

The Apiary

the
FrontProject

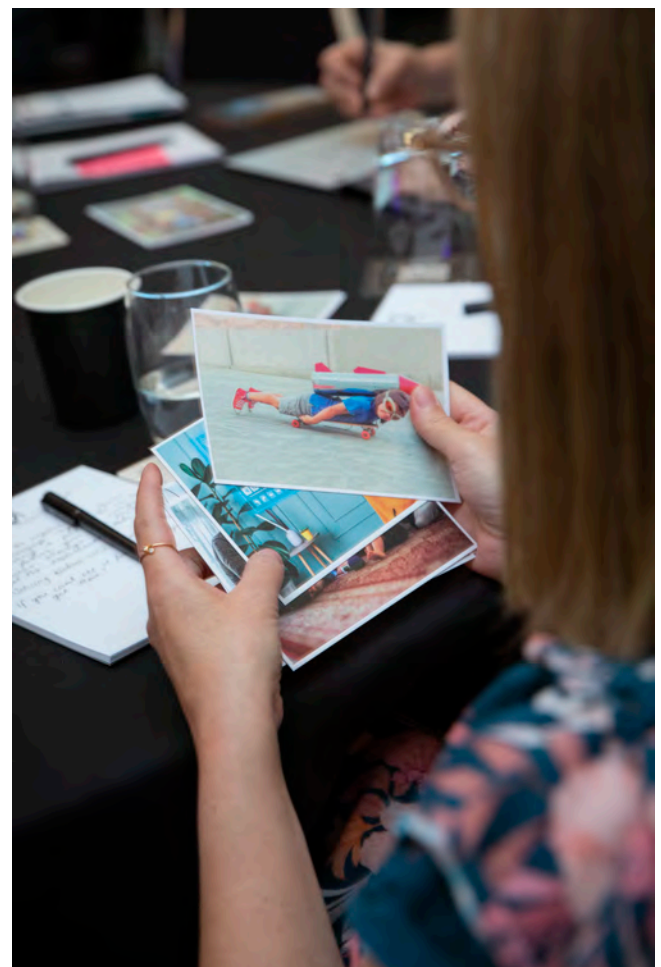
Visioning for the future of early learning in Australia

INTRODUCTION

Australia's early learning system is diverse and complex. Children and families across Australia engage with the early learning system in a range of different settings. Similarly, different parts of that system — early childhood education and care services, playgroups, health and early intervention services or the myriad of other settings that contribute to a child's early learning experience — may have different goals and objectives in how to best support children, and be able to access different policies and funding to be able to do so.

The future of the early years system is on the national agenda: the Australian Government has embarked on an ambitious and important early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy agenda, and is creating a whole of government approach to the 'early years' by developing an Early Years Strategy that will identify ways to deliver better outcomes for children and families across Australia. Additionally, a number of State and Territory governments are pursuing their own reforms to increase access and affordability to ECEC for children in their jurisdictions.

The creation of a vision for early learning in Australia will enable us to develop strategies and pathways, build shared aspirations, and work together with a shared sense of purpose and connection, transforming the early learning system into one where every child, family and community can thrive. To support this, the Front Project and the Apiary Fellowship are bringing together diverse perspectives from children and families, as well as from all corners of the early learning system, for future generations in Australia.



Visioning for the future

The Apiary's future visioning work started in 2019, as the Apiary Fellows recognised an opportunity in the system to take action and bring together the diverse perspectives of those working with and for children. The Apiary has been working closely with global experts including, Joe Waters, the CEO of Capita, based in the United States. Capita's work is about creating a future vision for children that identifies what it takes for every child to flourish now and into the future.

Drawing on the learning from Capita, application of system change practices, deep conversations with child development leaders and futurists, and sense-making of Australia's political and sector environment, the Apiary has pursued future visioning as an initiative that can unite a complex sector beyond the challenges of today and collectively look to transform the early learning system around the timeless needs of children, as the world around them changes.

The Apiary's work into the impact of future visioning on systems resulted in the October 2022 inaugural Early Learning Visioning Summit. The Summit was attended by 100 participants from government, early childhood settings, playgroups, research, First Nations and cultural settings, health, disability, early intervention and community. Those who joined the day did so in the spirit of collaboration and with a vision to enable a collective contribution from the system for a future in which young children and their families can thrive.

The Early Learning Visioning Summit

The Early Learning Visioning Summit was designed for participants to explore a range of innovative and interactive methods to help uncover unique insights for the longer-term future of the early learning system.

Futures thinking does not attempt to predict the future. Rather, it is a creative and exploratory process that uses divergent thinking, seeking many possible answers and acknowledging uncertainty. The intention of each method is to help participants to move beyond the default frames of likely-unlikely or desirable-undesirable futures, to question assumptions and to explore a wider lens of possibilities.

The Front Project & The Apiary

The Front Project

The Front Project is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that works with children and families, the early learning sector, government, and business leaders to develop evidence-based, meaningful, and pragmatic policy solutions, to ensure the early learning system supports all Australian families, and gives all children the best possible start to life.

The Front Project works closely with government to advance the ability of Australian children & families to access quality early learning and ensure the early learning system offers the right support to working parents who need to work and raise their family.

We do this through a range of approaches, including producing independent, evidence-based research. The Front Project also directly supports early childhood educators who are undertaking a bachelor's degree in early childhood teaching, through enabling peer-to-peer support and mentoring.

