

About Big Fat Smile

Big Fat Smile is a not-for-profit organisation that plays an important part in the lives of thousands of children and families.

Big Fat Smile is one of the most respected and reputable providers of quality education, care, recreation, community and inclusion services in Australia.

Where did it start?

Illawarra Children's Services Action Group was established in 1981 with a view to bring positive, lasting change to the region through active campaigning for the rights of families to access affordable care. Today Big Fat Smile consists of a network of Community Preschools, Fun Clubs and a portfolio of community and inclusion programs across Australia, but still with a firm, solid foundation in the Illawarra.

Our Work



Preschools and Long Day Care

- 26 Community Preschools for 0 – 5 year-olds, made up of:
 - Term only
 - · Long day care



Fun Club Out of School Hours

- 15 Fun Clubs for 5 12 year-olds
- Before school, after school and school holiday programs



Include Me

- Funding and inclusion support
- Delivers supported playgroups
- Parenting workshops
- · Transition to school support
- Capacity building sessions

Big Fat Smile Group Ltd.

ACN: 002796232 | ABN: 82002796232







Chairman's Report

Big Fat Smile has just celebrated a major birthday - turning 40 this year, a significant milestone in any organisation's life but even more important when we consider the early education and care provided to thousands of children over that time.

High quality early learning helps create a foundation for children's lives and four decades of passion, dedication and commitment to children is a rich legacy. To every current and past team member of Big Fat Smile, thank you. Your combined commitment to high quality early education has made an extraordinary difference to your community.

But there's still more to do and with the financial security of an on-going partnership with Goodstart Early Learning the team at Big Fat Smile isn't wasting a moment.

Deep connection with children, families and the communities we are a part of is the hallmark of Big Fat Smile's on-going success. The focus on children's outcomes and well-being continues a pace and is reflected in the energetic and focused work Big Fat Smile continues to do in its social inclusion programs. This on-going commitment is also apparent in our focus on reconciliation. Every Big Fat Smile team is now a part of the reconciliation program Narragunnawali. I am looking forward to seeing each centre's Reconciliation Action Plans come to life over the coming year.

The voices of children are central in our work and Big Fat Smile ensures they are heard, understood and acted upon in our centres, and increasingly in the wider communities and within government.

Big Fat Smile is well placed for the next forty years as we prepare to provide high quality early education and care for generations of children across all of the communities we are so lucky to be a part of.





CEO Report **Jenni Hutchins**

Last vear, as I closed infamous the year of 2020, I spoke

about the global pandemic, the uncertainty and the challenges. We all wished for a better year for 2021: more hope, more certainty, less COVID-19. As we now know all too well this did not occur. Big Fat Smile's Educators, staff, children and families continued to provide high quality education and care to children to enable families during the pandemic lockdowns.

Our services and educators became the mainstay in families lives; reflecting stability and predictability for our children and our communities. Early Education and Care was one of a handful of sectors that consistently remained open. It provided a service to community's most important and our vulnerable citizens and our educators did this, all whilst supporting and caring for their own families.

The impacts of COVID-19 have not been insignificant on our communities: work, lifestyle, family life, and emotional impacts. In our environments this has been reflected in some of our children's ability to emotionally selfregulate. Our inclusion teams have experienced this through a tripling of requests for Inclusion Development Funds through our Inclusion Agency services; funded by the Australian Government. At a service level many children had experienced a supressed social and emotional environment, requiring additional supports, understanding and additional educators. The recognition of the impact of COVID-19 on our sector was just starting to dawn. During this time, we experienced a few closures, which were all managed with aplomb.

Our Head Office staff worked overtime to enable our services. Community Programs built online programs and social environments

for our playgroups. Our vision, values and strategic plan have been enlivened through-out what was a very challenging but inspiring year. I feel deeply lucky to work with such dedicated people and in such an inspiring organisation. A must in this annual report is a thank you for the unwavering commitment and effort to our educators for looking after our children and showing to a commitment to each other.

Despite the many and varied impacts of this past year we managed to achieve many great things.

This year we celebrated Big Fat Smile's 40th Birthday! Some of our face-to-face celebrations were scuppered due to lock down but we managed to still celebrate online in a meaningful way with our staff and families.

