

# AWARD WINNING SAFE PRACTICE

By Caroline Milburn

A Melbourne early learning centre has won Victoria's top early childhood road safety award by taking a collaborative approach to road safety education and embedding it into the centre's curriculum.

Joyce Avenue Children's Centre in the northern Melbourne suburb of Greensborough won the inaugural VicRoads Starting Out Safely road safety education award in May.

The annual award, sponsored by VicRoads, recognises excellence in the delivery of road safety education in an early childhood education and care setting.

Ms Katherine Bulluss, the educational leader at the Joyce Avenue Children's Centre, said staff and families were thrilled that the centre's innovative approach to promoting road safety messages had been recognised by the award's judging panel.

She said the centre's decision to strengthen its approach to road safety education began after staff took part in a Starting Out Safely professional development session, delivered by trainers from Early Learning Association Australia (ELAA).

"The training session inspired us to do more research on how to promote road safety messages in our service," Ms Bulluss said. "We wanted to further incorporate road safety education into our curriculum and involve our own families in the program.

"We started to come up with ideas about how to embed good road safety practices in families rather than just practicing the activities with the children in the centre."

The centre developed a community-based approach to its curriculum and program development. For example, to promote the importance of children holding an adult's hand while crossing a road, children and parents posed for photos holding hands as they walked across the centre's carpark.

The photos were displayed on the centre's front gate and had an immediate impact. They triggered positive responses from parents and a noticeable increase in the number of adults holding children's hands in the centre's carpark.

"I've had families come up to me and say, 'My child wants to hold hands too, so can you take a photo of us and put it on the display?' " Ms Bulluss said. "Children point to their photo proudly and others ask if they can have their photo taken. By involving our families in these road safety activities the material is more meaningful to them instead of them seeing a stranger on a poster."

Centre staff also borrowed a Bicycle Helmet Education Pack, available from local police stations. They used the helmets and resources in the pack to set up a display to inform children and families about the importance of wearing helmets and how to choose and fit them properly.

Staff embedded the safety information into activities in the playground by ensuring children used helmets when

## Early learning and road safety

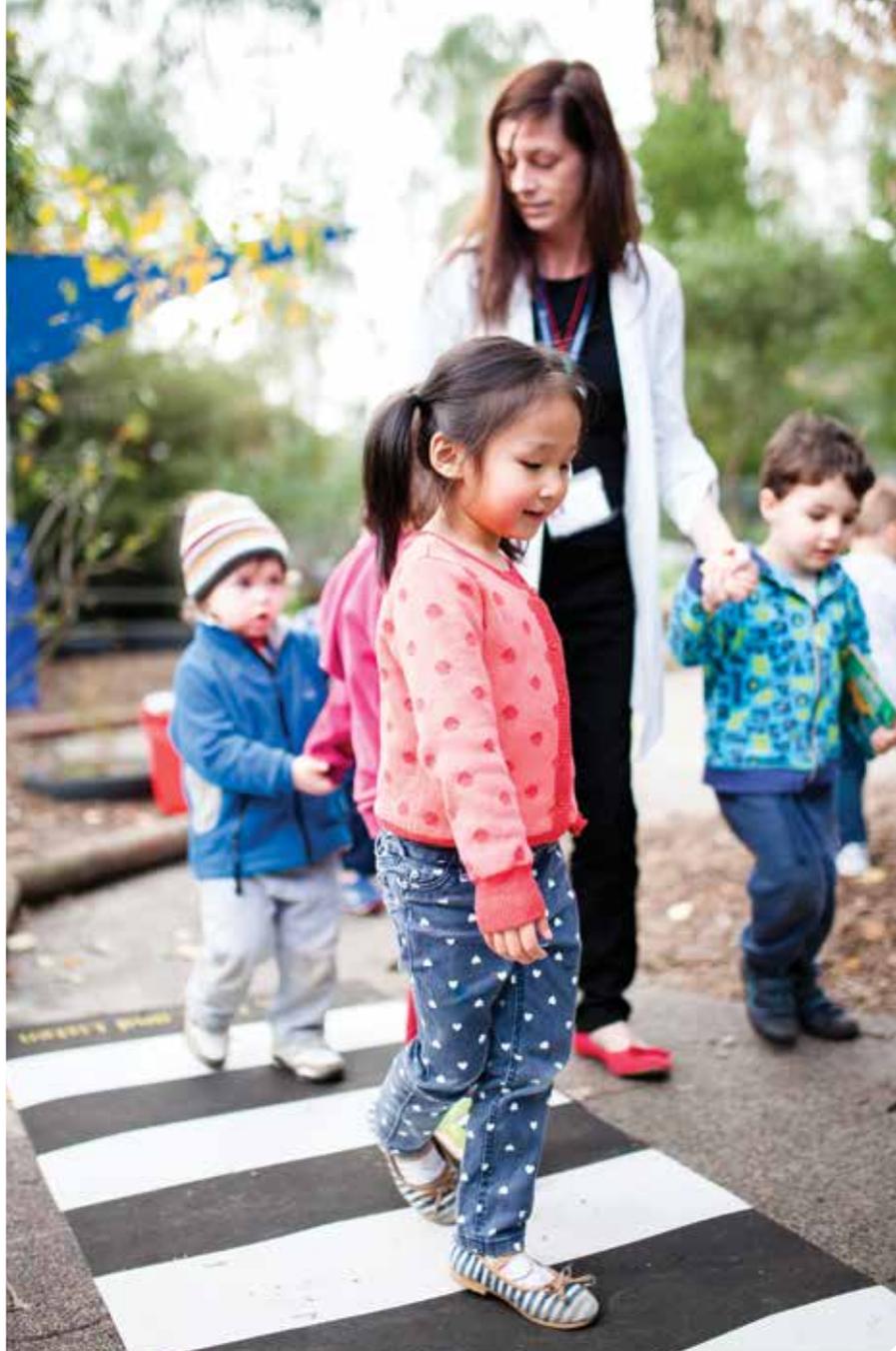
How Joyce Avenue Children's Centre enriched its curriculum:

