

I started working with young children about 18 years ago. I have been through many roles as an educator, I started working with children as a babysitter / nanny, I then got my diploma qualification and now I am studying my Bachelor of Early Childhood Education through Curtin University whilst working full time.

The reason why I chose this profession goes back to my childhood. I come from a broken home. My mum did everything she could to ensure I got a good education. She married her second husband who was an abusive alcoholic who took away my childhood by physically and emotionally abusing me when my mum was busy at work. I swore to myself that if I could stop one child from living that kind of life then my life would be well lived. I chose to work in childcare because every day I can make a difference in the life of children.

One moment in my career that I am extremely proud of is: The day that I walked into a supermarket and saw a little boy that I had worked with shopping with his mum. To know how significant this is you would have to know this little boy. To know that 2 years before his mum wouldn't have dreamt of taking him to the shops. This little boy was a fiery ball of hatred when he entered my classroom. He was being abused just the same way I had been. It took me a very long time to gain his trust. At first he would hit me, bite, kick, punch and through metre tall climbing frames at my head. He would up end the whole classroom when returning from kindergarten if he had a bad day. So between 3pm and 6:30pm each day I had a battle. One where I had to keep the other children in my 3-5yr old class group safe, and I also had to meet this child's needs where I wanted to exclude him to myself and everyone around me safe.

I was not long out of TAFE and I was also acting director of my centre as my Director had left the industry for better wages. I had no support with this. I didn't have the privilege that educators have now of Facebook to network with other educators. I had to get onto the phone to Diversity Directions (now Inclusive Directions) and work with their coordinator to get a plan into place for this child. Not one other educator wanted to work with me on this plan. I had to go into work when I was sick otherwise I would break this poor child's trust. I planned my holidays around his so I was always at the centre for him. This almost broke me. Slowly but surely he began confiding in me what was happening for him. He then disclosed what was happening at home, he and his mum were being physically abused by his dad. This brought me to tears, I cried with him. I then told him something that I had kept to myself for a very long time. I was able to tell him that I would do everything I could to help him.

When his mum came to collect him that night I broached the subject very cautiously. I knew that I had to tread gently as this could be the moment where I gain her trust or lose it. Luckily she then confided in me, she didn't know what to do to keep her, her daughter and her son safe. This is where my background came in. I helped mum make a plan to make them all safe. Luckily mum picked up them all that night. We were able to get them all to somewhere safe as her husband was away. Thankfully she didn't return to the husband. She had an apprehended violence order put against the husband. He could not come anywhere near the centre or the family. Once this happened we had a new child at the centre, we found a polite caring and happy little boy who had a cheeky and funny personality.

If I had not been there to support this little boy there is no way he would have been the calm little boy I said goodbye to when he went to school. His last day at the centre was also mine. He was the first child to make me cry happy tears leaving a centre. He told me that day "Thankyou Hayley for being the only person to care". No child has ever made me cherish my privileged position of being an educator the way this child did. This is one of many big developmental milestones I have had the privilege of being a part of.

As an educator I have faced many challenges:

Being fresh out of TAFE and being the only person left in the centre to become acting Director as I was the only person with the qualifications. I had been in the centre for less than 6 months. We had lost all of our qualified team leaders and our centre director. The reasons for leaving varied one educator decided to become a teacher, another decided to become a mortician, another went back to working in retail. Which left me to recruit new staff, train them, run a 3-5 year old room and to learn the role of director whilst management looked for a fulltime director so I could return to my role as assistant director in the 3-5 room.

I have also faced working with educators who should never, ever work with children. We know the research children aged under five for decades researchers have been aware of the extraordinary development of a child's brain during the first five years of life. Recent advances in neuro-science have helped crystallize earlier findings, bringing new clarity and understanding to the field of early childhood brain development. Children are born ready to learn. They cultivate 85 percent of their intellect, personality and skills by age five. The first months and years of life set the stage for lifelong development. I have worked with people who have walked in off of the street with no experience, it is demeaning to think that we are leaving our nation's most precious resource with somebody who has no training or qualifications for what can be up to 90% of the child's waking time during the week.

I have faced losing colleagues who are highly trained with many years of experience to lesser qualified professions as they earn more. I myself earn less an hour than the person who cleans my centre. I work with children for the love of it, definitely not for the wages. My wage has been one of the sorest points for me. It got so bad at one point that my husband and I were collecting bottles and cans from the side of the road to be able to have enough money at the end of the fortnight to buy milk and bread. I had to pull my child out of a centre because we just couldn't afford to have him in the centre.

Professional Wages in child care means that I will start getting respect from the community that I'm not just a baby sitter. In the future I would like to see high quality Early Childhood Education for all Australian Children that is affordable for educators, yet pays its educators and teachers PROFESSIONAL WAGES. I would like to be able to work in a centre where I can afford to put my own child.