trauma was an issue larger than any one individual.

Trauma is not just one person, it can affect a child, parents, family, community, and culture. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Generational trauma. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Other participants reported that their increased knowledge of trauma was more practically-based, allowing them to identify and assist with the trauma experienced by the children in their preschools:

The difference between grief and trauma and different behaviours from children could be a sign. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

How every small step we take/allow/facilitate is another step forward for the children to express/develop. Don't expect big change, quickly, it takes time. What importance we are/have working with children 2-6yrs. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

While one participant commented that Gunawirra's recent conference on trauma was "amazing", another participant, who had rated learning only 'some knowledge', indicated that, at this stage, she had not learned enough to deal with the scope of the problem.

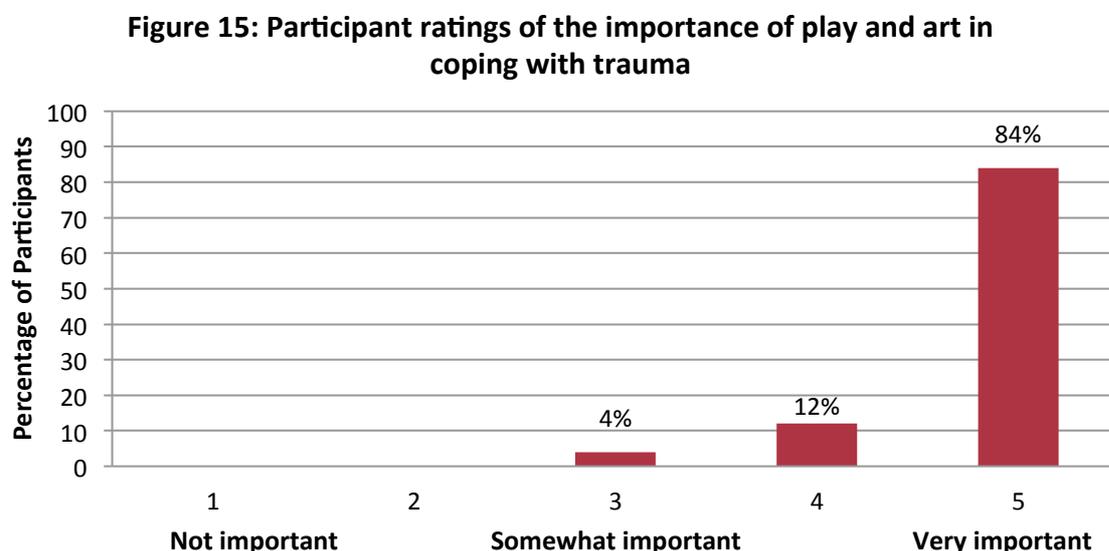
It is such a broad field! I have done a small amount of training with Gunawirra and our director discusses what she learns while training. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Finally, another participant who had also indicated they had only 'some knowledge' of trauma reported that she had gained comparatively more from Gunawirra in regards to meeting children's physical needs.

We have learnt more about the need for health and hygiene in children, been given care packages, as well as the need for nutrition and healthy ears. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

Coping with trauma: The importance of play and art for children

Participants rated how important they thought play and art (including indoor and outdoor experiences) were in assisting children to cope with trauma. These results are shown in Figure 15.



An overwhelming majority of participants (84%) rated play and art as 'very important' in assisting children in coping with trauma. The narrow range of participants' responses, with all but one participant (96%) indicating that it was more than 'somewhat important', demonstrates that there is a large degree of support among preschool staff members for the role of play and art in assisting children to cope with trauma.

One participant commented further that they found art and play of great benefit not only for children, but for staff too.

The art therapy is crucial to provide a sensory experience for children to calm selves, express selves, it will be of great benefit for us as a staff also. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

The effect of trauma on preschool staff

Participants were then asked to consider how working with traumatised children might have affected their personal lives. Most participants suggested that they worried a great deal about the children in their preschool.

Worry about the home life they have to go home to and deal with. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Yes I often worry about children when they leave and during holidays. I am a mum and worry for my own kids that I treat my preschool kids like my own. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

This worry was then reported to affect participants in a variety of ways. A number of participants indicated that worrying about the children affected their own ability to function in their home lives.

We have not seen severely traumatised children at this service that others have. However, we have witnessed trauma both in parents, grandparents and children which affects staff eating and sleeping patterns. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

I go home and can't switch off and cry a hell of a lot. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Sleepless nights - worrying about child/children. Brings memories of own childhood trauma. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

As this third response indicates, working with traumatised children can bring up some participants' own experiences of trauma. Another participant commented upon this, reporting that working with traumatised children had been a somewhat positive experience.

Trauma looks different in everyone. Working with these children has helped me see the trauma in my own life, and in a way is healing. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

A number of other participants also felt that these experiences have had some positive effect, reporting that working with traumatised children had given them renewed vigour in appreciating, understanding and attempting to help children

Absolutely...the passion and the drive to take on challenges and take calculated risks, not to be afraid to revisit strategies and collaborative ideas. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Makes you more pro-active in helping others and identifying symptoms. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

It has made me more understanding and receptive of the children and their experiences, thus making me more understanding of their behaviours and how to deal with that. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

However, many participants reported that working with traumatised children had affected them negatively; upsetting them and making them feel inadequate to deal with it.

Very much so, you can't see such sadness on a daily basis, in these little people's lives and not be affected and saddened. We just keep going because we have to don't we? (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

It makes me feel very negative about the community, town and country I live in. I have seen so many awful things and I do not seem to be able to help much. I see the problem growing and no one is dealing with it in any significant way. It makes me sad and I don't live in this type of community. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Yes I struggle with emotions of the children. I worry about them and I take the worry/guilt home with me. I feel like sometimes, I am not making progress with the children and I get overwhelmed. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Finally, a couple of participants suggested that preschool staff required support to help with the burden of working with traumatised children.

Emotionally, mentally, physically. We are there for the children but who's there for the educators. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

It can be emotional for us as child care workers, but we discuss things between ourselves, about the children. (Indigenous, Role not specified)

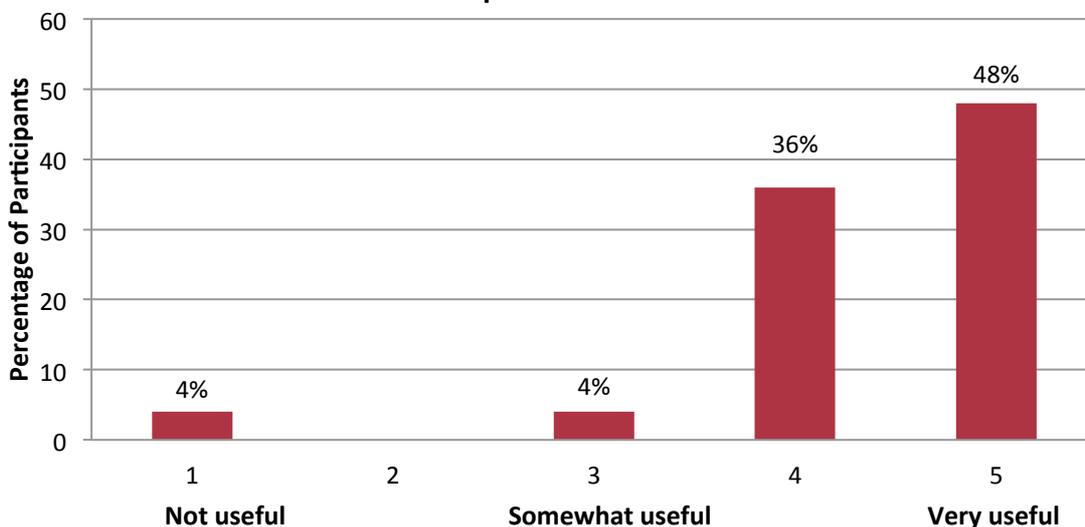
Gunawirra's support in the preschool

Participants reported on their experiences of working with Gunawirra, and their perceptions of the usefulness of Gunawirra's support in their preschool.

Usefulness of the preschool visits Gunawirra makes

Participants rated the usefulness of Gunawirra's visits to their preschool, with a large majority of participants (88%) rating them at least 'somewhat useful', and a sizable proportion (48%) rating them 'very useful'. Only two participants rated below this, one participant (4%) indicating that the visits were 'somewhat useful', while another (4%) rated them as not 'useful'. A further two participants did not provide a rating. These findings are presented in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Participant ratings of the usefulness of Gunawirra's preschool visits



These results indicate a strong degree of support among participants for Gunawirra's visits to their preschool. Two participants, one who provided no rating and the other who rated these visits as 'not useful', indicated that, at this stage, they had not received any visits.

As such, these outliers should not be taken as a disapproval of the usefulness of Gunawirra's visits, or their support, as another participant's response also suggested.

We are in an area that is not frequently visited by Gunawirra, though they have made us a priority preschool for receiving support. The one visit that we did receive was very emotional for our staff, it opened the floodgates and there were many tears shed as we shared of some of our stories. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Overall, most participants were very positive about Gunawirra's visits, and mentioned a number of different aspects that they found useful. They reported that it offered emotional, practical and financial support, including fostering communication and collaboration among staff, providing strategies and resources to work on various problems, and helping staff understand Indigenous children and people, and significance of trauma.

The art therapy was very useful. Identifying children that display their trauma in different ways and how intervention can have an effect. The addition of a breakfast programme has been incredible for our children. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

The education on the health and hygiene has helped the children as they have also been given physical knowledge i.e. the packs that have helped create a better understanding in the children. The involvement in nutrition, tucker and the garden has also been helpful. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

Highly professional, well experienced knowledgeable staff. Easy to work with, they fit in well, see a need and help us provide support regarding those areas of need. Provided my staff and I with a platform, led by professionals to collaborate regularly around these stressful, hurtful issues around trauma in our children's lives and providing us practical ways to help the children, the families, ourselves and our fellow workers. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

A number of participants, further, reported that Gunawirra's visits had validated their needs and the significance of their role as preschool educators.

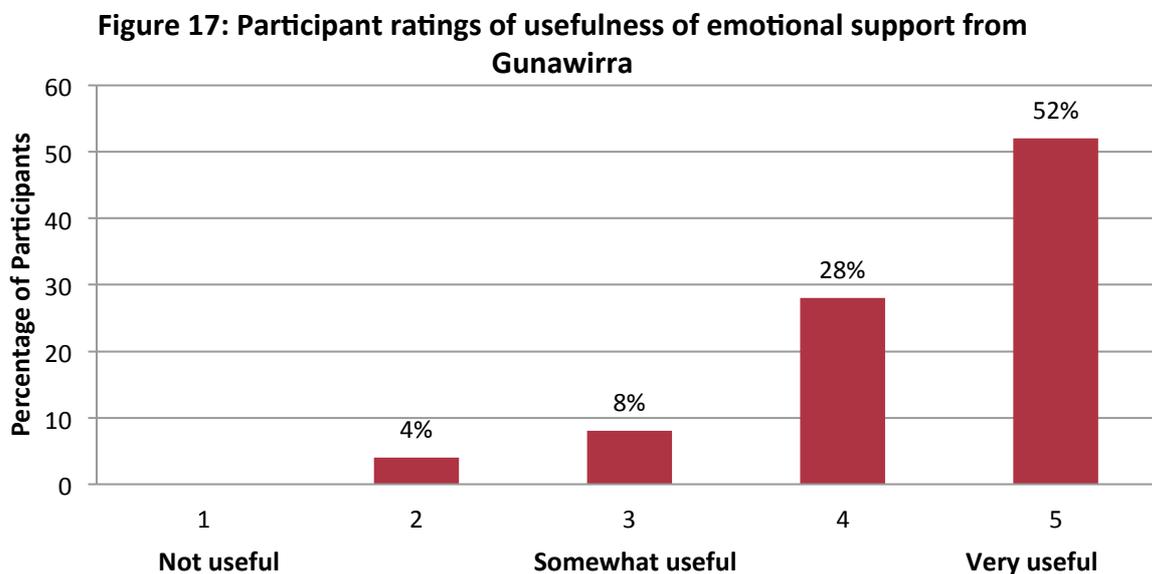
Highlights needs of staff to be encouraged to keep doing what we are doing and give us knowledge and strategies to work on problems. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

The value Gunawirra places on our services and early childhood education. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Usefulness of the weekly contact with Gunawirra

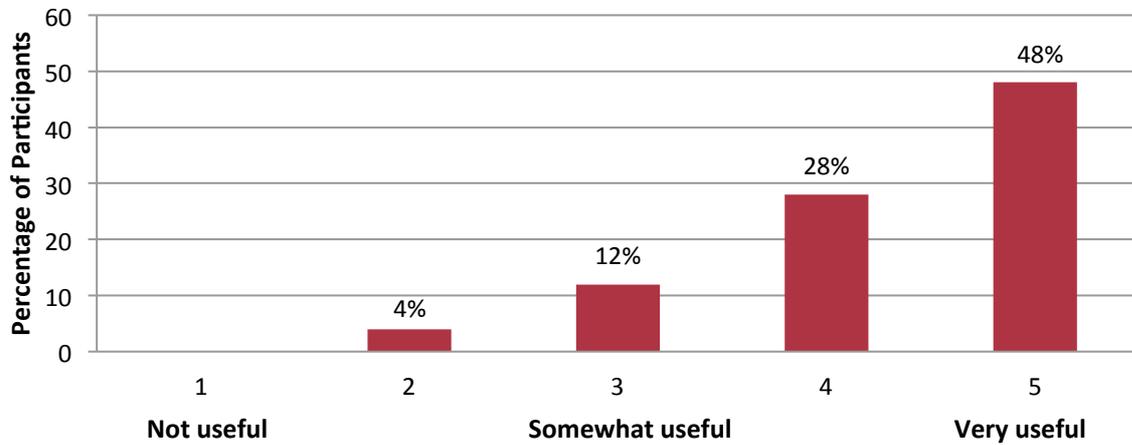
Participants rated the usefulness of Gunawirra's weekly contacts across a range of indicators: emotional support, debriefing, reflective space and practical support.