Among the smaller, daily wins not mentioned below, we managed to achieve these largeticket items from our Strategic Plan.

Pillar 1: Client Experience

At the behest of the Department of Education, Big Fat Smile opened our first Shoalhaven service, Milton Early Learning and Care in February of 2022 after the closure of a local service. The circumstances of the closure left families displaced and traumatised. Big Fat Smile was requested to step in and open Milton Early Learning and Care Centre to cater to the needs of families who have experienced multiple traumas.

To assist our prospective customer's journey to access and understand Big Fat Smile services, we launched a brand-new website. We also updated the parent handbook to be more reflective of current branding and family needs. We also created a Children's Handbook for both Preschool and Fun Club services, where

children were consulted and their commentary documented in its content.

We also leveraged the voice of the children to inform Big Fat Smile's Policy. Children were consulted in elements of policy creation and revision.

Pillar 2: Inclusion and Educational Ethos

For three years, Big Fat Smile has been developing an Educational Framework. At the behest of our families to understand the educational content of early learning and care and out of school hours care, Big Fat Smile invested in an Educational Framework. This document will be used to guide educational programming and the practice of educating our children.

Additionally, our Child Safe Framework, incorporating all aspects of our Child Safe Organisation Action Plan, has been approved by the Board and will commence rollout in 2022.

The Inclusion Agency Contract, rolled over 12 months at a time due to COVID-19, was rolled over again for a final 12 months ending in 2023. Big Fat Smile remains committed to being an active partner in inclusion services for children in Australia.

Our Fun Club Strategy was finalised with our goal to be the most attractive provider in our locales. Five of our services undertook Assessment and Rating, resulting in 5 Exceeding outcomes. Congratulations to Unanderra, Thirroul and Balarang Fun Clubs along with Dapto and Wollongong City Community Preschools. A big shout out to Our Bellambi Point Community Preschool which received a rating of Excellence: one of only 18 in the state of New South Wales (out of 5,500 services and 48 in Australia. This is a first for our organisation.

Big Fat Smile also commenced our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) journey. We have registered 100%





PILLAR 1

Client Experience:

Big Fat Smile is the number one choice for families for the provision of quality education and care.

PILLAR 2

Inclusion and Educational Ethos:

Our organisation has a deep foundation and a clear education ethos that is visible in our daily education practices.

PILLAR 3

Staffing Excellence:

Big Fat Smile is recognised as an Employer of Choice and widely regarded as having high quality staff leading to the delivery of quality education.

PILLAR 4

Organisational Excellence & Innovation:

We achieve long term viability of the organisation.

PILLAR 5

Advocacy & Leadership:

We are thought leaders, advocates and experts in our field.

of services with Narragunnawali and commenced the plan development.

Pillar 3: Staffing Excellence

This year, Big Fat Smile made investments in our staff training and benefits. These included Professional Learning in areas where emerging risk has been for all senior and middle managers on the DiSC professional personality model, cyber security training, the introduction of Salary Sacrificing and the launch of our Professional Learning Management System.

We have endeavoured to keep our finger on the pulse by tuning in to our staff and their voices. This was achieved by the tracking of our Employee Net Promoter Score through our quarterly staff engagement surveys. The results of which will be used to guide us in 2022. We have also developed a Workforce Strategy to build our workforce during a critical deficit workforce environment.

Pillar 4: Organisational Excellence and Innovation

PILLAR 4

As our organisation continues to grow and evolve in a dynamic and increasingly digitised climate, it is imperative our digital infrastructure stays up to date and most of all, useful. Thus, 2021 saw our payroll software, Chris21 upgraded completed.

This year also saw a redevelopment at Bulli to introduce 20 additional places to meet the need for Big Fat Smile quality services. Junior Landcare Grants and Community Building Partnership Funding have also been received, for nearly every service, providing funding of \$87,094.

After last year's merger with Goodstart Early Learning, we have leveraged their procurement strength with Woolworths for all services.

Pillar 5: Advocacy and Leadership

In a time of uncertainty for all, never has advocacy for the voices of our Educators, children and families been more of an imperative. In 2021, we advocated for educator wellbeing and advocated for legislative change to financially assist families and children through COVID-19.

