

Lunar New Year Celebrations

Lady Gowrie University South Education and Care Service



Hi, my name is Helen Mounster, I am an Inclusion Professional currently supporting Lady Gowrie University South Education and Care service. Being co-located within the grounds of University of Tasmania Sandy Bay Campus, Lady Gowrie University South supports the inclusion of a growing number of families from a range of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, in particular, families from Asian backgrounds. The service also has two Chinese, Mandarin speaking educators Pinkie and Ling working across the service.

During one of my visits I recognised an opportunity for the service to build connections with families whilst also increasing the cultural understanding of educators working across the service by joining with families in celebrating upcoming 'Chinese New Year'. The following story recounts Lady Gowrie University South Education and Care service's New Year Celebrations with families.

In preparation for the afternoon tea celebrations with families, educators worked alongside children making signs and pictures using Chinese characters and spoke a lot about the different meanings of the signs and colours they were using. The children were very engaged in learning new words and the children who speak Mandarin were delighted to share their language and laugh along with peers and educators with their attempts at pronunciation of Mandarin words. As soon as we set plans in place for our Lunar New Year celebration a positive attitude was forming between children and educators which is so crucial for building an inclusive society.

Approaching the date of the celebration, families of other Asian cultures such as Vietnamese and Japanese started to bring in their own signs and share stories with service managers and educators about their own celebrations. The families also suggested Lady Gowrie University South could call the planned celebration 'Lunar New Year' instead of 'Chinese New Year' to be more inclusive of all Asian cultures. Service managers identified that changing of the name was a great learning experience for all in relation to cultural sensitivity.



The decoration at the front door welcomes the community in celebrating Lunar New Year together. Families from China, Vietnam and Japan contributed the items for display that are significant in their cultural practice.

During the afternoon tea celebrations children, families and educators shared food that represented a variety of cultures. I noticed Ling (educator) was busy cooking dumplings and I invited Ling to join me in singing 'Happy New Year' song in Mandarin with the children and families. The children and families all said 'Happy New Year' in their own language which further supported a sense of belonging for all within Lady Gowrie University South.



Tom was not quite sure about the purple Chinese sweet dumpling, then his friend Tao encouraged Tom to have a try.

Reflection from a family following Lunar New Year celebration

Qing, a parent from Vietnam shared how warm and grateful she felt to be part of the afternoon tea celebration during her family's adjustment to a new country, language and culture.

Qing and her family were expecting an unusually quiet celebration for their first Lunar New Year in Australia as they don't have their extended family and friends with them, who they usually spend significant time with during this important cultural celebration. The family were so happy to receive the invitation from Lady Gowrie University South. The family joined in with tasting the traditional Chinese dumplings along with many other beautiful foods. Most importantly, Qing recounts the warm atmosphere of celebration of her culture and the wish of 'Happy New Year' spoken in Vietnamese, has brought her and her son a sense of belonging in this very new chapter of their life.

Reflection from an educator (Melinda).

Melinda felt like an invisible barrier had come down after the celebration afternoon tea. Melinda noted the 'Lunar New Year' celebration supported a greater respect of family's cultures which enhanced all families sense of belonging.

'Culturally competent educators understand that a non-tokenistic approach in their ongoing programming is only possible through knowing and understanding the specific needs and practices of individual children and families attending their service and incorporating these practices within the daily program'.

(Australian Mosaic, Issue 39, pg. 33)

Within my role as an Inclusion Professional I continue to encourage Lady Gowrie University South education and care service to reflect on the whole experience and continue to build and embed cultural aspects into all areas of daily program and practice. Following the celebration, the service has now identified 21 different languages and cultures represented within the service. Educators across the service are motivated to continue to increase communication and connections with families and gather information to inform not only future cultural celebrations but daily programming which is meaningful and reflective of the community within Lady Gowrie University South.

Educators who speak other languages such as German, Italian, Slovakian and Laos are encouraged to share their language and culture within daily programs across the service. Lady Gowrie Inclusion Agency has further supported the service with resources including 'Communication Book' which encourages educator teams to learn key words from children's home languages and phonetically write the pronunciation of words from child's home language into English script. Once completed this resource supports educators to use children's home languages throughout routines and experiences and demonstrates to children and families that their home language is valued within the education and care service.



Lady Gowrie Inclusion Agency is looking forward to continuing to work alongside Lady Gowrie University South Education and Care service as they continue to increase their capacity and capability towards embracing and reflecting the cultures of children, families and educators within their daily programs and practice into the future.

Helen Mounster

Inclusion Professional

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