Emotional support was rated highly by participants, with the majority indicating it was 'very useful'. These results for emotional support are displayed in Figure 17.



The opportunity to debrief during weekly contacts was, therefore, also rated highly among participants, with the majority of participants rating them more than somewhat useful. These ratings are displayed in Figure 18.

Figure 18: Participant ratings of usefulness of debriefing with Gunawirra

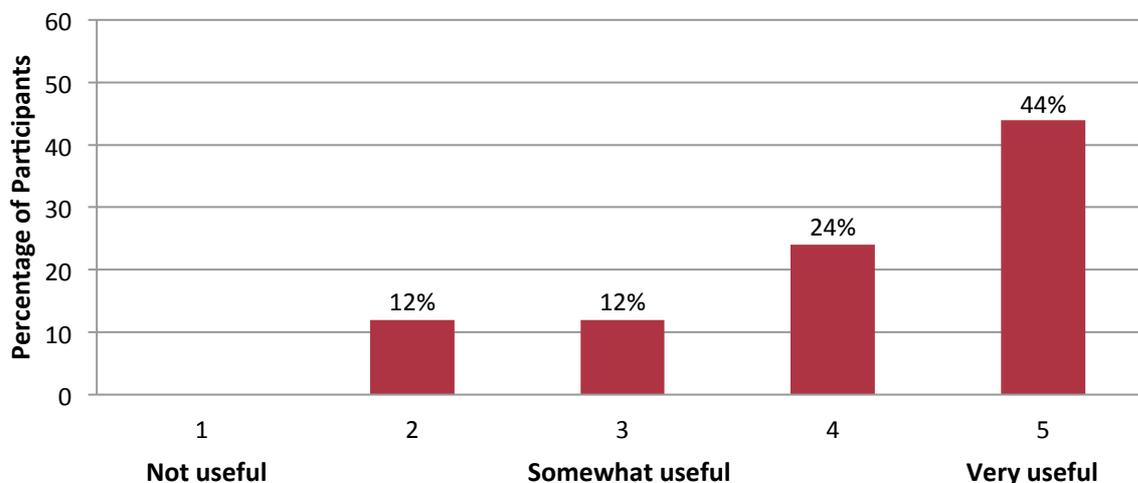


One participant, in particular, commented positively on the confidentiality provided in this contact, indicating that it helped them to cope with, but not resolve issues.

The weekly contacts for me are a time to share (debrief) when I can't tell anyone else. It reduces the load, but doesn't fix anything else. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

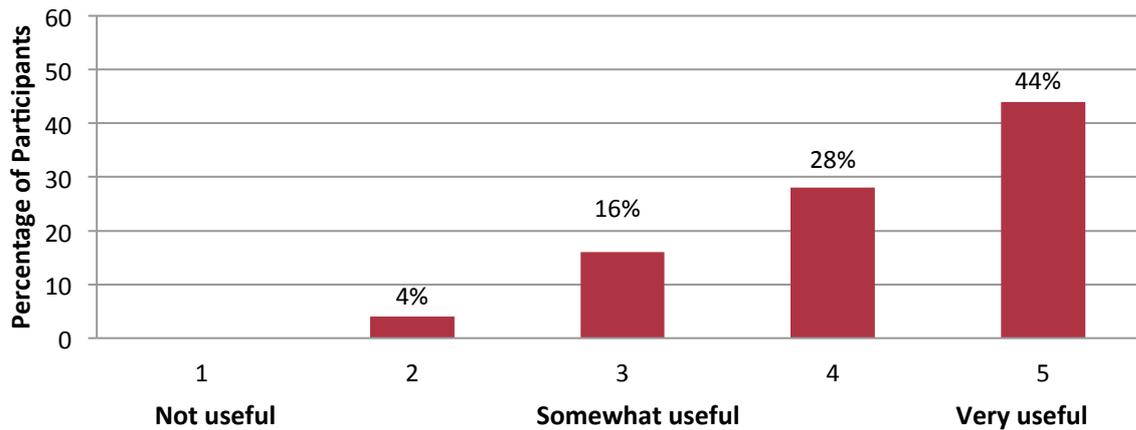
While reflective space was still rated as 'useful' or greater by the majority of participants, it had a slightly lower rating overall, with three participants (12%) rating it below 'somewhat useful'. These results are displayed in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Participant ratings of the usefulness of reflective space



Finally, practical supports was rated as more than 'somewhat useful' by the majority of participants (72%). These findings are displayed in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Participant ratings of the usefulness of practical supports



Some participants commented further that they found the practical resources Gunawirra provided, particularly their financial support, training and initiatives, to be useful supports.

The \$'s Gunawirra are able to source are very appreciated, particularly for gardens and open days. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Time for the team to get together and strategize with these professionals. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher).

Gunawirra sponsors our staff to attend their trauma seminars, we find the support and networking very helpful. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Overall, then, participants most often rated Gunawirra's weekly contacts as 'very useful' across all indicators. Further there was little variability within each indicator and between them, with the majority of participants rating all at least 'useful'. However, two participants (8%) gave no ratings on these indicators. Similar to previous missing responses, those participants who provided no response for this question reported that they did not have access to Gunawirra's weekly contacts.

We don't have weekly contact, would be great (Pre-school Director has phone calls from Gunawirra). (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Staff).

As this response also suggests, a number of participants, who gave relatively low ratings across the indicators, reported that they approved of contact with Gunawirra, but, because of their role, did not receive them on a regular basis.

I received this briefly and it was really good to debrief. Our director receives most of the support. With the stress and strain of the job I imagine this would be beneficial. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Limited contact I have had though has been excellent. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

In contrast to this, Preschool Directors, who generally received these weekly contacts with Gunawirra, were better able to comment upon the usefulness of this service. One reported that part of the usefulness of Gunawirra’s contact was that it was not just weekly, but “always available” through phone and email.

Other supports to the preschool

Participants selected the other kinds of support their preschool received, in addition to that offered by Gunawirra. As can be seen in Table 2, the majority of participants reported that other staff and volunteers provided them with support within their preschool.

Support	Count (N)
Other staff/volunteers at the preschool	80% (20)
Parents	40% (10)
Community/local groups	48% (12)
Family/friends	68% (17)
Organisations/agencies outside your preschool	52% (13)
None of the above	4% (1)

Table 2: Participant selections of other supports offered to their preschool

As well as the one participant who selected ‘none of the above’, another participant selected none of these supports, and reported that they were uncertain on this matter.

Further support from Gunawirra

Participants were asked in what ways Gunawirra could provide them with further support. In most of the responses, participants demonstrated their approval of Gunawirra by recommending that they continued, or extended, the services, training and resources they already offered.

Please continue with the two day seminars, they are a great P.D. as well as wonderful networking. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

More visits and more contacts to on floor staff :) (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Continue to provide funding and support to implement the Five Big Ideas. Continue to send donations of toys and clothing. Continue to assist with funding our nutrition program.

Continue to fund our cultural and art therapy programs. Continue to provide phone support.

Continue to provide care packs. Continue sponsoring our staff to attend Trauma seminars. Provide further training in Marte Meo. Provide training in creating trauma informed environments for our children, families and staff. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

A number of other participants reported that, at this stage of the roll-out, they wanted more training on trauma and on implementing the *Five Big Ideas* program to the preschool staff.

Provide further teaching tools about the Five Big Ideas as they seem to relate positively to the children and children respond well. Provide further teaching on the trauma to children and the need to focus on this. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

More in trauma. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Training regarding Five Big Ideas for staff not familiar with it. I'm sure there may be if we sat down and discussed it, but generally Gunawirra are providing support to our centre in a holistic manner, where children, staff are supported, families are supported regarding deep trauma and crisis issues, culture is incorporated into the support to connect with children, staff, families around identity building. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

A couple of participants also made suggestions for further support by promoting communication among staff and with children, as well as more resources.

Run workshops to talk openly about issues. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Written material - text books and resource books. Practical strategies in dealing with children's grief in regards to death. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Finally, one participant reported that, at this stage, they required more training to effectively deal with trauma.

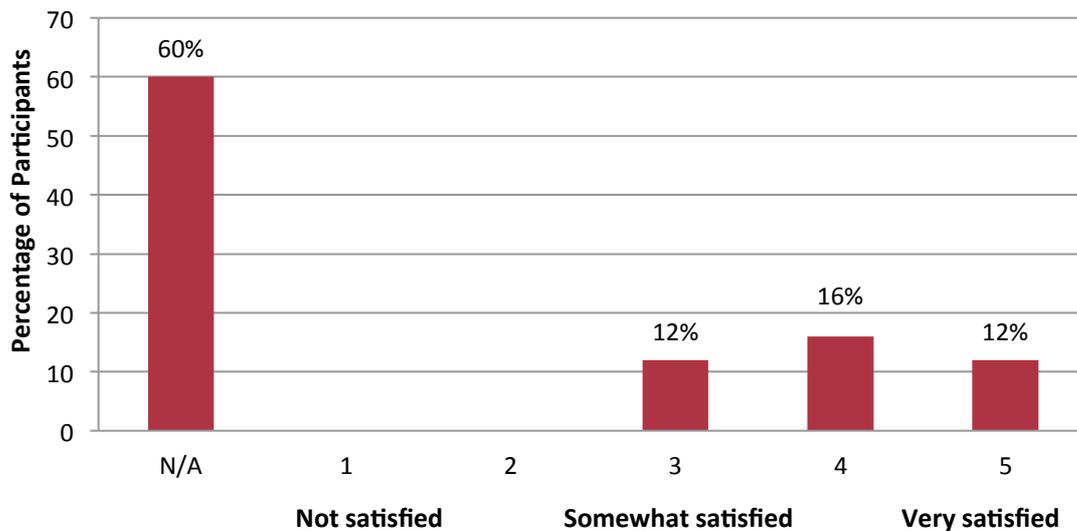
Gunawirra provides minimal support - distance I guess is a problem. They provide a once a week phone call which is the most valuable - although sometimes they can be a drain. As one of the core preschools, not only do we get support, we are also responsible for providing certain info, ideas etc. to Gunawirra for them to develop programmes for other centres. This can seem overwhelming when we are so time poor. What we really need is someone capable to come to our centre and train our staff in how to identify and deal with trauma. This has to be during outside hours time. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

The Five Big Ideas

Satisfaction with training and preparedness for offering the Five Big Ideas

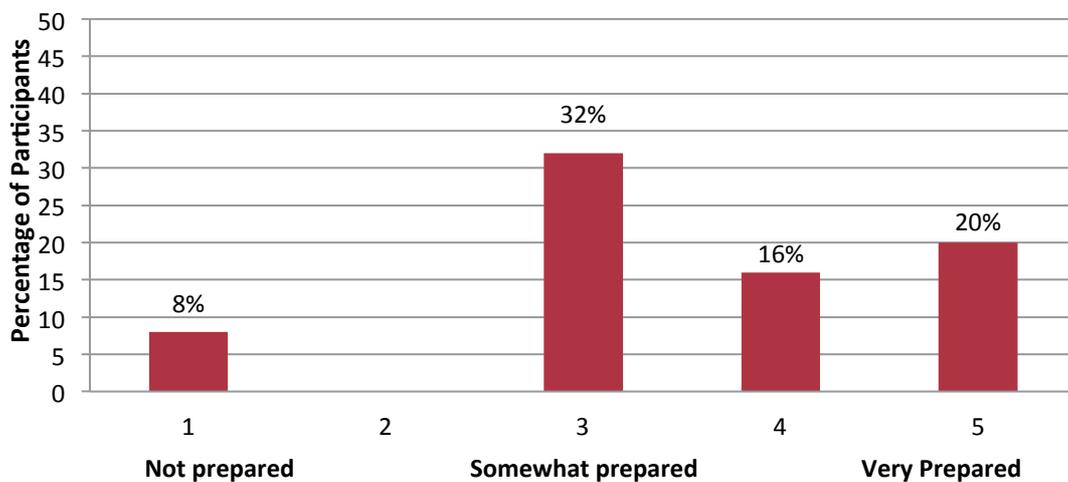
Participants rated how satisfied they were with the training and support they had received on the *Five Big Ideas* program. At this stage, however, many participants (60%) had not received the training. Among those participants who had received training (n=10), their level of satisfaction ranged from 'somewhat' to 'very satisfied'. These results are shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21: Participant ratings of satisfaction with training and support



Participants then rated how prepared they felt in offering the *Five Big Ideas* in their preschool, the results of which are displayed in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Participant ratings of preparedness to offer *Five Big Ideas*



Of the participants who did respond to this question, most rated that they were at least 'somewhat prepared', with four participants (20%) rating being 'very prepared' to offer the program.

There was a lower response rate to this question, however, with only seventy six percent of participants rating their preparedness. It would appear that those participants who rated themselves as 'not prepared', as well as those that did not answer this question, were individuals who had not yet received training on the *Five Big Ideas*.