We also continued to respond to any crisis that presented itself, in 2021 this was floods and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, we as an organisation:

Completed our Disaster Recovery Bushfire Plans

Built risk and assessment strategies for climate events (bushfire and floods)

Developed and implemented ongoing COVID-19 Workplace Health and Safety Risk Management policies and procedures to ensure the safety of children, families and staff in our services

Developed and refined an ongoing COVID-19 communication strategy to both families and staff

Developed support strategies for vulnerable children, non-attending children and educator wellbeing

Developed an on-line training approach

We will continue to adapt and respond to COVID-19 as the Country and the world opens up and Government policy reflects this for our services. We will continue to be guided by our Strategic Plan, which focusses on a strong, stable future, where the best interests of children and families are the heart-centre.

Being the Chief Executive Officer of Big Fat Smile is a privilege and, as I head in to my sixth year of service, I wish to say thank you. Thank you to all of our Educators, our Inclusion colleagues and our Head Office staff who invest daily and commit passionately to the outcomes of our children and their families and work towards our vision of enriching the lives and minds of children and families in their communities.



Board and Leadership

Board Directors

(all members during 2021)

Jeffery Harvie: Board Chair

BBus, CPS, MAICD

- Non Executive Director of Big Fat Smile Group Ltd. since 2020
- Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee Member
- Nominations and Remuneration Committee Member

David Campbell (Hon)

M Mgt, FAICD

- Non Executive Director of Big Fat Smile Group Ltd. since 2014
- Board Chair Ceased 29th June 2020
- Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee Member

Julia Davison BSc (Hons); MPS; MAICD

- Non Executive Director of Big Fat Smile Group Ltd. since 2020
- Nominations and Remuneration Committee Member

Marina Papic Dr of Philosophy (Ph.D)

 Non Executive Director of Big Fat Smile Group Ltd. since 2020

Gavin Bartlett LL.B

- Non Executive Director of Big Fat Smile Group Ltd. since 2020
- · Chair, Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee

Sophie Ray

BA (Hons) LLB (Hons) Grad Dip Leg Studs, GAICD

- Non Executive Director of Big Fat Smile Group Ltd. since 2016
- Chair, Nominations and Remuneration Committee

Jason Malone BComm, MBA, CPA,

- Non Executive Director of Big Fat Smile Group Ltd. since April 2018
- Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee Member

Executive Leadership Team

(members as at of 31st December, 2021)

Jenni Hutchins: Chief Executive OfficerB Arts (Welf, Psych), PG Dip (Child & Family, Psych, Intern Psychologist), R. Psych

Jenni has been the Chief Executive Officer of Big Fat Smile since February 2017. Jenni leads the Executive Leadership Team in the implementation of Big Fat Smile's Strategic Plan delivering on the organisation's vision of enriching the lives and minds of our children and families in their communities.

Bob Kotic: Chief Financial Officer (interim) B Business Studies (Accounting), Masters of Econ (Finance), FCPA

Bob leads a team in the delivery of the finance, facilities and IT functions of the organisation. Bob is temporarily taking up the CFO Role whilst a replacement is recruited.

Justine Uluibau: General Manager, Operations

Dip (Children's Services), Grad Dip (Public Sector Management), Cert IV Training and Assessment

Justine has been the General Manager

Operations since September 2020. Justine
leads a team in the operations of Big Fat Smile's
portfolio of community preschools, early learning
and care, Fun Clubs, school holiday care, child
protection, Inclusion Agency, and community
support programs to enhance the education,
care and wellbeing of children, families and
communities.

Amanda Archer: Executive Manager, Experience and Development

BEd (EC), Dip. Quality Auditing, Adv Dip Leadership & Management

Amanda has been with Big Fat Smile since September 2017, and in the role of Executive Manager of Experience and Development since October 2020. Amanda leads the Compliance, Client Experience, Business Development and Marketing teams towards synergistic goals to achieve our vision and values.

Michele Peden: Pedagogical Thinker in Residence

Dr of Philosophy (Ph.D), MEd(EC), GDipAdultEd, Cert IV Workplace Training Category 2, Cert IV Training and Assessment, Associate Diploma of Social Science (Child Studies), BEt(EC),

Michele has been Big Fat Smile's Pedagogical Thinker in Residence since February 2018.

