

AUSTRALIA

Montessori Australia Foundation

Highlights

We see a Montessori movement in Australia that is continuing to expand and increase in its diversity. MAF has worked hard to tailor to the services offered to each sector of the Montessori community across the nation, and now offers whole of life support from birth to aged care, including training and professional development, publications, digital and online resources, quality assurance, and government and industry liaison.

Events & Activities

This year we presented over 30 events in Australia and held an inaugural International Montessori Retreat in Hawaii, in conjunction with the US Montessori Administrators Association (MAA).

As well as our usual consultation forums in each State, we held three major conferences throughout the year including our second International Conference on Montessori Environments for Dementia in Sydney, in November. Once again, we hosted the four international leading experts in this field to continue the process of identifying standards for aged care services internationally, using Montessori principles and practices for people living with dementia. The annual Montessori Early Childhood Education and Care Conference was held in Adelaide and attracted over 250 people. Keynote speakers included AMI Trainers Cathy Swan and Amy Kirkham, together with leading early childhood academics, and those providing practical assistance for educators working in Montessori centre-based long day care. Montessori workshops were provided throughout Australia presented by both local and international speakers including AMI trainers J McKeever, Alison Awes and Amy Kirkham.

With a growing interest in Montessori in the public sector, a significant event during 2015 was the inaugural Montessori Public School Forum in Melbourne, where eight of the ten Montessori public schools in Australia were represented. The MAF Full School Support Package aims to enable new Montessori programmes in public schools to achieve the highest quality of Montessori from 0-3 through to Montessori Adolescent Programmes. A second forum will be held in April, in 2016.

The annual "Meeting in the Middle" forum was held on the Sunshine Coast, a precursor to the Adolescent Orientation held in January 2016.

A definite highlight of the year was the Administrators Retreat in Hawaii, with speakers Dr Yong Zhao and Trinidad Hunt, and attendance by AMI President, Philip O'Brien.

The theme of our plenary session for the Whole School Refresher was "Montessori Education for Peace". Speakers for the Refresher this year included David Kahn, Carla Foster, Sharlyn Smith and Madlena Ulrich.

The first Assistants to Infancy Training Course to be conducted in Australia by an Australian-based trainer commenced in Brisbane in August 2015. The course is running over four five-week blocks, with final exams and graduation scheduled for June 2016. Julia Hilson also presented the inaugural AMI 0-3 Assistants Course in Australia in the remote Aboriginal community of Lockhart River. Pamela Nunn and Amy Kirkham have also run 3-6 courses in Melbourne and Sydney as well as Assistants Courses in Sydney and Melbourne. 2015 also heralded the first and long-awaited 6-12 training course with an Australian trainer Rebecca Dallam, and this continues into 2016.

Special Projects & Outreach

Montessori Independent Schools Australia (MISA) is planning a Summit in Alice Springs in August, to collectively determine future directions for the Montessori Independent Schools sector. Key issues will be addressed such as leadership development, training, financial resilience, marketing, governance and MAF services. Interest continues to grow in our Montessori Centre Management Australia (MCMA) consultation service, and work is well under way with design and development of our first project in Canberra, which will open its doors to children in 2017.

Continued improvement and refinement of the Montessori Quality Assurance Programme has been a highlight of the year, as more schools and centres join and benefit from the increased recognition of being a Montessori Registered TM school or centre.

The 2015 year has established Montessori Ageing Support Services as the leader of quality Montessori training and consultancy in Australia. In August, MASS was nominated for an Aged Care Award, and subsequently shortlisted as a finalist, a fabulous achievement for a young organisation. MASS also produced a video conveying the essence of the Montessori approach in the aged care sector, and the profound impact it is having upon the lives of people impacted by dementia. Older people are shown in a number of different settings, engaging in activities, which address excess disability, restore movement capabilities and support memory loss. These gains enable older people to take up important roles, which contribute to the life of their communities and return feelings of self-worth and meaning. The video can be seen at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzxXDbwjB2I

The government liaison agenda continues to be an important priority as education at all levels is reviewed, and new policies and regulations offered for consultation at both Federal and State Government levels. As the national body, we make representations in each state on issues relating to children and continue our relationship with the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA). We have a strong relationship with the early childhood education and care sector through ACECQA, Childcare Associations Australia and the National Childcare Accreditation Council and make it a priority to ensure that Montessori is on the government's early childhood education agenda.

Attendance at National Consultative Group meetings of ISCA and ACECQA forums and workshops is also a priority. During 2015, we have continued to liaise with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), concerning

recognition of the Montessori National Curriculum (MNC).

Collaborations & Partnerships

We are honoured to be able to continue to contribute to AMI's international work and to collaborate with AMI on the development of the Montessori Observation and Record Keeping System and AMI Digital.

Australian Montessorians provide support to AMI initiatives taking place in Asian countries. Several Australians (trainers, teachers and administrators) have visited China, Indonesia, East Timor and Thailand in order to provide training, consultation, mentoring and workshops.

During the year, the Montessori Children's Foundation continued to operationalise its four key principles of partnership, sustainability, quality and flexibility by making Montessori programmes available to some of the most vulnerable children in Australia, who, for a multitude of reasons, would not otherwise be able to access them. We now have Montessori programmes across the Torres Strait, an expansion of our programmes in the Aboriginal community of Aurukun, and the development of a new programme in the Aboriginal community of Lockhart River. In addition, we have maintained our relationship with and support for the multi-campus Ngaanyatjarra Lands School in remote Western Australia.

Other

MAF remains focussed on building capacity and services for the Montessori movement in Australia. We are continuing with our exciting restructuring plans, and 2016 will see the launch of our new resources division, a new website and a focus on more effective communication and service to the diverse Montessori community that we serve.

Christine Harrison
President