Further needs in offering the Five Big Ideas

The participants were asked about their further needs for support, training or resources in offering the *Five Big Ideas*. As might be expected based on previous responses, a number of participants reported that, at this stage, they still required the training and resources on the *Five Big Ideas*. A couple of participants noted that while some of their preschool's staff members had training, and also experience, in implementing the *Five Big Ideas*, this varied depending on their role, and how long they had been in it.

The Five Big Ideas are what I have been doing with children for years, as I am an experienced Director. It is nothing new to me and I did not need to be trained to use it. I imagine it would be good for younger, less experienced staff. In order to make it most effective all staff at our centre should be trained regularly - together - in how to use it. It would need to be done at the centre. Webinars are the way most rural training is being done these days, if it is too expensive to send someone out to do face-to-face. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

In addition to this issue, a number of participants reported that they wanted further knowledge and training and support on cultural awareness.

Extra support for cultural awareness. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

I feel the need for more education/knowledge on the cultural background of the children to help them and myself have a better understanding of the issues surrounding them. Also how to implement the program successfully would be helpful. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

Other participants also reported practical concerns and needs for implementing the *Five Big Ideas*.

I feel the training provided discussed why the Five Big Ideas are so important, but didn't really discuss practically implementing them. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Finally, one participant reported that she considered the principles of the *Five Big Ideas* to already be a part of the educational practice within her preschool.

The Five Big Ideas are linked to the ELF and NQF so they are intertwined with everything we do. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Offering the Five Big Ideas modules in preschool

Participants selected which of the *Five Big Ideas* modules they wanted to be offered in their preschool. While there was some variability among participants, all of the modules were endorsed by a majority of participant as something that should be offered in their preschool. These findings are shown in Table 3.

Module	Count (N)
Personal health and hygiene	68% (17)
Nutrition	68% (17)
Healing and resilience	60% (15)
My culture, my identity	68% (17)
My land, our environment	68% (17)

Table 3: *Five Big Ideas* modules participants want offered in their preschools

While the percentages of participants who wanted each of these modules offered was not particularly high, this may not be due to participants disapproving of the *Five Big Ideas*. Rather, a couple of participants reported that they were all important, and already taught in their preschool, hence they did not need to be concerned with choosing which to offer in future.

We use all areas and have done for a few years. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

We do all of this effectively. Our staff are very qualified and capable. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Further, a number of participants who selected none of the modules had also yet to receive any training on the program, and so may have been uncertain about answering the question.

A number of other participants reported that all the modules of the *Five Big Ideas* were important.

All five of the ideas are important in their own right. If these areas are looked after, they give children the best foundation for learning. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

I believe that all five are important and valid in a child's education. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

However, some participants did differentiate between modules, reporting that some were more applicable to their preschool.

Personal health and hygiene - have worked on this module a lot. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

I would like personal health and hygiene and nutrition being highlighted more in our centre. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

'My culture, my identity' and 'my land, our environment' are the most significant given there are no Indigenous educators. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Benefiting from the Five Big Ideas

Participants selected who they believed would benefit from implementing the *Five Big Ideas* in their preschool. Most participants indicated that parents/carers (88%) and the children (84%) would benefit the most. These findings are displayed in Table 4.

Beneficiaries	Count (N)
The children	84% (21)
The preschool staff	76% (19)
Parents/carers	88% (22)
The local community	68% (17)

Table 4: Participant beliefs of who will benefit from the *Five Big Ideas*

A few participants then provided further comment on *how* the *Five Big Ideas* might benefit these groups.

Educators can teach the children and the children will then teach their families and families will educate the community. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

If we could get parents involved it would greatly benefit them and the community. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Concerns with offering the Five Big Ideas

Participants reported any concerns that they had with offering the *Five Big Ideas* in their preschools. A number of participants had no concerns, instead reiterating how important they thought the program was.

No concerns as this is going to be a good program for preschools and staff and the wider community. (Indigenous, role unknown)

None at all. It's an excellent program covering basic human needs to help children grow and develop. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

One participant, while supporting the program, suggested that it “may take a bit for parents to gain trust” (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

A number of participants indicated that they would like further instruction in implementing the program, either because they had received no training so far, or because they required a refresher.

My concern is whether I fully understand the topics and strategies put in place by the Five Big Ideas, as well as the involvement and responses of the children. However, with further education I feel this can be overcome easily. (Non-Indigenous, Child Care Worker)

I would like someone to tell us about this program. I know we helped this project but that was years ago. It's only being in this last two weeks that we are starting to look at this program. I don't have a problem with it. It's fantastic but I feel like we are not in the loop. (Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

A couple of participants reported that the *Five Big Ideas*, or its principles, were already a part of their curriculum.

We have already been using these ideas for many years. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

My only concern is that the Five Big Ideas are already part of EYLF and NQF so it has been part of our early childhood philosophy prior to the Five Big Ideas being presented. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Finally, a couple of participants reported on different practical issues around implementing the program, or certain parts of it.

The puppets are too confronting, too sensitive to be implemented into preschools. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

We offer and do a lot of different programs finding to do any program to a high standard extremely challenging and most days impossible. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Educator)

Further comments

Participants were asked if they had any further comments about the topic areas covered in the survey. A number of participants commented on being satisfied with the survey, and positive about implementing the program.

No concerns, good questions in this survey. (Indigenous, role unknown)

No all the areas in Five Big Ideas are great. (Indigenous, Preschool Director)

However, a couple of participants commented that they needed more social interaction than what they were currently receiving.

More in emotional/social aspects. Adding onto those already presented. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

I am looking forward to the group sessions where I can talk about some things that worry me in my job. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Teacher)

Finally, one participant described a number of issues that had reoccurred in participant responses throughout the survey, including the difficulty in engaging parents, the lack of time and resources, and the large workload of some preschool staff.

Engaging parents within this programme is a major and very time consuming process. To fully implement the Five Big Ideas we would need a fully paid staff member to do the work with families. Preschools are underpaid, understaffed, poorly skilled and most tasks fall to more capable staff members - and they become overworked and can't do any job properly. (Non-Indigenous, Preschool Director)

Section Two: Evaluation of Preschool Staff Survey and Interviews Post Roll Out of *Five Big Ideas*

Post Roll Out Evaluation Design and Method

Design

The evaluation of the post roll out of the *Five Big Ideas* program is based on data from surveys and semi-structured interviews with preschool staff at three preschools in Regional NSW and one semi-structured interview with a Gunawirra staff member. Each preschool was selected as a case study by Gunawirra.

Ethical approval for the evaluation was received from the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. All documents that were part of the ethics approval were provided to the preschool directors and written acknowledgement of the ethics approval for the study was subsequently received from each preschool director. Participation in the research was voluntary, with opt-in consent procedures followed throughout the data collection. All data has been treated as confidential.

Procedure

Researchers from the Centre for Health Research made contact with the preschool directors from the schools identified by Gunawirra. During initial contact with each of the preschool directors, the researchers explained the aims of the study, the proposed methods for the evaluation and had a discussion about the practicalities of a site visit at each particular preschool. The importance of being flexible and working in with the needs of the preschools was emphasised by the researchers. As part of this discussion, the directors gave feedback on the practicalities of the study protocol within their particular preschool. Feedback from directors included: the importance of researcher sensitivity to the potential for psychological distress when discussing cultural identity and trauma, particularly for Aboriginal participants; the possibility of conducting unrecorded interviews if participants preferred; conducting interviews in groups or pairs where preferred by participants; working in with the day to day routine of the preschool and needs of the staff; and steps taken in collaboration with preschool directors to inform and prepare preschool staff for the visit, such as providing survey and interview questions in advance.

Each preschool site visit took place at a date and time identified by the preschool directors as suitable for their school. Two researchers from the Western Sydney University visited each preschool. Having two researchers present at each site visit allowed for greater flexibility around the timing of interviews according to the needs of the preschool staff on the day. Subsequently,

site visits were carried out over one full day at one preschool, and over two days at the other two preschools. Eighteen participants took part in individual semi-structured interviews and two participants took part in a group interview. All 20 participants also completed a post roll out survey. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Researchers from the Centre for Health Research also made contact with staff from Gunawirra heavily involved in the development, delivery and support of the *Five Big Ideas* program. An interview was conducted with one Gunawirra staff member at a time convenient to them. The participant gave their informed consent and the interview was audio recorded, then transcribed verbatim.

Survey and Interviews

Surveys and interviews with preschool staff were completed on site during the preschool visit. The sessions took place in a location separate to other staff members and children to allow for a private and confidential discussion with participants.

Surveys were distributed and completed by participants during the allocated interview time. In addition to the completion of the survey, participant responses also served as a prompt for verbal discussion by participants and were incorporated within the interviews where appropriate. The survey was made up of demographic questions and quantitative questions regarding participant experiences of implementing the *Five Big Ideas* program, the effectiveness of support offered by Gunawirra, and the effectiveness of the program for the children and staff.

Interviews were semi-structured and included the following topic areas: experiences of working in the preschool; experiences of the *Five Big Ideas* program so far; experiences of support and training around the *Five Big Ideas* from Gunawirra; links between the *Five Big Ideas* and curriculum; how the *Five Big Ideas* might influence the children; and how the *Five Big Ideas* might influence the role of the preschool staff. Open-ended prompts were added where necessary to elicit further descriptions of participant experience, as well as both positive and negative accounts.

The Gunawirra staff interview took place at the Gunawirra premises in Rozelle, Sydney. The interview was semi-structured and included the following topic areas: experiences of developing the *Five Big Ideas*; experiences of training preschool teachers in the *Five Big Ideas*; the perceived impact of the *Five Big Ideas* on the preschool staff, children and wider community; and, changes that may benefit the future design and implementation of the *Five Big Ideas* program.

Participant Profile

Twenty participants from three NSW preschools participated in the post roll out survey and semi-structured interviews. The preschools involved were Dalaigur, Gunnedah and Minimbah. These three preschools were at different stages of the roll out process of the *Five Big Ideas*. As a result, some participants responded to the survey questions in general rather than referring to the *Five Big Ideas* specifically. Other participants, who had not yet implemented the program, often did not answer or replied N/A to questions regarding the *Five Big Ideas*. This will be indicated throughout the report where relevant.

Cultural background and professional role

The majority of the participants self-identified as Anglo-Australian (50%), while a significant proportion self-identified as Aboriginal (45%). The participants occupied a variety of professional roles within the preschools, with the largest proportion (45%) being preschool educators **. The demographic details of this sample are presented in Table 5.

Characteristic	Percentage (N)
Cultural Background	
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	45 (9)
Anglo-Australian	50 (10)
Other	5 (1)
Professional Role	
Preschool teacher *	35 (7)
Preschool educator **	45 (9)
Preschool director/manager	10 (2)
Early intervention teacher	10 (2)

Table 5: Survey Participant Profile

* 'Head teacher', 'Room leader'

** 'Assistant teacher', 'Child care worker', 'Junior teacher'

Summary of Findings

This report contains a descriptive overview of the findings from the preschool staff survey and interviews post roll out of the *Five Big Ideas*. The aim of the survey and interviews was to evaluate participants' perspectives and experiences of the *Five Big Ideas* program.

Responses from the survey and interviews indicated that **participants faced challenges in their roles as preschool workers**, particularly in terms of **children with additional needs** and **engaging families and communities** in preschool activities. Responses also indicated that the **preschools had implemented some or all of the *Five Big Ideas* learning modules or had intentions to implement them in future.**

Overall, participants were **highly positive about Gunawirra's *Five Big Ideas* program**. In particular, participants **valued the support Gunawirra provides** the preschools in terms of **visitation** and **weekly contact**. However, some participants indicated that they would like **more direct training from Gunawirra**, particularly on **cultural awareness** and on **how to implement the *Five Big Ideas* program** in their schools.

The findings of the report are organised around the following themes: experiences of working in the preschool, including rewards and challenges; experiences of implementing the *Five Big Ideas*, including the modules used; experiences of delivering the *Five Big Ideas* including effectiveness and challenges; the benefits perceived from the *Five Big Ideas* for children, parents, community and staff; and the level of satisfaction with support in rolling out the *Five Big Ideas* program. Participants from the preschools are referred to as 'staff' or 'staff members' and the Gunawirra participant is referred to as 'Gunawirra staff member' for the remainder of the report.

Experiences working in the preschool

This section gives an overview of the various rewarding and challenging experiences reported on by the preschool staff regarding their professional roles.

Rewarding experiences

Most staff described rewarding experiences of being a preschool staff member. For many staff the biggest reward was seeing the preschool children happy. As one staff member said,

...definitely the hugs and big smiles on their faces, happy to see you when they come in every morning and the big wave goodbye in the afternoons.

In particular, staff talked about being heartened to see the children happy to come and be a part of the preschool. The staff also enjoyed seeing the “kids’ faces light up when they learn something new.”

Other staff mentioned they appreciated and enjoyed the trust that both the children and their families placed in them and that these relationships continued outside the preschool context. For example, one staff member said,

One of the best things that I love ... I’m down [at] Woollies and I’m off shopping and I will have a parent and he’ll go, “Hey, there’s [...]. Come and say, ‘G’day,’ to [...].”...That makes me warm inside ‘cause I know that they know who I am and they trust me with that child.

For some staff, learning about and teaching Aboriginal culture was the most rewarding experience, particularly as some Aboriginal staff had not been brought up learning about their culture. As one staff member said,

The most rewarding thing that would be here is actually learning about the Aboriginal culture because that’s – I’m Aboriginal, but I don’t know anything about my culture.

Non-Aboriginal staff also reported enjoying learning about Aboriginal culture and watching children learn about it from a young age.