Michele leads a team in the development of the Educational Framework for children aged birth – 12 years, and staff professional learning to enhance quality educational and care outcomes.

Michele has completed a Ph.D in evidenced-based web-mediated professional learning program for Early Childhood Education and Care addressing physical activity and healthy eating behaviours of young children.

Marina Haris: Executive Manager, People and Culture

B.Comm (Employee Relations), MBA

Marina has been the Executive Manager People & Culture since July 2021. Marina leads a team that is focused on attracting and retaining talent to support the delivery of our vision. This includes functional responsibility for workforce planning, talent attraction, employee relations, performance management, and HR processes and systems.



2021 Financials

2021 Operating Surplus / Deficit

2021 was again a very challenging year with the continued impact of the COVID-19 Virus. Despite these difficulties, Big Fat Smile was still able to post solid revenue gains and have another financially successful year.

At an operational level, Big Fat Smile recorded a surplus of \$1.106m (compared to a surplus of \$2.953m in 2020). Revenue increased \$4.796m (9.8%) on previous year on a like for like basis after excluding government assistance grants for COVID impacts. At the same time, Big Fat Smile experienced only a marginal Increase (\$190k or 0.5%) in operating costs. Big Fat Smile continues to be debt free and has net equity of \$6.0m.

Total Revenue

Big Fat Smile was able to increase its utilisation at its centres during the year. This was within a business environment of continuing increased competition and changes to the flexibility of client attendance. Total revenue increased to a new record of \$40.2m. Over the last 9 years Big Fat Smile has experienced compound average revenue growth of 6.9%.



76% Clients

23% Partnerships

& Grants

1% Other

EXPENSES

78% Salaries

18% Children's Services

2% Administration

2% Other

As of December 2021:

643

permanent, fixed term and casual staff 10.94%

employee turnover rate

34.8%

of our workforce is part time



Community Preschools and Early Learning and Care

Big Fat Smile is committed to running world-class early education and care services. Our community preschools offer a combination of long day care, term-only preschool, and mobile preschool services, for children from birth to five years across NSW. We deliver best practice staffing ratios, provide highly qualified teachers-and educators and offer nurturing play environments that facilitate creative expression in the children we care for and educate.

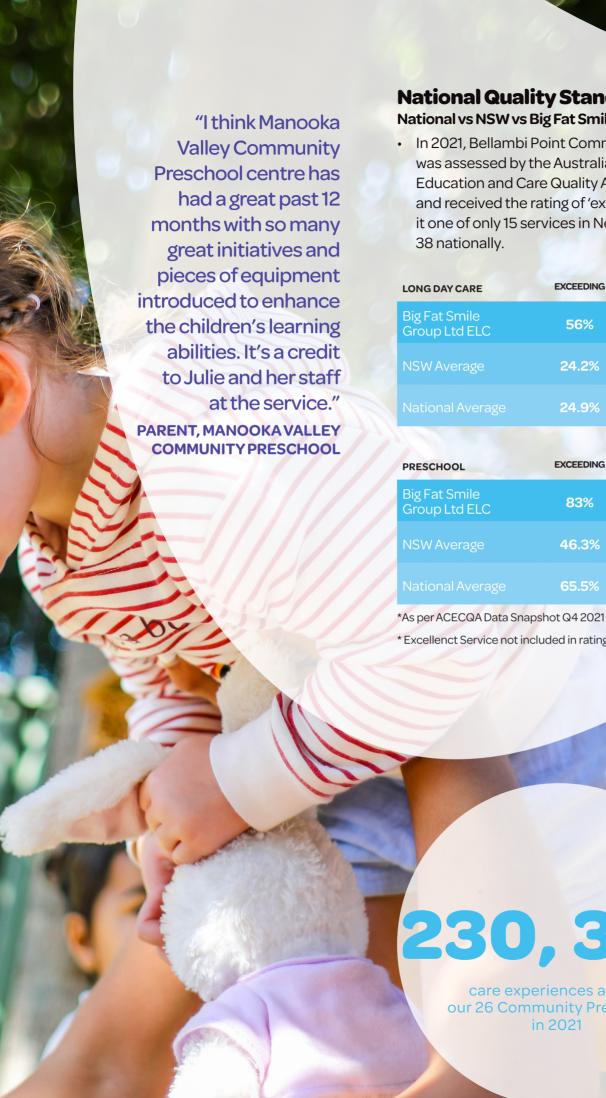
In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on our services, leading to reduced attendance and even some service closures. However, spirits remained high; our educators showed amazing resilience through some challenging times and supported our families and children with professionalism and empathy. The early education and care sector continued to be one of only a few sectors remaining open even through lockdown.