The Apiary

The Apiary brings together people who are committed to creating thriving futures for children in Australia. Through the support of the Front Project and the Paul Ramsay Foundation, it builds system leadership, collaboration, and the capability to work differently to bring about lasting change in early learning. Over a series of convenings and workshops facilitated by the Front Project and through the incubation of key ideas to leverage systemic change, the Apiary collaborated on the identification of an opportunity to unify our diverse systems under a shared purpose for the future, and help visualise how early learning stakeholders can meet the timeless needs of children into the future, as the world around us changes.

Three distinct 'futuring' methods were used throughout the Summit, to allow for creative and divergent thinking, and to encourage participants to think about innovative solutions for the future. This provided an environment in which participants were able to generate a rich bank of insights about desired futures for the early learning system.

Method 1: Postcards to the future (photo elicitation)

Each participant was provided with a set of 5 photos. They were asked to choose the photo that resonated with them the most and answer the question; What is your vision for the early learning system?

81 postcards to the future were submitted, our analysis saw clear themes emerge on what a future early system looks like:



1. Children's individual needs are at the core of the system design and their voices are an integral part of decision-making for the future.



2. Community responsive-localised settings developed within communities where children and families can access early learning and education, health, social services, food/nutrition and nature/environment.



3. Multigenerational approaches where strong partnerships exist across generations, supporting the child to thrive.



4. Inclusive and diverse settings where individuality and uniqueness is embraced.



5. First Nations values, knowledge and culture is embedded in practice and deeply valued.

Method 2: Landscapes of the future (3d system modelling)



13 groups created a landscape using a range of loose parts to create a desired future. These landscapes showed the following emerging themes:

1. Community early learning settings with multiple pathways and entry points.
2. Children should shape the future and are at the centre of all decisions.
3. First Nations pedagogy is central to all decision making.
4. Sustainability and environment are integral in the creation of community spaces.

Method 3: Transformative futures (narrative scenario development)



13 groups developed a transformative scenario which showed the following emerging themes for the future of early learning:

1. Community collaboration where services are built together and facilitated by co-located, co-designed early learning settings to create a collective society.
2. Children are at the centre, their contributions are heard and valued and their input into design and decisions is embedded in how we shape the future.
3. Inclusive and diverse environments are created and everyone is respected.
4. The early learning system values the workforce by high pay rates and conditions, and there are career pathways.
5. Lifelong funding models are established and maintained throughout the early learning system.

Children are at the centre

Amongst its set of values, the Front Project and the Apiary hold children at the centre and recognise the need to genuinely listen to and include the voices of children and their families in decisions that emerge from the changing context in which they live.

Listening to children is central to recognising their voice, opinions and views on decisions that directly impact them. In 1991, Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which specifies the right of children and young people to have their opinions taken into account on matters that effect their lives (Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

Together, these innovative methodologies will culminate in generating future-state visions for the early learning system in Australia that has children's voices at the centre and incorporates the views, perspectives and experiences of their families, the ECEC sector and other relevant system stakeholders, including but not limited to the disability, Allied Health and Community Services sectors.

Visioning conversations with children

From November 2022 to March 2023 the visioning will continue. There will be an opportunity to connect and contribute to visioning via localised early learning settings across Australia. These settings will support communities to facilitate conversations, and implement the same futuring methods used at the Summit. Children and families will have the opportunity to contribute their lived experience and share their views using both the Postcards to the Future and Landscape of the Future methodologies.

The two futuring activities have been adapted to make them meaningful to children, at the same time as allowing for comparisons to be drawn across adult contributions, so that their voices can be included and have equal weight in shaping collaborative visions. The activities have also been designed to allow for children to participate in the environments and settings where they are already engaging in services that are familiar and known to them, to ensure we capture honest and authentic insights.

Early learning settings will be provided with guidance and support to implement two activities with children and/or families and other professionals and capture the outcomes. There are print materials available, and a series of facilitator learning sessions will be implemented via Zoom. These outcomes will then feed into the overall visioning process, bringing together the voices of children, families, communities and diverse stakeholders in the early learning system across Australia.

As part of ensuring there is diversity in the voices represented in the visioning process, the Front Project and the Apiary are actively engaging and seeking people and communities who work with or interact with children and families and other professionals in metro and rural settings, such as ECEC services, playgroups, libraries, First Nations and cultural settings, health, mental health, disability, early intervention, libraries, social groups, sporting clubs, arts and play.

Children's Wellbeing, including Safety and Privacy

The safety and wellbeing of children is paramount as we implement these experiences, and we have the ethical principles and considerations required to be followed by all participants. A Collaboration Agreement is required to be signed by participating parties which outlines all the considerations including implementation, data storage and security.



Timeline

Expression of Interest — Visioning Conversations with children

Registrations open
28 October 2022 — 10 March 2023

[Visioning Conversations with Children Expression of Interest](#)

Learning Sessions

Online Learning sessions via
Zoom for participants
End November
Mid December

[Check the Visioning Conversation with Children page for all updates](#)

Reporting

Summit outputs — initial results
18 November

First round of outputs from community settings
— captured for synthesis
17 December

Second round of outputs from community
settings — captured for synthesis
End January

[Check the Visioning Conversation with Children page for all updates](#)

Third round of outputs — captured
3 month Progress Report
End February

Final synthesis of data and report
31 May 23

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We are an independent national enterprise working to create positive change in Australia's early learning system.

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