Challenging experiences

Most staff also discussed many challenging experiences they encountered in their teaching roles. One of the major challenges reported was accommodating the increasing flow of children with additional at the preschools. For example, one staff member said,

...I’m finding that the longer I’m here, that the amount of children with additional needs or on the spectrum is just growing at a rapid rate.

Staff reported that many of the children with additional needs had experienced some form of trauma, for example, “[children] removed from their home”, “dad ... or mum [is] in jail” or “loss of

parents” and “neglect”. Staff noted the challenge of managing the time and attention given to additional needs children and that standard teacher-student ratios were not sufficient as “*five kids can equate to 30*”. They reported that working with additional needs children meant that sometimes other children were “*missing out*”. In addition, some children had not been diagnosed, therefore, no formal funding or assistance could be arranged. This forced staff to “*[spread ourselves] very thin*”, causing further burden.

Some staff found it difficult to connect with the preschool families and at times the children. The non-Aboriginal staff found it particularly difficult to connect with Aboriginal families. For example, one staff member said,

...that's been probably the biggest hurdle... getting to know the families, getting their trust and then speaking to them about [their children]...

Most staff also found it challenging to get the parents/community involved in preschool activities, commenting that “*it's always the same parents*” who got involved.

Staff who had grown up in a completely different environment from the children in their classroom talked about the challenge of understanding what the children were going through and how to connect with them. For example, one staff member said,

As a child, I didn't know anyone who died. I don't remember as a child going to a funeral or those sorts of things where these children ... they have a mattress on the floor, and they're running away in the middle of the night, and there's drugs and alcohol, and so, this sort of whole idea and scope on things is so different to my upbringing

Some staff found it difficult to maintain distance, to not get too involved with the children and their families, yet be able to provide non-judgemental support:

Dealing with all the trauma that the kids go through...to know that you're sending a child home to a house that is just in such turmoil and such dysfunction, and that you're putting that child on that bus with your heart breaking is really, really hard. And to not worry – I mean I still cannot not worry about kids that you know.

Implementing the *Five Big Ideas* Modules

This section begins with outlining the purpose of the development of the *Five Big Ideas* program from a Gunawirra staff member's perspective. It then explores preschool staff experiences with implementing the *Five Big Ideas*, including outlining linkages between the *Five Big Ideas* modules and the existing preschool curriculum. It discusses the *Five Big Ideas* modules currently taught in the preschools, the children's enjoyment of these modules, and the perceived effectiveness of each activity.

According to Gunawirra, the *Five Big Ideas* was developed for the purpose of addressing a need in training, knowledge and direction for preschool staff. For example, the Gunawirra staff member said,

The Five Big Ideas were a really good introductory grounding program created by all of us... Initially, we thought, here's a booklet and here's a little USB of the puppets, and we can give the teachers direction, because we were seeing many of the teachers very well intentioned but didn't have the kind of training or direction or knowledge of what was needed enough, or the means to deliver.

Linking *Five Big Ideas* with existing curriculum

Preschool staff found that the *Five Big Ideas* fitted well with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), with one staff member saying,

The five outcomes of early years learning framework can fit straight into everything that you're doing with the Five Big Ideas.

Many of the staff reported that elements of the *Five Big Ideas* fitted in with their existing curriculum and that in their teaching practice they also used other resources that overlapped with the *Five Big Ideas*. For example, one staff member said,

Five Big Ideas were very much, in my mind, what kids need to be able to learn anyway.

Staff reported that the modules 'nutrition' and 'health and hygiene' from *Five Big Ideas* linked particularly well with their existing curriculum, saying, "*the whole nutrition side of it automatically fits in*". One staff member mentioned that 'my culture, my identity' was new to the existing curriculum, saying,

In this room here, we're all new to this preschool... So I'm not really sure how they went about it, but before all of us, there was no Aboriginal culture. So that's what I was brought in for although I don't know a lot about it, but I do a lot of research and I try and implement it as much as I can.

Staff described how they drew on "*different ideas from everywhere*" and many referred to *Five Big Ideas* as a base for ideas or an "*additional resource*". For example, two staff members said the following:

At the beginning at the term, we all sat down and worked out what we were gonna do for the – like for this term... And we were struggling to try and find ideas to what to do ... so we got [the Five Big Ideas book] out, had a look and we implemented quite a bit into the programs for this term.

I find the ideas have been a great starting point which we have then adapted in accordance with our children’s interest.

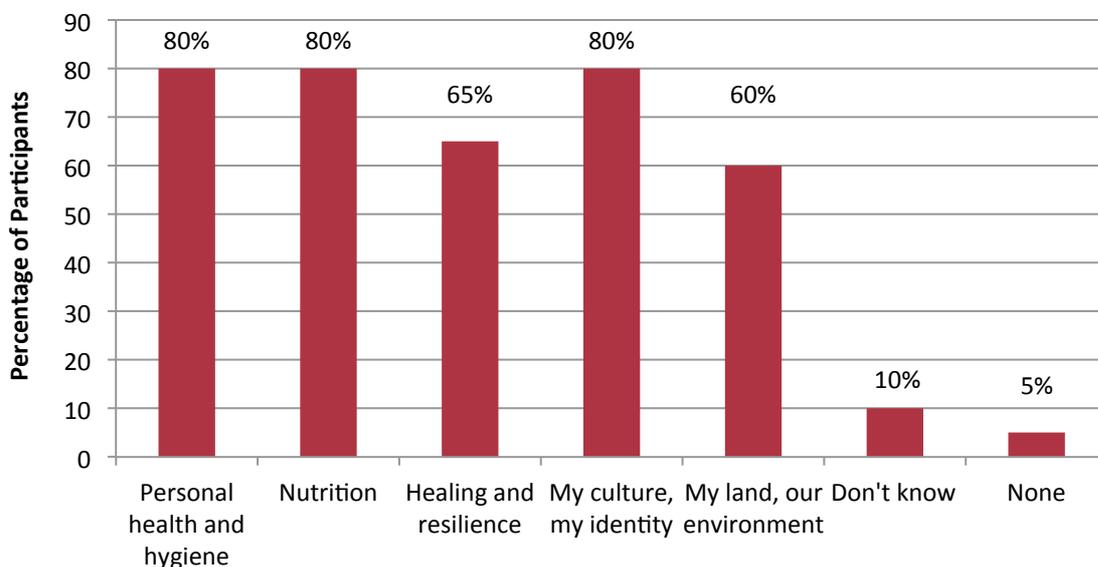
Overall, staff were very positive about the *Five Big Ideas* as a resource “with ideas on how to teach the information in one place”. For example, one staff member highlighted that the style of *Five Big Ideas* was very suitable as it could be adapted in various ways to suit the different classrooms and the children’s ages:

I find that we can simply implement it at the children's learning abilities...This year, we’ve had to break stuff down into some of the real basic, basic stuff... And I find with a lot of the Five Big Ideas, you can break it down. It doesn't have to be done all in one sitting, all in one day or all in one week, or all in one. And that's been easier to implement. And it can carry on over without it being – if we miss a day, it's not the end of the world.

Modules offered

Staff were asked to identify which modules of the *Five Big Ideas* program were offered in their preschool. ‘Personal health and hygiene’, ‘nutrition’ and ‘my culture, my identity’ were the most common modules offered (80%). Due to the varying stages of the roll-out process 10% of the staff members did not know which modules their preschool offered and 5% did not offer any yet. The results are displayed in Figure 23. Figure 23 indicates that the majority of the *Five Big Ideas* modules were offered in the preschools.

Figure 23: Five Big Ideas modules offered in the preschools*



* Some staff members answered this question in regards to modules covered in general.

Some staff had not yet implemented the *Five Big Ideas*, but instead discussed the activities and lessons they used as part of their existing curriculum, which were covered in the five modules. These accounts are also included in this section. Other staff who had not yet implemented the program reported that they would “like the opportunity to learn [to implement the Five Big Ideas]”.

The ‘nutrition’ module was covered by all three preschools, particularly in areas such as “healthy eating” and “*encouraging them to try the new foods*”. Staff reported that the children enjoyed hands-on activities such as being in the garden, collecting eggs and cooking. For example, one staff member said,

They love cooking, yeah. I mean even making the play dough, everyone’s vying for a spot around the table, “Let me. Let me. Let me.” So yeah, they love hands-on things like that for sure.

The module ‘Health and hygiene’ was also covered by all three preschools, particularly in areas such as personal hygiene, physical health and basic social manners, for example, “*washing your hands, going to the toilet, sitting at a table properly, eating with a knife.*” Some staff reported that many children were not being taught these basic skills at home and were incorporating this learning into their classrooms to prepare the children for school. For example, two staff members said the following:

All those sorts of things we’re sort of finding... [are] not being taught that at home...

We give them the basics of health, like clean your hands, blowing your nose... We make sure the kids do that, because there’s nothing worse to have a child that doesn’t understand the necessity of being clean, of washing hands, blowing your nose and the routine. Because when they get to big school... that’s routine.

Many staff used some aspects of the ‘healing and resilience’ module in their classrooms. For example, staff explained that they encouraged children to learn self-expression through music and artwork, yarning, talking about emotions or selecting favourite activities for a traumatised child to assist in ‘healing’. For example, one staff member said,

Yeah we’ve got all the faces and we’ll bring it out and say, explain to the kids what the emotions are and then ask them... which one they might be feeling on that day... The kids are quite happy to tell us what they’re feeling... the Yarn Up is really successful. So, they’ll sit in a circle, sometime they’ll lie on their bellies with the teacher. And then she just encourages them to talk about anything that’s happened in their day, or they’re worried about...

One staff member described how they taught ‘resilience’ to children through games by learning how to appropriately cope with losing, “*Like we will play games like musical chairs where it’s important for a child to get out and which doesn’t go well. We have lots of crying and screaming every time we do it.*”

The staff were positive about the outcomes of the Art Therapy sessions for children with additional needs. One staff member described the complexity of this process, saying,

So...since the Art Therapist's been in, he's been, he's found out and he's coping. He's dealing with that...So, I think things are getting addressed...I think addressing the issues here has been a positive even though it hasn't been a positive for him as yet. But I can see that it will be in the long run.

Another staff member was concerned about the effect talking about domestic violence in the preschool might have on children:

I don't really know whether I want to expose the kids to that, especially to the kids that are living in their neat little household. That might be very confronting for them.

Most staff covered some aspect of 'my culture, my identity'. It was noted that many of the Aboriginal children's parents had not learnt their language or knew little about their culture. One staff member noted,

[there is one girl who] is probably the only one that I've actually seen in five years that is getting that cultural education at home, which is a bit alarming...

Staff emphasised the importance of children knowing their identity, as one staff member said, "healthy kids should know their identity". Identity was taught in the preschools through various activities including artwork (handprints, cave drawings, mud painting, face painting, line painting, dot painting), music (didgeridoo, clap sticks, singing), dancing, boomerang throwing and traditional games. The staff also talked about "where they come from" and "what tribe they're from" as being important and had introduced the children to local totems. One staff member said,

Many of the parents don't know. They know their mob, but they don't know their totem. And that has been a bit of the stumbling block to get that part of their identity going.

And at the moment we're learning about echidna the totem and that's the animal totem here... I just gave them a little talk about the echidna and it's the totem of animal and this is where animal people are and show them a little map there and show them a picture of a real echidna... we're just painting [an echidna] and then we're just gonna put the handprints, white handprints so they can be like the spikes...

Staff described activities such as putting up flags, looking at maps and globes and discussing where the children come from. For example, one staff member gave the following example of an activity in their class.

The Aboriginal children will put theirs up there, their flag... we do that every morning... identify the flag, the colours ... sing the flag song... Pictures – we put them around saying from where they come from, even on the map, saying where they come from, and I do that all the time...

Staff reported using the Dreamtime story in the *Five Big Ideas* as well as incorporating other local Dreamtime stories. Some classes were being taught the local Aboriginal language and some of the children had had the opportunity to perform songs and speak in front of their community: “they all were so happy and proud to stand up and start saying their Dunghutti words.”

Many staff covered some aspects of the module ‘my land, my environment’ with some staff highlighting differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives:

I believe non-Aboriginal people look at land and the environment in a different way than Aboriginal people. It's a part of us because there are people like them and we have to go back to nature.

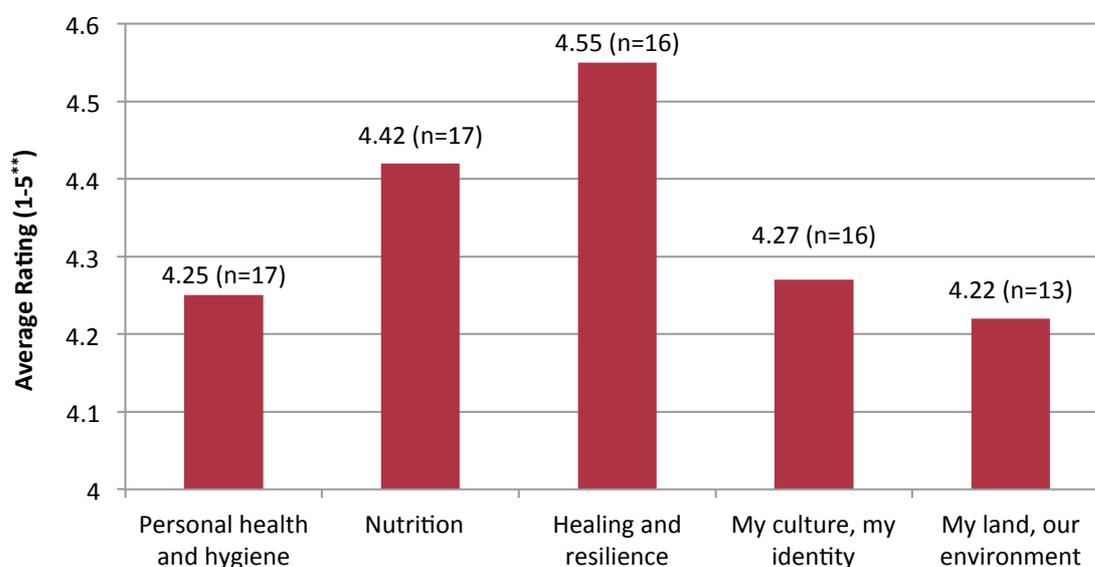
Staff reported that children enjoyed playing outside and growing things. One staff member described her desire to expand their outdoor activities to connect with the land, with an outdoor classroom and bush tucker trails:

... we're starting to think of bush tucker path, trail and get the children to learn and be tour guides. We want to have an outdoor classroom, so even kids there – and I really think that there's a culture problem because our ancestors used to do everything outside.