2021 Highlights

During 2021 there were many highlights for our community preschools and early learning and care services including:

- Bellambi Point Community Preschool achieved the Excellent Rating for The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) Assessment and Rating
- Milton Early Learning & Care opened in February providing education and care for families in the Shoalhaven area
- Wollondilly Mobile commenced operating five days per week and increased their hours for families
- Expansion of Bulli Community Preschool commenced which will deliver 20 additional 3–5-year-old places in 2022
- Wollongong City Preschool was reassessed under the National Quality Framework and achieved Exceeding.
- Two educators received ATSI scholarships to complete their Degree in Early Childhood Teaching
- Several services received grant funds and upgrades





National Quality Standards:

National vs NSW vs Big Fat Smile.

In 2021, Bellambi Point Community Preschool was assessed by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) and received the rating of 'excellent'. This makes it one of only 15 services in New South Wales and

LONG DAY CARE	EXCEEDING	MEETING	WORKING TOWARDS
Big Fat Smile Group Ltd ELC	56%	44%	0%
NSW Average	24.2%	62.8.%	12.8%
National Average	24.9%	61.9%	12.9%

PRESCHOOL	EXCEEDING	MEETING	WORKING TOWARDS
Big Fat Smile Group Ltd ELC	83%	17%	0%
NSW Average	46.3%	47.1%	5.6%
National Average	65.5%	37.8%	5.1%

230, 340

care experiences across our 26 Community Preschools in 2021

^{*} Excellenct Service not included in ratings

Fun Clubs

Fun Clubs provide high quality Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) for children aged 5 – 12 years.

Big Fat Smile operates 15 Fun Clubs across the Illawarra, Wollondilly and Goulburn regions, providing before school, after school and vacation care to children and families.

The Big Fat Smile Operations team worked collaboratively with other portfolios to focus on fun and safe service provision, ensuring adherence to the National Quality Framework, the National Law and National Regulations. We always strive to support educators at our services to deliver best practice.

Our Fun Club programs provide:

- Safe, nurturing recreational environments in which school age children can make choices about their leisure time and develop their sense of belonging
- A wide variety of sport, fun and creative experiences planned in accordance with the National Framework for Outside School Hours Care and our Educational Framework. Children's voices are heard and responded to within our Fun Clubs and the suggestions the children make guide aspects of service delivery including:
 - Healthy food menus that reflect the Australian Dietary Guidelines and promote lifelong nutritious choices and give children opportunities to make choices about the menu;
 - · Questions for educators during the interview process and;
 - Programming and planning ideas.

107,926

care experiences across our 16 Fun Clubs in 2021.

13, 242

Before School Care

60,885

After School Care

15,799

Vacation Care

2021 Highlights

- Balarang Fun Club achieved Exceeding rating for the ACECQA Assessment and Rating of their service
- Before school care, after school care and Vacation care services continued to operate through the pandemic even during lockdown
- Bulli Fun Club successfully partnered with Bunnings to commence a vegetable garden within the school and their service
- A Fun Club Strategy was developed implementation for 2022

In 2022, we plan to continue to deliver innovative programs, offer competitive prices and deliver high quality services to our families, children and school communities at all of our Fun Club sites. We continue to endeavour to raise the profile of our Fun Clubs and educate our communities on the important developmental benefits that OSHC offers to children in middle childhood.



Include Me

Big Fat Smile is passionate about inclusion and we do it well. Include Me is the equity access arm of Big Fat Smile – the part of our organisation through which we proactively strive to make quality early learning and family support accessible to all children and families within our communities.

Include Me consists of a suite of programs that are delivered within a socially responsible framework, to meet the needs and aspirations of local communities and ensure children have the best possible start to life.