**Start early.** In the babies room, children liked to watch the traffic lights on the road outside. Staff talked to children about the lights and different types of transport. Road safety discussions and activities were developed further in the toddler and kindergarten rooms.

**Involve families and children in creating fun displays.** Taking photographs of families doing things safely, such as using seat belts or crossing the road, makes the messages more meaningful.

**Practice road safety in fun indoor and outdoor activities.** Create interactive wall maps of the neighbourhood, using your own photos. Make your own road signs and traffic lights for the maps and for outdoor play.





Since then, as the children and educators have discussed what they see on roads in their neighbourhood, the display has expanded to include common road signs and symbols, different types of transport and a section on riding bikes safely in the playground, with accompanying photos of the children.

The centre also received a VicRoads educational resources kit as a prize for winning the award, which included road play mats, helmets, books and puzzles.

Mr Gary Blackwood, the Victorian government's parliamentary secretary for transport presented the award to the centre's staff at the 2014 Early Childhood Education Conference held in May. He said the judging panel had been impressed by how the centre's educators had developed effective ways to work with children, families and communities to help prepare children to become safe and independent road users.

"This award recognises and celebrates the achievements of early childhood educators in the provision of exemplary road safety education," Mr Blackwood said. "The standard of submissions received for this award was high and demonstrates the level of commitment and engagement within this area of road safety."

Vicroads' Starting Out Safely program, Victoria's early childhood road safety education program, is being rolled out statewide.

Over the past two years, more than 1400 educators in Victorian early learning services have received its professional development training and resource materials on road safety education.

VicRoads funds ELAA to deliver the free Starting Out Safely activities across Victoria. The program is designed to provide an engaging approach to road safety education, with training for early childhood educators, maternal and child health professionals, parents and carers.

Recent figures released by VicRoads revealed that no children under seven years old were killed in car crashes in Victoria in 2013.

Shane Lucas, ELAA's CEO, said the statistic showed that road safety education, through programs such as Starting Out Safely, was helping to make communities safer for Victorian families.

"The program is a great example of organisations working together to implement national reforms to early childhood road safety education, aimed at reducing the death toll on our roads," Mr Lucas said.

riding their tricycles and made sure children took the helmets off when they moved to another activity.

They drew zebra crossings on the ground with the children and children and staff took turns playing crossing attendant as children passed on their bikes. The centre also introduced a home made traffic light system for the playground, with children and staff discussing responsible riding and making better judgements about stopping and speeding in the playground.

Ms Bulluss said parents have told educators they've noticed how their children have become more aware at home about road safety and the importance of wearing a helmet since the initiatives were introduced. The \$500 prize money from the award has allowed the centre to buy working traffic lights for the playground to practice road rules.

"The children think it's great to hold the stop sign and play the role of the lollypop

person," Ms Bulluss said. "They love to practice real life situations in the safety of the centre. So when we do go out on excursions, the children have an understanding of the road safety rules and what's expected of them.

"We talk to children about where their helmet lives at the centre and children come in and tell us where their helmet lives at home. As educators we're working on linking the experiences we provide for children at the centre to children's lives outside the centre, in their homes and communities."

The community-based approach about road safety has also been introduced into indoor activities at the long day care centre run by Banyule City Council.

In the toddlers' room the children play with an interactive traffic and road safety display on the wall. The display started with roads, traffic lights, a roundabout and a railway track.