Rating the children’s enjoyment of the Five Big Ideas modules

Staff rated how they perceived the children’s enjoyment of the *Five Big Ideas* in regards to the five modules. Results showed that overall the children had a similar level of enjoyment for each module. On average, each module was rated above 4 (out of 5). The module that received the highest rate of enjoyment was ‘healing and resilience’ (4.55), while the module that was rated the least enjoyed was ‘my land, my environment’ (4.22). These results are displayed in Figure 24. Figure 24 demonstrates that staff perceived the children enjoyed all of the *Five Big Ideas* modules.

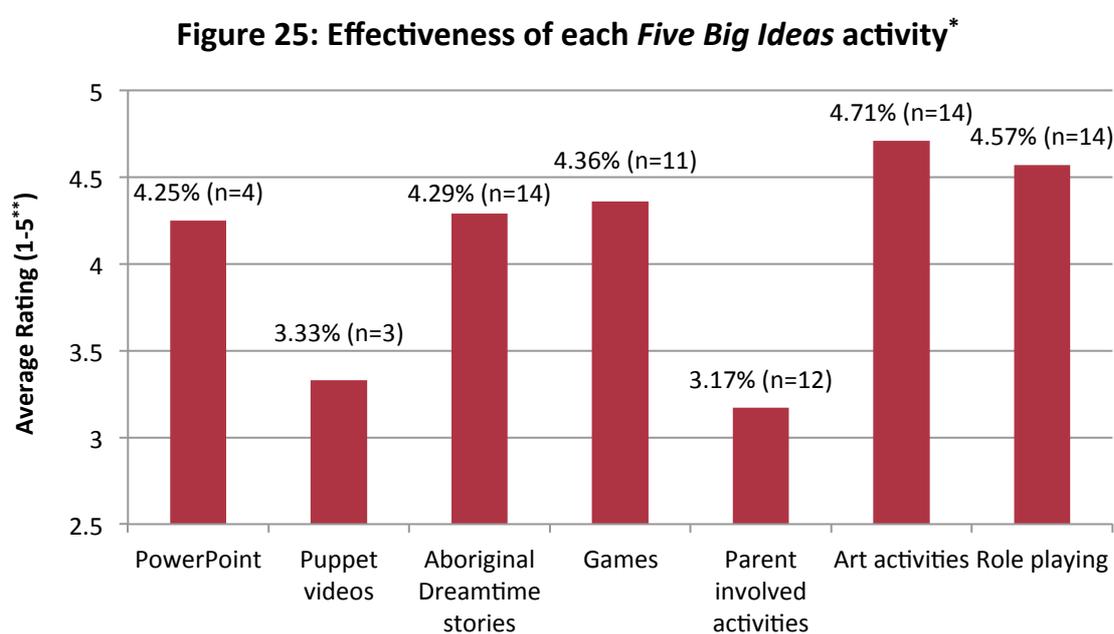
Figure 24: Children's enjoyment of the Five Big Ideas modules*



*Staff only rated the modules that had been implemented. Some staff rated children’s enjoyment of similar modules that were already used in the preschools, but not necessarily related to the Five Big Ideas; **Where 1 = ‘did not enjoy’ and 5 = ‘very much enjoyed’

Rating the effectiveness of each of the activities

Staff rated how they perceived the effectiveness of each of the activities in the *Five Big Ideas* program. On average most activities had a similar rating of between 4 and 5 with the exception of 'parent involved activities', which had the lowest rating (3.17), and 'puppet videos' (3.33). However, only a few staff had used the 'puppet videos'. The activity that received the highest rate of effectiveness was art activities (4.71). These results are displayed in Figure 25. Figure 25 indicates that staff perceived all of the activities offered in the *Five Big Ideas* to be at least 'somewhat effective' with the majority rated between 'effective' and 'very effective'.



* Staff only rated the activities that had been implemented. Some staff rated the effectiveness of similar activities that were already used in the preschools, but not necessarily related to the *Five Big Ideas*.

** Where 1 = 'not effective' and 5 = 'very effective'

Resources used

Most of the staff were positive about the *Five Big Ideas* book. They liked that the book had all the ideas in the same place and described it as relevant and "quick and easy" to use. As one staff member said,

The booklet was really good, that was very easy to read... It's just nice and quick, "Oh yeah that's right, such and such," or "Yep, we do that and yep, we do that" and "we can try – we do try with the families" but "Oh that's a good idea, we can try that." So it was good that way. It was nice and easy formatted... and it's good for this quick reference because we don't have much time as you could probably tell.

Staff commented on the use of experiments from the *Five Big Ideas* book: “our children have been really interested in experiments”. The ‘experiments’ or ‘games’ from the book were popular with staff as they offered a tactile, engaging, physical way of teaching the *Five Big Ideas*. For example, one staff member talked about the activity in the health and hygiene section, saying,

...especially the Glitter Germs, I really enjoyed that one because we did ... the snot talk and that, but it actually gave them a physical thing to look at, so it was a really good idea in helping me teach them that and I really like that idea...it’s really a nice resource to go and have a quick look through.

Not many staff had used the puppet videos. Some staff members did not know about the videos, others had not yet looked at them due to technical trouble or lack of access to the USB where the files were. For example, one staff member said,

We’ve had trouble with the smart board in our computers lately, so we haven’t done the power points or the shows or the puppet type things.

Some staff reported that the children loved watching the videos. As one staff member commented,

...we did the puppets with the kids and they absolutely loved it, and they were talking about it for weeks after we showed it to them.

Other staff mentioned that the children “loved playing with the puppets”. Some staff who had not yet used the puppet videos showed an interest in using them in the future: “I’d love to use them”, “We are going to use the [USB] and the puppets.”

A few staff members showed concern regarding the ‘Healing and resilience’ puppet video. One staff member suggested that this particular video maybe too confronting for use in a group situation:

...at the training that [we went to] we’ve watched the little puppet thing and I’m like “Oh, I don’t know whether I’d actually show that to the kids.” ... Just that cringe...I think it was just that it was very, very straightforward... Off memory, I think they were talking about how you don’t feel safe at home or something along those lines. That’s more of a one-on-one conversation than – I would never do that in a group.

However, this staff member also wanted more puppet videos on all five modules:

I would like to see more of the puppet videos dealing with each of the modules, but to see it in a different way. So like for our group this year, we showed them the health and hygiene video because it was an absolute smash last year...If it was done in a slightly different way, maybe they would [have enjoyed it as much as the group last year].

Another staff member said that they did not think the ‘Healing and resilience’ puppet video was appropriate in the way it portrayed domestic violence:

Aboriginal people have issues, but I think society in general have issues like domestic violence and –and domestic violence can cover areas from the people in higher society right down to lower So I just think there needs to be another way of doing it or I feel like we're being patronised...

Overall, staff were positive on the idea of using puppet videos but the two concerned staff members recommended that they be done in a more sensitive way that did not accentuate stigma:

I think engage the children and don't make it feel like it's a stigma – domestic violence – be sensitive towards how the children are feeling... draw them out to talk to other children or talk to their teachers because this is a safe environment. So they could come and talk to us and if you... feel that you need to talk to someone then talk to your teacher or your nan or pop – base it around what the family and the children – 'Cause it could be an uncle or an aunty that's doing it. So I think the puppet video needs to be looked at.

Other resources on the USB had not been used by many of the staff who either did not know about them or had not had time to look closely at the material, with one staff member saying,

[The book is] sort of quick and easy and relatable, where when you've got the memory stick you've actually gotta have time, where you're sitting down, and you're with a computer to go through it.

However, staff said that they thought that it would be something they could use in the future. For example, one staff member said,

...it's... getting the time to go through it and familiarising ourselves with exactly what's there, so that when things come up in our classroom, we can go, "Oh. Yeah. That'd be really good for now." Yup. So, definitely a resource that will be used.

Some staff had already planned to use a PowerPoint resource for a specific lesson in the future:

...we are going to use the little PowerPoint about nutrition and about keeping them... safe as part of our... child protection week coming up... We're gonna watch that with the children and also bring in the rights of the child...

The staff described how Dreamtime storytelling was used in a variety of ways. Some staff read the Dreamtime stories directly from the *Five Big Ideas* book:

I [read the Dreamtime stories] from the book, yup. Because I don't know confidently, if I did it without, that I'd do it the right way.

In other classrooms the stories were adapted and told by an uncle/elder.

... we do the dream time stories, but I think we tell them a little bit different, and we use [Uncle]. He's good at 'cause he's a Dunghutti male so he just changes the stories around.

Some staff reported that they sometimes told Dreamtime stories with blocks or symbols drawn in the sand. The children had learnt to create their own stories using traditional symbols:

...the kids are actually telling stories with them. That's good.

So they're creating their own stories so that's great. Creativity, that's great.

Some staff told local Dreamtime stories as well as stories from around Australia:

We do a lot of story with Dreamtime stories from around Australia. We try to make sure that they know where they're from.

... as for the Dreamtime stories. I mean 'cause we live here... I find out more about this local area...I go and research and I'll find out what stories around here.

Staff reported that many children enjoyed Dreamtime stories however others explained that some children found the stories frightening:

... we do read the Dreamtime stories to them, but some of the children find them quite frightening because – well, they are, but if you explain to them what it all means, but they're the stories that they will hear from their elders, so that needs to continue...

Staff also explained about trying to encourage community involvement with parents during special events such as 'Father's Day' as well as within the general preschool program. As one staff member said,

We try and invite the community in as well to be a part of the program. Yeah. We encourage parents to come in, cooking and stuff like that.

Staff reported that some parents did get involved, sharing their knowledge and culture with the children. For example, two staff members said the following:

...one of the dads...gets asked to go to the schools and do dancing.

... like for NAIDOC week, some of their dads came in and they do a lot of activities with the kids, like if they like footy. Footy is a big thing and one of the dads will come in and sit down and talk about the dot painting and get the kids to paint, do hand prints.

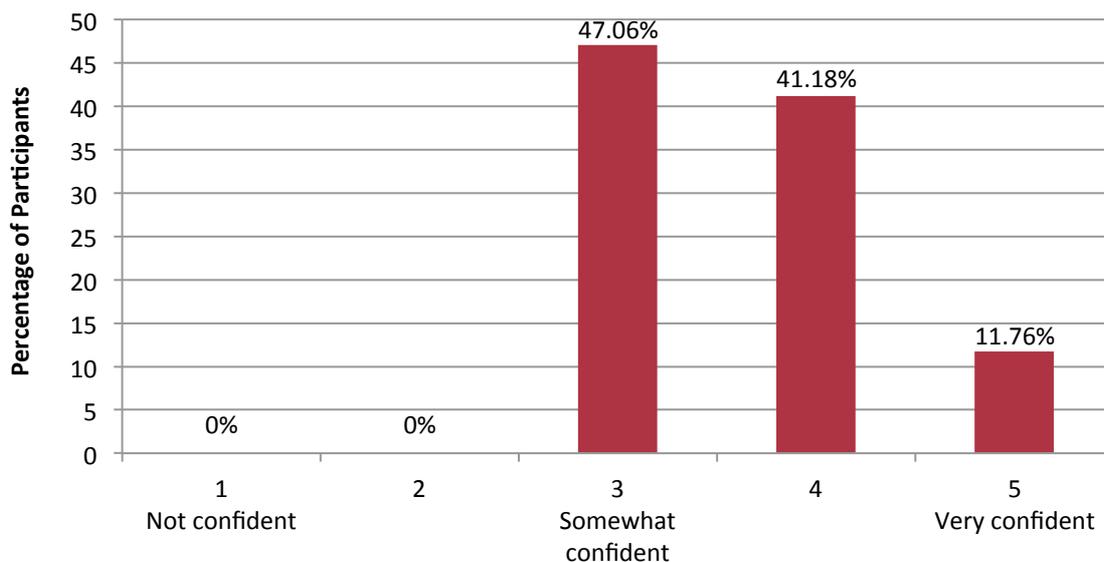
Experiences of delivering the *Five Big Ideas*

Staff were asked to comment on their experiences of delivering the *Five Big Ideas*. This included: confidence in running activities from the *Five Big Ideas*, challenges with implementation, perceived effect on children’s skills in coping with trauma, as well as the overall effectiveness of the *Five Big Ideas* program.

Confidence in running activities from Five Big Ideas

Staff rated how confident they were in running activities from the *Five Big Ideas*. All preschool staff indicated that they were at least ‘somewhat confident’ (47.06%), with a significant proportion (41.18%) between ‘somewhat confident’ and ‘very confident’. These results are displayed in Figure 26. Figure 26 illustrates that all staff had at least some confidence in running *Five Big Ideas*.