Through Include Me, Big Fat Smile partners with the Australian Government, NSW Government and community organisations to deliver the following key initiatives:

NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency

A key part of the Inclusion Support Program, funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, are the Inclusion Agencies in each state and territory.

The NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency is delivered by KU Children's Services in partnership with Include Me and Gowrie NSW. It provides a team of Inclusion Professionals who are trained to provide tailored inclusion support to services. Thework of the Inclusion Agency builds capacity and capability for educators in these services, and empowers them to address participation barriers for all children by implementing quality inclusive practices.

Include me oversees four Inclusion Hubs across Illawarra, Sydney South, New South Wales South East and the ACT Regions. Include Me also oversees The Help Hub (formerly known as the 1800 Support and Response Team) who respond to phone and email enquiries across NSW and ACT from services needing additional support and guidance related to Inclusion. In 2021 the Help Hub responded to 866 enquiries, an increase from 838 enquiries in 2020.

In 2021, the Inclusion Agency used a

combination of service delivery models to provide direct support to services, including service visits (where COVID-19 risk mitigation strategies could be met) as well as phone, email and online meetings. The main tool used by the Inclusion Agency for supporting capacity building was the development of the Strategic Inclusion Plan's (SIP) for services. At the end of December 2021, it was reported that 3,341 services across the NSW/ACT had an active SIP. This was an increase from 2929 active SIP's recorded in December 2020.

A number of online professional discussions were also facilitated by the Inclusion Agency and were a means for services to network with colleagues across the sector and explore challenges and successes in inclusion practices in their own services.

Inclusion Development Fund Manager (IDFM)

The other arm of the Australian Government's Inclusion Support Program is its Inclusion Development Fund, which provides funding assistance to eligible childcare services for the purpose of addressing and removing barriers to inclusion, for children with additional needs.

Include Me in partnership with KU Children's Services serves as the Inclusion Development Fund Manager (IDFM) to provide nationally consistent and equitable management of the Inclusion Development Fund.

Between January and December of 2021, the IDFM assessed the following number of applications, across four streams of funding, from services across Australia:

- Additional Educator: 10, 872 approvals
- Immediate Time Limited Support: 2159 approvals
- Innovative Solutions: 289 approvals
- Family Day Care Top Up: 45 approvals

During 2021, further changes were introduced

to assist services with access to funding and inclusion support which included:

- Changes to the Innovative Solution Stream: Commencing from September 2021, services can apply for funds of up to \$10,000 to assist with additional projects to support inclusion within their service.
- Changes to the Notification of Processing Timelines: Services were advised of the changes in processing timeframes now being outside of 15 days and closer to 30-40 days due to the increased number of applications.

Transition to Education and Care facilitates access to early childhood services for children with a developmental delay and ongoing high support needs.



10,872

additional educator approvals through IDFM

Children and Parenting Support (CAPS)

Our Children and Parenting Support (CAPS) Program is funded by the Australian Government under the Families and Children Program and makes up another important component of Big Fat Smile's Include Me program. It is designed to support families with children aged from birth-12 years, living in the 2518 and 2502 postcode areas.

2021 CAPS highlights:

At different stages thought the year all programs and activities in the Primbee/Warrawong and Bellambi/Corrimal areas were put on hold due to the Pandemic. Aslow transition back to providing playgroups in the community occurred in the later part of the year to ensure families were confident in bringing their children back to the program environment.

During the lockdown periods, parents were supported in alternative ways. The CAPS team made regular phone contact with parents, checking on their wellbeing and offering support. The team also provided inspiration for activities for parents to use with their children, including a Facebook page with stories, craft ideas and yoga postures for children, an interactive "Rock Drop" project where parents could take their children to the Wollongong Botanic Gardens to find Rocks that had been painted with BFS colours, characters from stories or funny faces on their daily walks. The CAPS program also provided other resources such as links to "@home with Big Fat Smile."

When programs resumed, there were changes to the format to adapt to COVID safe requirements. Sessions needed to be booked in advance to meet the limits on public gatherings in parks, sessions were held in outdoor spaces, using fewer pieces of equipment, and including more games.

