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| NSW Government logo |  Australian Early Development Census logo. |

Onsite Occupational Therapist Program

# Salamander Childcare Centre Inc

## About the community

Salamander Bay is a suburb of the Port Stephens local government area in the Hunter Region of NSW.

Salamander Childcare Centre is a community based not-for-profit early childhood education and care centre for children aged between 6 weeks and 5 years of age. It serves families in Port Stephens and is run by a Management Committee comprised of volunteers from families enrolled in the centre.

## What did the data show?

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national measure of early childhood development that is collected at the time children commence their first year of full-time schooling. The AEDC collects data relating to 5 key areas of early childhood development referred to as ‘domains’. The domains are physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills (school-based), and communication skills and general knowledge.

The 2021 AEDC outcomes for the Port Stephens community showed 21.0% of children were developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains and 10.8% were developmentally vulnerable in 2 or more domains, which was a slight increase from 2018.

There were also increases in developmental vulnerabilities between 2018 and 2021 in the physical health and wellbeing domain (from 8.8% in 2018 to 10.9% in 2021), social competence domain (from 8.5% in 2018 to 9.4% in 2021), and language and cognitive skills domain (from 5.9% in 2018 to 7.7% in 2021).

## Bringing about change

Within the community of Port Stephens, there are extensive waitlists to access specialist support from speech pathologists, occupational therapists and paediatric psychologists, with some families reporting having to wait up to 12 months for their child to be seen. This has the potential to increase developmental delays for some children in the community, as they are unable to access timely early intervention.



As part of the Onsite Occupational Therapist Program, Salamander Childcare Centre had a qualified occupational therapist onsite one day a week throughout the year. The occupational therapist engaged with children, their families and educators to identify any additional support required for children enrolled in the centre and to ensure inclusive practices were embedded across the service to foster children’s development across all 5 AEDC developmental domains.



Partnerships

Salamander Childcare Centre partnered with The University of Newcastle – Occupational Therapy Clinic to deliver the program. The program was also developed and run with the support of the Salamander Childcare Centre Management Committee and all Salamander childcare educators and leadership team.

## Achievements

The Onsite Occupational Therapist Program has successfully increased families’ awareness and access to support available to them in the community, and led to a greater understanding of the signs to look out for when identifying a child who may need additional support. More children were screened under the program which meant that fewer additional needs were going unnoticed or unmet.

Families and educators at Salamander Childcare Centre valued the relationship with the resident occupational therapist. As the support offered was onsite and incorporated within the day-to-day operations of the centre, it was much more accessible for families and less confronting.

When the support provided at Salamander Childcare Centre did not have the expected impact for a child, the occupational therapist would then meet with the family to discuss progress and next steps. The occupational therapist was also able to assist the family with any required reports to help them get the additional support they need.

Some of the statistics are below:

* 25 children were seen for screening and assessment using relevant measures. A screening report was provided to the caregivers (educators and family) of each child.
* 11 children participated in individual intervention. Individual intervention focused on goals set by caregivers (including but not limited to managing emotions within play, participating in toileting routines, achieving developmental milestones, participating in mealtimes, attention and pretend play skills).
* 15 children participated in the group intervention throughout the year.

## Looking ahead

Salamander Childcare Centre is eager to continue improving developmental outcomes for children and families in the community by strengthening interagency partnerships and supporting other early childhood education and care centres to establish their own onsite occupational therapist programs.

For more information, contact the AEDC NSW Project Team:

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