Figure 26: Confidence in running the *Five Big Ideas**



* Three staff members did not answer this question as they had not yet implemented the *Five Big Ideas*.

Challenges with implementation

Some staff said that they were unclear about the *Five Big Ideas* program due to staff turnover, changes in preschool directors, or because of time constraints. For example, three staff members said the following:

... with the three directors in two years, the Five Big Ideas program hasn't been delivered consistently and thoroughly... and it's a shame because I know it's an excellent program.

We didn't get time to implement the program, if we had it would be a big help with our children, needs to be a team effort with our director too.

I had a quick flip through it and thought – oh –yeah – might be good, but never had time to sit and read or to go with other educators and see what they thought of it...

Some staff, who had not received training in the *Five Big Ideas*, reported that they needed the program explained to them and suggested that it would be good to see how other staff have implemented it. As one staff member said,

Given the book and then I've just shoved the book away because it doesn't make sense to me. Why are we given it when we haven't been told anything? And us, Aboriginal people, we don't like this read, read, read, read, read. We like to sit, hands-on and if someone's talking to us, like me, I'd learn, if I'm sitting and I'm writing. I gotta write, put notes down.

Staff reported only implementing programs into their curriculum based on the children's interest. If the children were not interested they did not persist with the topic. For example, two staff members said the following:

It's not so much getting the ideas. It's how to fit the ideas into the actual kid's interest. So even though we might think they're good idea, if the kids aren't interested, well, we're not gonna do it until they're not interested.

The obstacles are the children and that we are based around their interest, so if they aren't interested, well, you're not gonna use it, are you?

One staff member reported difficulties in implementing aspects of the 'nutrition' module in regards to maintaining the garden and the animals. For example,

[The children] were just picking them without having been ready. So – and then especially over the Christmas holidays, everything would die off 'cause no one was coming to water the garden.

... we had a break in and – yeah, and they end up killing the chickens... and the guinea pigs ran away eventually. So, that was really disappointing that community wasn't looking out for us as well. And it wasn't just the once and this happened quite a few times...

Many non-Aboriginal staff members had concerns about implementing modules such as 'my culture, my identity' where there was an emphasis on teaching Aboriginal culture. For example, staff members said the following: "I don't want to get it wrong", "I don't want to offend somebody", "I don't feel I know their culture well enough to teach them about their culture and do it well" and "I sometimes feel it's not my right to be teaching these children their culture when it's their parents' – the nan and pop's job." These staff members were worried they did not enough knowledge and that they did not have the right to teach Aboriginal children about their culture. Not wanting to offend, they positioned teaching Aboriginal culture as something that should be left to Aboriginal staff or community members.

Likewise, Aboriginal staff members noted that non-Aboriginal staff needed support to become more confident in teaching culture. For example, one staff member said,

... we did need some support with getting – helping the educators to be more ... comfortable – with presenting cultural activities and being more aware of cultural issues as well, just general issues.

Some Aboriginal staff also faced challenges when they did not grow up with their culture or were not from the local area of the preschool. As one staff member said,

It's hard to give the kids culture when I hadn't been grown up in culture myself. So, that's hard. That's very hard. That's why I never touched it before, because I never grew up with the culture because most of their parents didn't believe in that sort of the stuff. It was always negative. But when I got – when I'm old enough, it's sort of – now, I know there's more to that – to the culture and there's more out there to give to the children and for myself.

There were several cultural barriers where staff members felt they needed permission to teach culture:

I ask the elders or the aunties or uncles before I do anything. If I'm teaching them the right way, you know? Yeah. So that's what I do, but I like to know all about the culture and that's the way I brought up and it's my culture . Yeah. So that's what I do.

...because I'm not from here... when I go to the other tribes and that, I don't over step or do things that you shouldn't do. Yeah. And I've learnt that through my own grandfather.

Some staff also held the view that language should not be taught but should be learnt and that parents might not want their children learning other tribe's languages. As one staff member said,

The only thing we find very difficult to do is language, because we've got a few children from different areas and we think it might become a conflict because some parents mightn't want their children to learn language from another area. And we can't find the right people to teach the right language. So it's best not to do it because we don't want any conflicts.

A further challenge to implementation was reports of the difficulty to get parents involved with parts of the program, as one staff member said, “getting parents to turn up to anything here is really tricky”. Staff members talked about the importance for parents to be involved and to share their knowledge. As two staff members said,

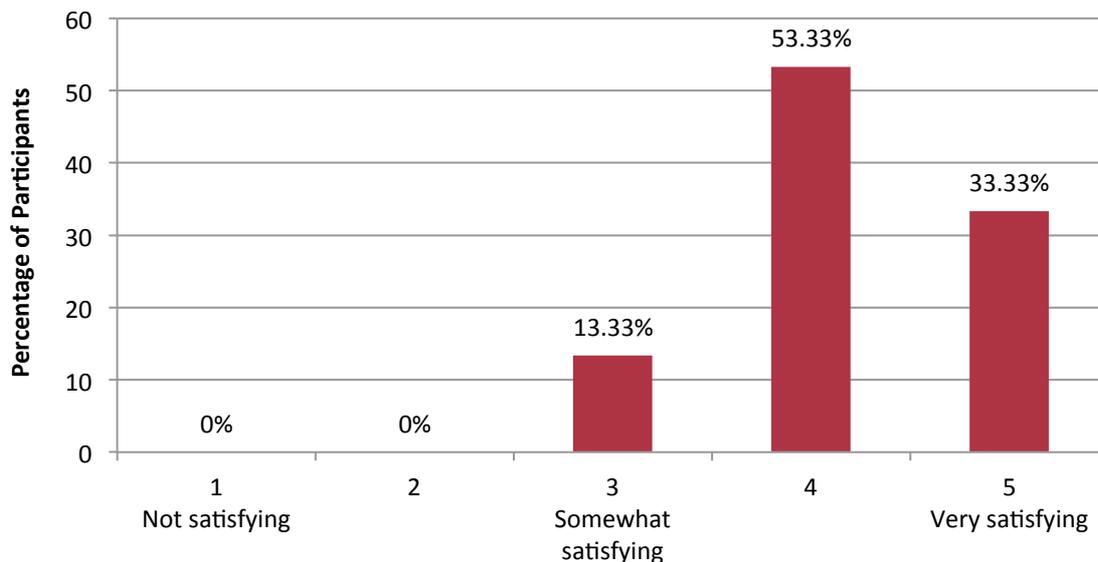
...if we had more ways of trying to get the families involved, if the kids saw their family's here more...that would build so much resilience too knowing that the families are interested in their child's life. That's a huge thing for a kid to know.

I think [parent involvement would] give the children a lot more self-esteem, definitely... we've had a couple of nans come and cook on odd days, we can just see the child just is beaming...

The overall experience of delivering the Five Big Ideas program

The staff were asked to rate their overall experience of the *Five Big Ideas* program in terms of satisfaction. All of the staff reported that they found it at least 'somewhat satisfying', with the majority rating their confidence as 4 out of 5 (53.33%). These results are displayed in Figure 27. Figure 27 indicates that overall, all the staff were positive about the *Big Five Ideas* program.

Figure 27: Overall experience of the *Five Big Ideas**

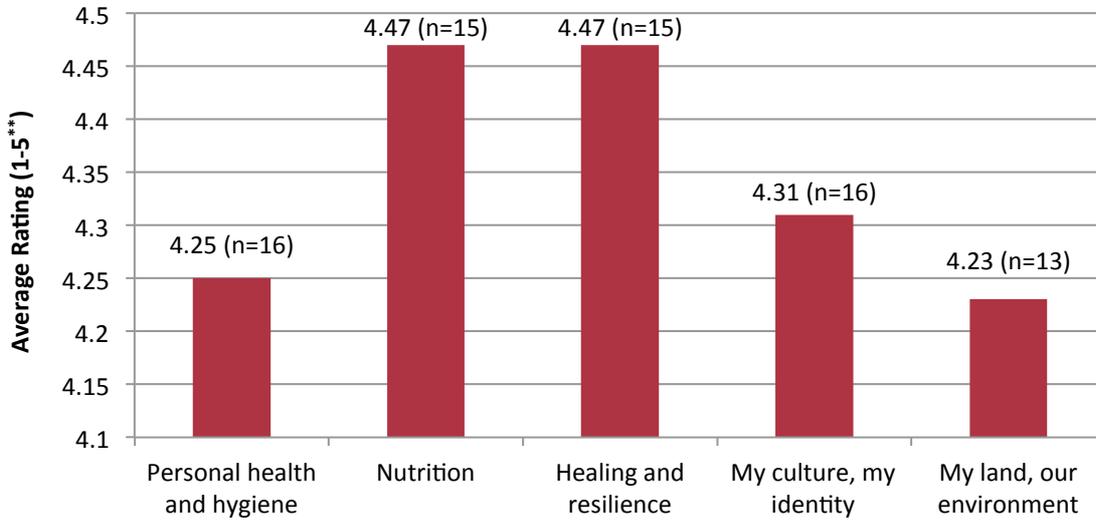


*N=15 Some staff did not answer as they had not yet implemented the *Five Big Ideas*.

Rating the effectiveness of Five Big Ideas in improving children's coping with trauma

The staff rated how they perceived the effectiveness of each of the modules in the *Five Big Ideas* as helping children to cope with trauma. The results showed that each module had a similar rating of at least 4 out of 5. The modules that received the highest rate of effectiveness for improving children's ability to cope with trauma were 'nutrition' and 'healing and resilience'. These results are displayed in Figure 28. Figure 28 indicates that staff perceived that all modules of the *Five Big Ideas* were effective in improving children's ability to cope with trauma.

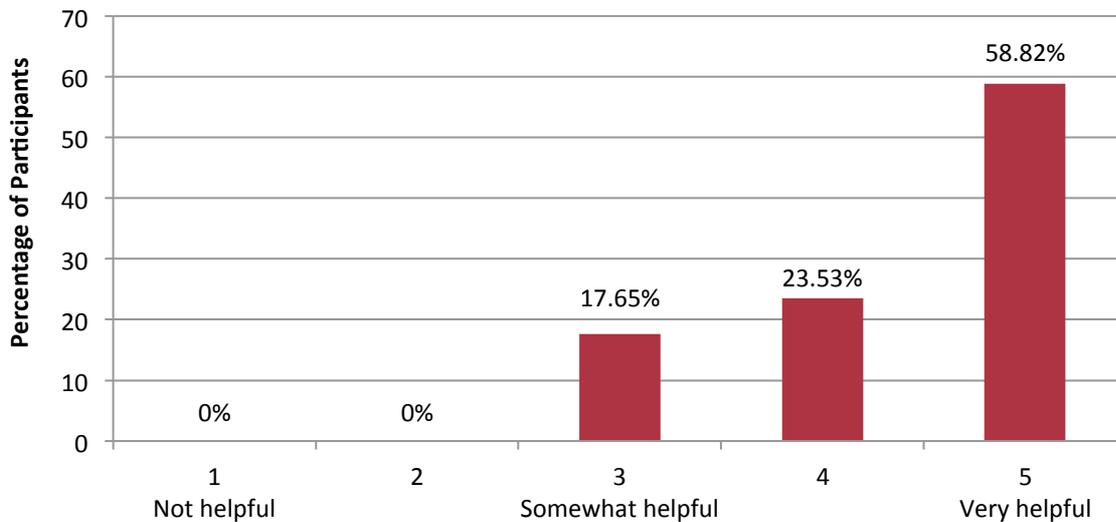
Figure 28: The effectiveness of the modules in improving children's ability to cope with trauma*



*Staff only rated the modules that had been implemented. Some staff rated the effectiveness in improving children's ability to cope with trauma of similar modules that were already used.
 ** Where 1 = 'not effective' and 5 = 'very effective'

Staff were asked to rate how they perceived the overall effectiveness of the *Five Big Ideas* as helping children to cope with trauma. All staff members replied with at least 'somewhat helpful', and the majority (58.82%) replied 'very helpful'. These results are displayed in Figure 29. Figure 29 indicates staff perceived the *Five Big Ideas* to be very helpful for children with trauma.

Figure 29: Overall helpfulness of *Five Big Ideas* for children with trauma*



*N=15 Some staff did not answer as they had not yet implemented the *Five Big Ideas*.

Preschool staff reported on the quality of the *Five Big Ideas* program, with one staff member saying,

I've seen a lot of programs around social and emotional development for young kids and dealing with trauma and grief, and [the Five Big Ideas] are practical. They're age appropriate. They're fun. They're high quality, and the expertise of the organisation are top level...

The Gunawirra staff member confirmed that Gunawirra had emphasised in particular the healing of trauma within the *Five Big Ideas* program to help address social needs in the preschools and greater community:

But there is one particular part, it's as if we took the microscope and we honed in on it, and we made the part to do with the healing of trauma as the most central part because of the massive social need created by poverty, sexual violation, domestic violence, all these things.