The following statistics outline the number of sessions held with the number of attendees

participating:

- For the 2,502 programs a total of 41 sessions and 648 attendees
- For the 2518 programs a total of 137 sessions and 3003 attendees
- For additional CAPS programs a total of 19 sessions with 348 attendees

Overall, 178 sessions, with a total of 3,597 client attendances. 19 additional CAPS programs with 348 attendees, A total of 3,945 Activity packs were distributed across 197 sessions.

The programs also engaged with:

- 392 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island clients
- 99 clients with a disability and
- 155 clients from a Cultural and Linguistic Diverse background

We also said farewell to our long-standing CAPS coordinators, Karen and Paula. Their contribution was acknowledged with a heart felt video thanking all the children and families they served over the last 15 years.

Transition to School

Big Fat Smile, through the work of Include Me, also delivers the Illawarra Transition to School Project (TTS), covering the Wollongong, Kiama, and Shellharbour Local Government Areas. This project is currently funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice until July 2023. Moving forward, the project will be funded under the Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) Program, an NSW Government early intervention strategy that supports children, young people, families, and communities experiencing or at risk of vulnerability.

The TTS program supports parents to give their children the best possible start to school, through information sharing, community events and collaborating with support agencies. The program has a strong emphasis on supporting Aboriginal children and families in their transition to school, as well as engaging families and children from new and emerging communities.

The TTS program continued through the COVID restrictions, using alternative means such as Facebook Live, YouTube home learning,

@Home with Big Fat Smile, and home learning packs delivered to families. The TTS program continued its strong focus on maintaining and strengthening relationships with community organisations, holding more than 60 meetings with organisations and family support agencies. Families from refugee backgrounds were closely supported via our community Hubs.

2021 Transition to School highlights

A total of 141 sessions were delivered with 2,787 attendees at activities including playgroup (in person and online), combined playgroups with other providers, sector training and development, library visits and referrals. A total of 2,986 attendees received Child protection week resource packs.





Pedagogy and Learning

Under Pillar 2 of our organisational strategic plan (Inclusion and Educational Ethos), Big Fat Smile emphasises the importance of a strong pedagogical focus. Pedagogy is a term used to encapsulate our educators' professional practice that focuses on curriculum-decision making, teaching, learning, and building trusting and supporting relationships. Play-based learning fuses play and educational pedagogy by underpinning curriculum decision-making across all our service models (Birth-12 years). The essential purpose of play-based learning is for children to learn while playing in a safe, secure, engaging and supportive learning environment. Play-based learning child-centered and focuses on children's development, interests and abilities as they developmentally appropriate experiences. Play is seen as the highest form of learning. As children engage in playbased learning, children are afforded the opportunities explore, to investigate, hypothesise, and examine new concepts acrossallcurriculumareas (numeracy, literacy, STEM, visual arts, Personal development, Health, and Physical education) learn through trial & error.

Educators play a vital role in play-based as they understand curriculums, importance and influence of learning environments, social interactions, and family context on a child's learning. As such, educators intentionally observe and plan meaningful learning experiences for children. With research highlighting a strong correlation between play and positive social and emotional outcomes for children, play-based learning enables children to develop further their communication skills, conversation routines, and interactions with peers and educators. Play also enhances children's self-regulation skills, as they learn and practice how they regulate their feelings and emotions with the support and guidance of educators.

In 2021, the ongoing impacts of COVID were felt across our community, impacting our educators, children, and families. With international and national research indicating a decline in children's prosocial behaviours and emotional regulation compared to before the pandemic. Hence, Big Fat Smile continued to strengthen its commitment to supporting children's social and emotional development and learning.

Educational Framework

At the end of 2021, our organisational Educational Framework was completed. This framework aims to increase the visibility of our organisation's deep commitment to a straightforward education ethos that is evident in our daily educational practices. It aims to guide and support our educators in providing quality pedagogical practices, as it complements our National Quality Framework.

The Educational Framework acts as a benchmark for all Big Fat Smile services, setting out our education expectations for pedagogical learning and teaching practices that support the promotion of learning in the early years. The framework also celebrates early childhood teachers' and educators' professional identities by heightening their awareness of best practices in alignment with the National Quality Framework and continues to support families in understanding the importance of early education. Finally, the Educational Framework draws upon the latest research in the early childhood sector, highlighting the importance of the early years for children's holistic development (physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language).

