

Reflections on the first year of the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre

The Glenroy Hub Children's Centre is a long day care centre located within the new Glenroy Community Hub, offering education and care for children from 6 weeks to 6 years of age, including integrated kindergarten for 3 and 4-year-olds. It is currently the only not-for-profit long day care centre in Glenroy and represents the NSEYC's first venture into education and care for children under 3.

In addition to the Children's Centre, the Hub is the new home for the Glenroy Library, Glenroy Memorial Kindergarten, Maternal child health services, CoHealth, the Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre, a community garden and more.

The Children's Centre officially opened on 28th February 2022. Our first anniversary presents a wonderful opportunity to reflect on our journey, including our successes and challenges so far.



Background



We know that the first 1000 days of a child's life are when the foundations are laid for children's lifelong health, wellbeing, learning and achievement. This is when the risk and protective factors in a child's life have the greatest impact. This window of time in a child's development is especially important in communities such as Glenroy where there are high levels of vulnerability and disadvantage. That's why, back in 2019, we jumped at the chance to submit an Expression of Interest to operate the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre, and to take the NSEYC model of integrated service delivery to these younger years where we know we can make a positive difference in children's lives from when they are just 6 weeks of age.

Since being selected as the preferred operator by Merri-bek City Council in 2019, we have worked in close collaboration with Council and other partners on plans for the design and function of the Hub, and the services offered within it, to ensure that it can best serve our wonderfully diverse community. It is pleasing to see all of this planning come to fruition, and we feel privileged and excited to be part of such an important community facility.



Reflections on year one

We asked the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre Manager, Brinda Mootoosamy, to share her reflections on the Centre's first year of operation.

What has been your main focus at the Children's Centre during this year?

During this first year we have focused on developing our learning programs and building the foundations of our service delivery model, including:

- *Providing an inclusive and inspiring learning environment where everyone feels welcome*
- *Building relationships within the community, particularly with families and our partners at the Hub*
- *Providing a safe and healthy environment*
- *Developing a capable and cohesive team.*



What have been the biggest successes and challenges in the first year of the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre?

Our biggest success has been creating a sense of welcome for families and supporting the vulnerable children in our community. We have received so much wonderful feedback from families about their experience at the Centre so far. For example, a mother who has a child with special needs and limited physical capabilities said at the beginning of the year that she never imagined her child would be able to attend a children's centre. Now, 10 months later, the child is walking and moving independently while receiving close support from an educator. That is why we are here doing what we do!



What has been the biggest challenge?

Finding enough staff to meet the demand for places at the Centre has been a challenge. This is largely because there is an overall shortage in qualified early childhood education and care professionals, but also because at the NSEYC we only recruit staff that demonstrate a genuine passion and commitment to children's learning and development, and an alignment with our values of Trust, Respect, Relationships and Curiosity.

The lack of staff has meant we have had to restrict enrolment numbers somewhat during the first year, so that we never compromise the level of care and education that children receive. Thankfully we have been able to recruit some wonderful new staff for 2023!

How has being located within the Glenroy Community Hub benefited the children, families and educators at the Centre so far?

It's great to feel part of a wider community. The integrated spaces within the Hub mean that families have easy access to services and programs such as the library, Maternal and Child Health and community health services, adult education, a community garden and lots more. It really inspires families to get involved. For example:

- *Every month, children at the Centre participate in Rhyme Time at the Library.*
- *Our children also have regular visits to the Community Garden to learn about growing food.*

- After hearing what children have learnt during the day and any new interests they have developed, families will often go straight to the library to borrow books on the subject so that the learning can continue at home.
- One parent often goes to the library to engage in the community puzzle to unwind before picking up their child.
- We were recently able to be part of the food bank program hosted at the Hub to support vulnerable families.

This is just the beginning as we are still becoming established, but there is so much potential! We are excited to continue working with our Hub partners to look for even more opportunities like these.

What families are saying

The team at the Glenroy Hub Children's Centre have worked hard from day one to create a welcoming environment for families. Recently, one of our parents, Lisa, shared with us what her experience at the Hub has meant for her family:



For us, around when Julius was one, childcare suddenly became a pipe dream. Things had gotten very complicated. Julius was diagnosed with a very rare genetic disorder, so rare in fact that in 2019 only 24 others in the world had been identified as having changes to the same gene. Many times, people asked us what we were going to do about his future, if he could attend a normal childcare or had to go somewhere 'more him'. The answer was we didn't know.

I remember talking to Sigi [CEO of the NSEYC] on the phone after we had been offered a place at Glenroy Hub Children's Centre, reeling from the diagnosis and what Julius could and couldn't do. Expecting the call to end with more of a 'thanks but no thanks' send off, I was surprised at the warm and empathetic person at the other end who soothed my fears and told me that it was going to be alright, that it was going to work, that this is what they do.

We expected to last a month at the Centre – if that. Ten months later, a new year is beginning and our second son is going to join Julius. The educators at the Centre welcomed Julius into the fold, made his goals their goals, captured precious moments, encouraged, pushed, loved, and included. We couldn't be happier with our first year at NSEYC Glenroy Hub Children's Centre.

THANK YOU TO OUR TEAM, FAMILIES, AND PARTNERS FOR MAKING THE FIRST YEAR OF THE GLENROY HUB CHILDREN'S CENTRE SUCH A POSITIVE ONE!