Some staff members indeed reported that the *Five Big Ideas* program has helped children in their preschool with trauma, as one staff member said,

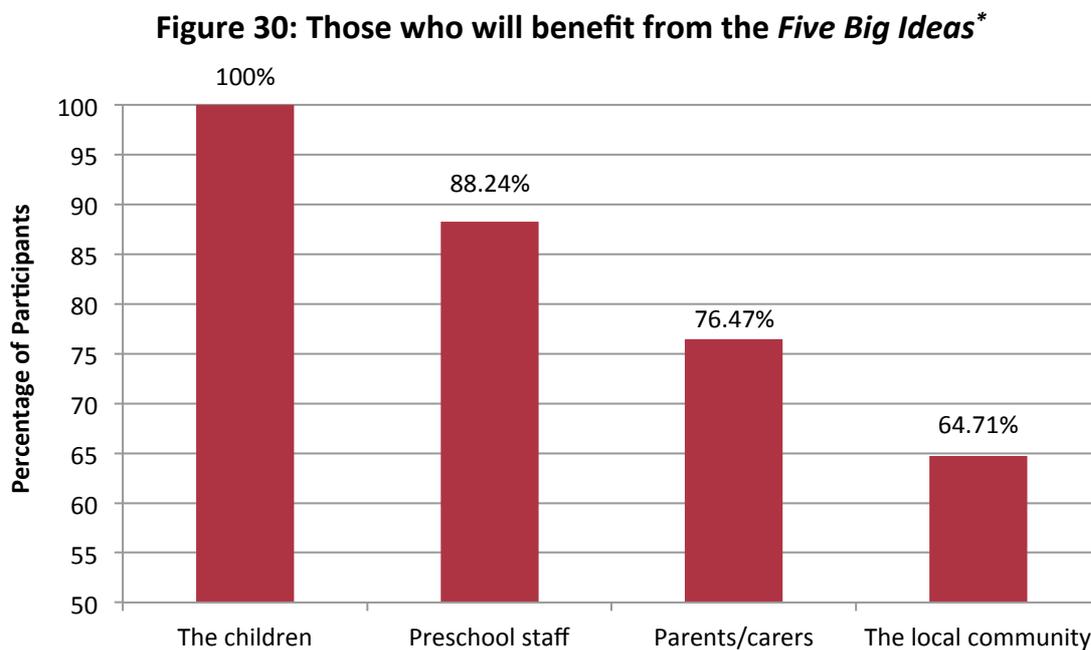
I think that's definitely helped the kids who have had the full on trauma to cope a lot better with day to day, coming here and even at home, parents have commented to the carers on – they're coping better at home, and the strategies that [Gunawirra] have introduced, have made it better at home to talk about things and not be so frightening and scary, and confronting.

One staff member pointed out that on the whole it is hard to say exactly what effects the *Five Big Ideas* have had as many other resources have also been used:

... there're so many programs and resources that we're drawing on. How do you gauge how one resource is helping? I mean, yes, it's a benefit, we do draw on that. It's one of the dozen resources that we use. But to actually gauge how this one specifically how it's impacting in making a difference, it's really hard. It's definitely one of the resources we use and it would definitely be aiding – If we found that it wasn't helping and wasn't working, we definitely wouldn't be using it.

Benefits from the *Five Big Ideas* Program

The staff were asked to indicate who they perceived has or will benefit the most from the *Five Big Ideas* program. All staff responded that they perceived that the children were benefitting from the program. The majority said that all three other categories (teachers, parents/carers and the local community) would also benefit. These results are displayed in Figure 30. Figure 30 indicates that the majority of the staff perceived that the children, parents/carers, preschool staff and the local community will benefit from the *Five Big Ideas*.



* Three staff members did not answer this question as they had not yet implemented the *Five Big Ideas*.

Gunawirra staff reported that all three preschools have responded positively to the *Five Big Ideas* program and were keen for it to continue. When asked to comment on the overall perceived impact of the *Five Big Ideas*, the Gunnawirra staff member responded,

Oh no one has told me that it's no good. No one. There have been complaints that we haven't been giving them enough on it. They would like more of our input on it.

The following sections outline the perceived impact of the *Five Big Ideas* program on children, parents and community, and staff from the perspective of the preschool teachers.

Impact on Children

All staff were positive about the perceived impacts of the *Five Big Ideas* on the children, with one staff member saying,

I think [the Five Big Ideas give] them identity, pride, and respect for who they are... to have nutrition is to have [health]... healing and resilience, you know, from that trauma, personal hygiene... gives them that confidence... and the land, they're a part of this land and they have a cultural identity... So I think those five ideas affect our children, in one way or another to make them who they are...

Some staff members noticed that the children were confident in speaking their own language and enjoyed teaching it to each other.

They're teaching each other in the room. They'll be first to the chair, "I wanna teach, I wanna teach." And they'll go through all the things in Dunghutti.

The staff noted that the children were proud to be Aboriginal. One staff member said,

They're proud that they have this language, this culture, and they're Dunghutti people and they're happy to be Dunghutti people. And I explained about what Dunghutti is, it's a local tribe of our community. And the children understand that...

Both an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal staff member described how a non-Aboriginal child had embraced the culture and proudly called himself Aboriginal:

We have this one little boy, he's not Aboriginal, but with what we've been talking about...he went home and he was – he tells everybody that he's an Aboriginal person and he's proud to be an Aboriginal person. And – like his family adore it and, you know, they tell him as much as they can as well, but he's by any means not, but, you know? It's great that they – that just proves that ... they embrace it. (Aboriginal staff member)

We have a little boy who's not Aboriginal, who after doing things with 'my culture and my identity' tells everybody, "I am an Aboriginal person." I say, "Yup. Right, mate." Because he wanted to – he was – and he can tell you anything, so much information about the Aboriginal culture, because it was something that he really enjoyed. (Non-Aboriginal staff member)

Some staff members said that learning about identity and culture could help “*build up their resilience*” and contribute to giving the children the confidence they needed in life. One staff member spoke about this in their interview, saying,

I think it would maybe make them a bit more stronger in themselves, in their identity and their culture for them when they go out into the bigger world out there...So, you want them to be able to go out there being able to feel good about themselves mostly and their culture and who they are. So, we want them to succeed.

As a consequence of the 'nutrition' module, many staff reported that children were eating more fruit and vegetables and drinking water. Three staff said,

... we had some kids that's refused to drink anything that looked like water, especially one little boy that I've got. And his nurse - and "No, he won't water, he won't drink water", but now he drinks water.

...they are eating more of the vegies.

...[the children are] getting it through into them that now, instead of just going straight for the sweets, they'll go, "Oh no, I want an apple".

Staff reported that children recognised what food is good or bad for them and what food is allowed or not allowed to be eaten at preschool, as one staff member said, "*...they even go on "I told mama I wasn't allowed these."*

The staff noted that with less sugar intake the children are calmer, with one staff member saying, "*Since no poppers, it's - yeah. We can see the really hyperactive kids, they've calmed down a lot*" and that they have increased concentration.

Furthermore, some staff explained that the 'nutrition' module helped in teaching the children self-help skills: what to eat, how to serve food, how to eat whole fruit and how to pour drinks. For example, two staff said the following:

I started letting the kids serve their food... I think it's so important for them to be serving their own food. It's a self-help skill; that it's something that they can then do at home...

I think that their self-help skills have just developed their independence.

One staff member noted that these increased self-help skills have given the children greater confidence and independence:

...they get enjoyment out of now they know how to do it, now they think they're really big 'cause they can do their own...I guess, self-esteem and just their confidence goes through the roof when they know they can do it, and you trust them to do it.

Some staff reported that the children have learnt good hygiene practices from the 'Personal health and hygiene' module and liked to remind teachers and other children about these hygiene practices:

They're all eager to brush their teeth. They remind me if I haven't got them out.

Another staff member reported that children were better at responding to others who have experienced trauma at their preschool following the 'healing and resilience' module:

I think, other kids are actually learning how to react what to say to children who, "I don't have a mum," or "My dad's dead." There were four kids that'd be sort of, "Mm." Or maybe, "Mm," let's change the - "Oh. Look over there. There's a bunny around." We're

sort of able to talk about it and work through it, and it's all okay. And the kids can see that...

Some staff members also described how Dreamtime stories provided a way for children to talk about feelings and prompted them to think about how to treat other people. As two staff members said,

... we do a lot of retelling Tiddalik and they like to tell the story now it's like "He drank all the water because he was thirsty but it wasn't fair," and then the different other Dreamtime stories they learned about and how when the snake bites the sun, although the snake made him sore 'cause the sun's now crying and different things like that. So they're starting to pick up different emotions out of the different Dreamtime stories and things which is good.

...[the Dreamtime stories] prompts them to think about how to treat other people on a general level.

One staff member also commented that the art and music activities helped to calm the children, saying, "So the art that we do with it, it calms them a lot."

Some staff also highlighted the positive impact community involvement in preschool activities had on the children. For example, two staff members said,

...it takes a community as they say to raise a child. And this is a centre-based service. We can't do this without the community or without parents and carers...

...they [parents/the community] don't realise even the smallest thing that they know and say to the kids has made such an impact...So that's what I'd love to see, the community getting more involved...on realising that their stories are worthy of telling and the kids are interested and we are interested in it

Impact on parents and community

The majority of staff commented on the positive impact the *Five Big Ideas* program has had and potentially will have on parents and the wider community. This included children impacting parents through what they are being taught from the program, as well as the positive impact of parents and elders from the community engaging with activities in the preschools. For example, staff saw the potential for impacting the parents through the children with health and hygiene practices:

I had so many parents coming in , going, " Do you know how many kids have told me like we've got to wash our hands now ," and things like that so I found more, if you tell the kids, they're more likely to take it home and then nag the parents about it rather than just send information packs home to parents ... so I found if you tell the kids and you teach the kids...they're gonna go home and tell little brother and sisters and things like that. That what I found the most, effective teaching methods is to tell the kids basically.

Some staff noted the potential for the growth of culture within the homes and communities of the preschool children by bringing back Aboriginal language into the preschools. As a couple of staff members said,

I think it's really nice to be able to build that back in...I think is just beautiful, I think, 'cause it's something that was really dying out.

...[the children have] gone on teaching their parents, their families...Their parents come and approach us, "What's this about children are speaking?" They come and ask us, and I just explain to them it's the Dunghutti language which I'm hoping to run a class to bring the parents in, to teach them the words and what their children are speaking.

In addition, staff also discussed the importance of the children connecting with Aboriginal elders as a way to pass on cultural knowledge. For example:

I like to get the elders involved 'cause they're the ones – very wise people and bring them into the classroom and the children just mingle with them...

Finally, one staff member reported that families of children facing difficult situations and trauma have been helped [through their contact with the preschool]. As one staff member said,

So we're not just a preschool, we're sort of like a second home for a lot of our families and children... 'cause we've helped our families through trauma, too. Our families have come in and spoke to us about things that are going on in their personal lives, so they ask for certain staff and we sit down, we have a talk with them.

Impact on staff

Staff commented on the impacts of the Five Big Ideas program on their teaching practices. The majority of staff were particularly positive about the increased learning opportunities of Aboriginal culture and of increased awareness around teaching children who have experienced trauma.

Some staff reported that the *Five Big Ideas* had impacted them personally, in particular, in learning about their own culture. Not only had it enhanced their own understanding but helped them to be more proud of their Aboriginal heritage:

...the culture side of it, it has a big impact on me because I'm a proud Dunghutti woman, and I love it, and I'm so over the moon with the language 'cause I've never had it before...It's made me a proud woman myself of what I'm doing. I feel heaps proud. I feel like jumping out of my skin proud. I'm so happy, yeah, happy with it.

So, with these Five Big Ideas, it's sort of – it's hard to use the words, but we know that we do it anyway. We know we use respect of our place, of our culture and – yeah. And we do Dreamtime stories, because that's – connects us our ancestors and I believe in our – I believe that we haven't been – up to this point now, we sort of hadn't realised that or hadn't enhanced that.

Other staff reported that The *Five Big Ideas* had had or will have an impact on non-Aboriginal staff as they come to understand Aboriginal culture. For example, one staff member said,

Cause [my co-worker] being a white Australian and see this will help her. This will really help her...

Another staff member explained how discussing the *Five Big Ideas* with the interviewer helped her to reinforce the purpose of being a preschool teacher:

Well, it reminds me – just off the top of my head – it reminds me, well, why we're here. We're here for the children and they need to learn – well, any healing and resilience to trauma and so forth. Of course, they need to know their culture. That's where they get their identity from and so forth.

Staff also reported that the *Five Big Ideas* has helped them to understand difficulties the children are going through and it has increased their confidence as teachers. As three staff members said,

I think a lot of the Gunawirra stuff has been really helpful 'cause a lot of the – I think unless you go through, for example, trauma or something – and things that I take for granted in my family or in my lifestyle isn't necessarily what you would do. Do you know what I mean? So that's really made me sort of look a bit more out of my box.

It's huge. It makes me feel more comfortable...I think definitely the confidence has been huge 'cause I've just never dealt, like personally with people that die, but not children that have dealt with it, so – yeah.

And identifying that this kid's actually going through issues and...looking at what could have been happening, like maybe they didn't have breakfast, maybe they didn't get to sleep, maybe the police were involved. So, it's given us – I think that's been a really positive as well, giving us an understanding...it given me different way of thinking as well, that it may not just all be bad behaviour. It could be they're crying out for help.

Other staff reported that while the *Five Big Ideas* had no impact on them personally as teachers, it was a very useful resource for them to use:

[The Five Big Ideas program] is a good place to start in terms of ideas and things to do with the children. Has it shaped how I teach? Probably not so much, but it's definitely been a great place to start for ideas.