The Learning Hub

At the beginning of 2021, a blended professional learning model was introduced and implemented into Big Fat Smile. A blended model combines the use of online and face-to-face modes of delivery. The online component consists of a combination of synchronous (live, interactive sessions) and asynchronous (pre-recorded sessions). The purpose of introducing a blended model was to promote the importance of flexible, contextualised, continuous professional learning opportunities that aim to meet the evolving professional needs of all employees. The Learning Hub (an online learning platform) was created to promote equitable access to professional learning resources to further enhance and scaffold employees' future skills, knowledge, and experience.

For educators, the Learning Hub capitalises on technology to foster critical reflection and collaboration among educators relating to quality and pedagogical knowledge and practices. The Learning Hub has increased the opportunities for educators to participate in and re-visit a range of professional learning topics. Furthermore, the Learning Hub's sustainable and flexible nature has a longitudinal impact on the individual, service, and organisation as multiple educators can develop their professional practice around one topic.

Supporting Children's Social and Emotional Well-being

An organisational focus for educators in 2021 centered around supporting children's social and emotional learning. All educators across all service types participated in an extensive 12-month professional learning program that concentrated on supporting and guiding children's behaviour. The program further enhanced educators' knowledge and skills relating to child development, rights of

children, the importance of interactions and engagement with children, and strategies to positively support children's regulatory behaviours. In 2022, our organisation's continued focus on relationships, positive engagement, and connections between children and educators to foster positive development, learning, and well-being outcomes will continue under the release of a Positive Interaction Framework.

Sleep Smart Pilot Program

The Sleep Smart Pilot program was piloted across several services in 2021 and designed by health professionals. The purpose of piloting this program was to further enhance our educators' professional knowledge and skills around safe sleeping and settling practices and share the information with our families. Our educators participated in an extensive professional learning program that covered social and emotional development and guides to settling infants and toddlers, inclusive of group settings such as early education and care services. As part of this pilot program, questionnaires were used to track pre-and post-data on educators' knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy levels to gauge the program's impact on child health outcomes. The results indicated a positive increase in educators' knowledge, confidence levels, and practices participating in the pilot program. Families also provided very positive feedback on how the pilot program had positively impacted children's sleep and settling practices. Based on the success of this program, all services education and caring for children birth- 5 years will participate in the program in 2022.







Safeguarding Children and Child Protection

In 2021, Big Fat Smile developed a Child Safe Framework which demonstrates the organisation's commitment to being a pre-eminent child safe organisation in the broader early learning and care and child and family sector. The Framework provides a comprehensive and integrated whole of organisation approach towards creating and embedding a child safe culture, child safe environment and practices for all children engaged with the organisation. The framework incorporates the legislative requirements of the NSW Child Safe Scheme. It enables the NSW Child Safe Standards to be embedded in what we do to support children's wellbeing and safety and to prevent and reduce risk of harm or abuse and neglect within the organisation. The Big Fat Smile Child Safe Organisation Plan sits under the Framework outlining a suite of initiatives to continuously improve out child safe approach.

2021 Highlights included:

- Update to the Big Fat Smile Board Charter, Code of Conduct and Audit, Risk & Compliance Committee Charter for oversight of the implementation of the Child Safe Organisation Plan.
- Development and implementation of the Big Fat Smile Child Safe Risk Register and review of the Child Safe Organisation Plan.
- Development and implementation of the Child Safe Professional Learning Plan for all positions. This includes the requirement of over 6 hours of mandatory Safeguarding Children professional learning for all fixed term and permanent staff and continued refresher training on child protection, reportable conduct and policies and procedures.
- All services were audited against key action areas of the NSW Child Safe Standards.
- All services developed individual Child Safe Action Plans and goals aligned with the Child Safe standards for implementation over the next 12 months.
- Ongoing Child Safe advocacy and sector development occurred at a State, Federal and interagency level. The CEO of Big Fat Smile has commenced as the NSW Co-Chair for Safeguarding children in Early Childhood Education and Care Directorate – a sector wide committee to build capacity, knowledge and skill and collaboration in the

Big Fat Smile

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