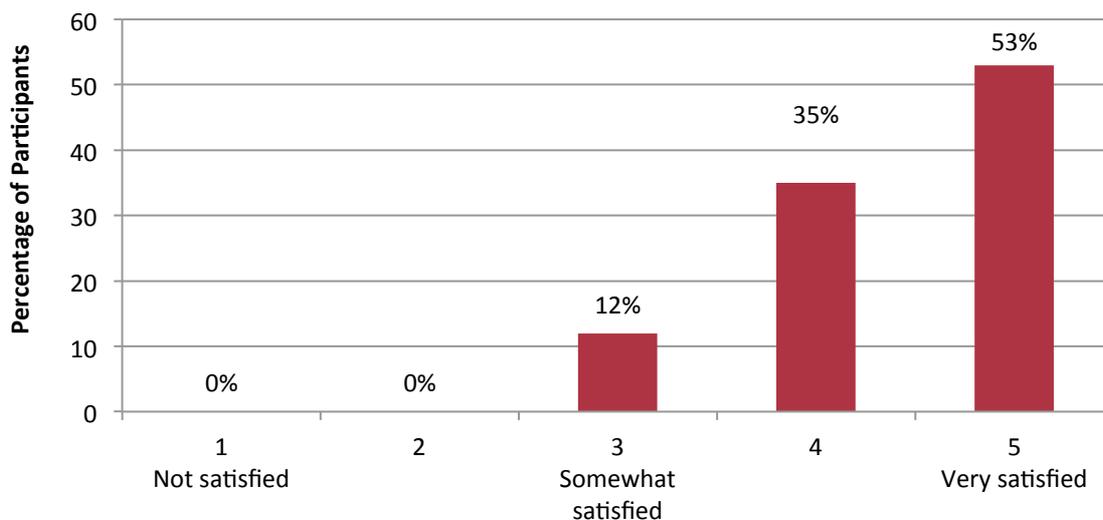
Support

The preschool staff commented on the support Gunawirra gave them in rolling out the *Five Big Ideas* program in their preschools. The staff were particularly positive about the seminars, weekly Skype sessions, cultural advisor site visits and art therapy that Gunawirra provided. The Gunawirra staff member commented on experiences of providing support to the preschools and the perceived impact this is having on preschool staff, children and the wider community.

Satisfaction with support from Gunawirra in regards to offering Five Big Ideas

Staff were asked to rate how satisfied they were with support from Gunawirra in regards to offering the *Five Big Ideas* program. All staff responded 'somewhat satisfied' or higher with the majority (53%) selecting 'very satisfied'. The results are displayed in Figure 31. Figure 31 indicates that overall, all the staff were satisfied with support received from Gunawirra.

Figure 31: Satisfaction of support from Gunawirra in regards to offering the *Five Big Ideas**



* Three staff members did not answer this question as they had not yet implemented the *Five Big Ideas*, some others rated it on 'satisfaction of support from Gunawirra in general'.

Most staff reported that the seminars, particularly the recent seminar on trauma were very useful, for example:

...we were thinking all of our staff should be sitting here hearing this because we had just been through a few years of atrocious things happening.

Staff placed a high priority on attending Gunawirra seminars and were willing to spend the extra time to learn more, for example, two staff members said,

...I was only gonna be able to come on a Saturday and the Sunday morning. And I actually sent my husband and the two kids to a party that we were meant to go to all together as a family. And I gave up that, to come, so I could do the full session on a Sunday, because after getting what I've got from the Saturday session I just didn't wanna miss the second session.

It's a very long two weeks when you do your full weekends. So you obviously – you work you're 14 days straight. But – No, very rewarding.

The Gunawirra staff member was very positive about preschool staff attendance at the seminars and perceived it as the “best thing” that is happening with training, saying,

But the best part of training the teachers has to be the seminars. And they come. We have one in Lismore in March and they have told us in Lismore to expect 200 that we will get from Tweed Heads, all the way up. The need's enormous.

However, some staff reported that they had not been given training on how to implement the *Five Big Ideas*, or how to use the book. For example, one staff member explained,

I was ... expecting to – “This is the Five Big Ideas. This is module one. This is what's in module one. How are you going to use that in the classroom... It was very much “Here's the book, go read it.

Gunawirra was aware that some preschool staff had not yet been trained in implementing the *Five Big Ideas* and therefore were not delivering the *Five Big Ideas* modules and activities. Gunawirra had received requests for further training, specifically on implementing the *Five Big Ideas* in the preschools, as the Gunawirra staff member stated,

And they would like us to go through the book [Five Big Ideas] with them, so that they're actually following the book.

All staff were very positive about the Art Therapy program Gunawirra organised for children with the most need. In addition, staff were encouraged by being able to talk with the therapist to get ideas on how to handle particular situations, for example:

Just being able to talk to [the therapist] about what we've been told and...then she can just go ‘Oh, try this’ or ‘We'll try this in the group and we'll see how it goes first.’

Likewise, the Gunawirra staff member was very positive about how the preschool teachers responded to the art therapy program, stating,

We found the new idea of art therapy for the teachers has taken off like a rocket. A time for them to relax, to express themselves, etcetera, taken off like a rocket.

All staff were really positive about the support from the cultural advisor from Gunawirra. They were particularly grateful for the advice and ideas given, for example:

Having [the cultural advisor] to do cultural and come up with ideas for that has been really good because that sort of gone by the way.

Non-Aboriginal staff were also positive about the cultural advisor's support on cultural appropriateness and how they gained confidence to teach Aboriginal culture, as one staff member said,

[The cultural advisor has] been really good to ask questions... I'm a non-Aboriginal person so what is culturally appropriate for me to be able to write or talk about. So his way of helping me understand that was really beneficial.

Aboriginal staff benefitted from cultural affirmation of their role in the preschool children's lives, as one Aboriginal staff member said,

... talking to [the cultural advisor] has given another perspective in my – in our role and with these children. And it's good for me 'cause [they're] very knowledgeable and he's ... sort of opened my eyes a little bit more to understand being a...role model to these children. It's... a lot bigger than I realised...

Similarly, the Gunawirra staff member commented on the positive impact the cultural advisor had made with training the preschool teachers in the 'my culture, my identity' module of the *Five Big Ideas*, for example:

[The cultural advisor] goes week walk about, taking culture to each of the centres and it's phenomenal what he does. That is such a training program for the teachers. He takes blocks. He takes stencils. He takes boomerangs. He takes totems. He takes all sorts of art... He takes those cultural aspects to do with the Five Big Ideas.

Preschool staff were also very positive about the Skype sessions held with Gunawirra staff. These weekly contact sessions gave a chance for preschool staff to discuss difficult situations and children in need of special care, as well as to receive ideas and strategies that were very useful.

For example, one staff member said,

... the Skyping has been really, really good. That's been great. So being able to sort of talk about things that – one, we wouldn't get time to talk about, and two, wouldn't have the professional support or someone who knew exactly what to say, or what to do, or to give you strategies...

From the Gunawirra perspective these weekly Skype sessions were important for training and supporting preschool staff in the *Five Big Ideas* program. For example, the Gunawirra staff member said,

Training of staff is ongoing all the time through those Skype sessions... we actually train in the Five Big Ideas during those, and we also create this environment where they can bring cases that are problematic to them, to show them how to use them.

Many staff members also reported benefitting from this ongoing support and opportunity to debrief with Gunawirra staff. For example,

... it had provided the staff with a private confidential forum and provided an outlet to release mainly around work situations, but I'm sure the odd person – if the staff wanna go there with a personal situation, they stay at the end of the group and the rest of us leave the group, and that person speaks to [Gunawirra staff] personally on their own and plus, they've all been told that we can contact them at any time, if we want any personal help on situations as well, which is wonderful.

The Skype sessions also allowed Gunawirra to assess the individual needs of the preschool staff and to incorporate personal debriefing and support, as the Gunawirra staff member said,

We've also added now, to that Skype program, you can ask for personal time. They're starting to all ask for personal time. We also are getting a better feel of the degree of burnout.

Many staff members were also grateful for the resources Gunawirra had supplied the preschools with, as one staff member said,

I find that we are really grateful and appreciative what Gunawirra does for us...They've supplied us with care packs, toys for the children for the last four years.

Other Support

The staff also discussed other sources of support external to Gunawirra. The majority reported that they felt close to their colleagues and supported one other:

I've got a wonderful group of people – well, this whole service is just full of great, passionate educators. So, we all support each other.

Some preschools had access to other medical and therapy programs. For example, one staff member said,

We have the speech pathologist coming, those things that help us support our children. The lady that came in this morning was vision so she'll be checking vision for our four year old check-up.

Another staff member sought professional psychological support,

I see my psychologist at least once a month just to offload.

Ongoing Support Needs

Staff were asked to comment on their current and ongoing support needs. Many staff members reported that they would benefit from more training on how to use the *Five Big Ideas* book and ways to implement the *Five Big Ideas* program, for example,

I think it would be really good for them to come and sit with the teachers and just to maybe to give them some more specific ways of implementing these things in the classroom.

Non-Aboriginal staff, in particular, reported wanting further cultural training to gain more knowledge and confidence for teaching Aboriginal culture, for example:

Probably the cultural [support] I think. Just probably to build my confidence in implementing those aspects I suppose, and ideas on how to do it.

Aboriginal staff also suggested that further culture awareness training would be helpful for the non-Aboriginal staff. For example, one Aboriginal staff member said,

I really believe [the cultural advisor] needs to do a full day [of culture training], because the non-Aboriginal educators are the ones who were asking the questions... and I think as a whole group, we could educate our educators... about culture.

Another Aboriginal staff member suggested that non-Aboriginal staff needed to ask and learn more because 'we don't wanna disrespect' is not a valid excuse to not teach Aboriginal culture,

... "we can't do it because we don't wanna disrespect." That's not an excuse, they teach – they have Chinese New Year, they celebrate other nationalities, so why can't they do Aboriginal? It's not an excuse anymore for me, isn't it? And I won't accept it as an excuse... And there's ways you can do it... Come and ask questions. We're not gonna bite them. We're there to help and support them.

Some staff members reported that they felt they needed to learn more about the local area and local Dreamtime stories, for example:

... we should be – know more about the local area... I like to learn about this area, animal nation and bring that in here 'cause this is where the children are at, in this school.

One staff member suggested that with extra funding, locals within the community could be employed to teach the local culture:

We've got a lot of people in our community that are knowledgeable, give me funding and pay them to teach their children.

The staff were open to more training in various areas including how to talk to children with emotional needs. For example, one staff member said,

I would like, how to talk to the kids when they're emotional – a lot of things. 'Cause as I said, we're not psychologists.

Another staff member voiced a need for regular seminars and workshops where workers from different centres were able to discuss what they do because, "Sometimes the centres you can feel isolated from the rest... It's good to talk to other child care workers."

Some staff wanted a better relationship and understanding with the Department of Community Services (DoCS) so they could handle situations with the foster children better. For example, one staff member said,

I don't believe we've got a great connection and I think that in end DoCS, they just come up and do what they do and we don't get any information. So, I think if we had a better relationship with those agencies, maybe we could better understand what these kids have been going through as well.

Staff felt that they and the children could benefit from more general preschool staff and specialised staff including an onsite psychologist, particularly with the challenges of additional needs children:

...because of the increase of these kids with additional needs and what not, it's more of a struggle each year ... we really wanna help these kids and they need one-on-one, but the funding's just not there to be able to help them or help us help them to get further ahead.

All staff were positive about the Art Therapy program run by Gunawirra, but many voiced the need for more Art Therapy sessions for other needy children, for example two staff members said:

[The art therapist] needed to have four kids to do a group session and... she could only do one child one-on-one... It's so difficult to choose those children. So, we decided to do the kids that were going to go to school next year 'cause they were sort of bit more in need, but there's so many kids.

We could probably give you 40 kids, if we bought in ones with parents in prison, but just our key trauma and grief families – we had 21... And you can only really pick one key child, the one with most main issues to work with one-on-one.

The Gunawirra staff member highlighted the difficulties Gunawirra faced in offering more art therapy sessions, with the steep financial costs involved and the very small group sizes needed to be most effective:

The art therapy is working really, really well. But it has a massive problem. If we fly them up and fly them back at night, it costs a thousand dollars a person. That is a lot of money. The groups have to be very small. We found four was too many. Four very disturbed children in a group is useless. It had to be two to work.

Finally, some staff reported that they were in need of equipment and resources for their children to play safely and to progress with their education, for example:

We need things within the program. As you've seen it's empty. Yeah, we need more resources... Just things to help them make this transition to kindergarten. Numbers, colours, just a lot of things that's gonna help them.

The Gunawirra staff member reported that the main request Gunawirra gets asked is “to give more. And we haven’t got more to give. That’s the problem” highlighting the financial constraints to do more than they are already doing.

Concluding Comments

This report evaluated the staff perspectives and experiences of the *Five Big Ideas* program in three preschools where the *Five Big Ideas* program was in the process of being rolled out.

The three preschools were in different stages of the roll out phase of the *Five Big Ideas*, however all three preschools indicated that they either had implemented the *Five Big Ideas* modules or intended to do so.

The report also included the perspectives and experiences of the *Five Big Ideas* program from Gunawirra staff. The report contained a descriptive overview of the findings from a preschool staff survey and interviews and a Gunawirra staff member interview. Overall, the preschool staff were highly positive about the *Five Big Ideas* program, and in particular the support they received from Gunawirra. All three preschools received ongoing support from Gunawirra, including weekly contact through Skype, regular visitation with an art therapist and the Gunawirra cultural advisor as well as seminars arranged at various times throughout the year. Some staff indicated that they would like to receive further training from Gunawirra, particularly on cultural awareness and on implementing the *Five Big Ideas* program into their preschools.

The Gunawirra staff perceived the central role of the *Five Big Ideas* as being a positive impact on the healing of trauma within the preschools and the wider community. They also acknowledged the need highlighted by the three preschools for further support in implementing the *Five Big Ideas*, in cultural training, personal Skype time and in delivering art therapy to additional needs children.