# Forever Learning – A Digital Story from Berrimba Child Care Centre

SNAICC developed a digital story in their plight to raise awareness about the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated early years services, with a focus on the Berrimba Child Care Centre in Echuca.

## Transcript

**[00:00] Aunty Melva Johnson (Elder, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. Life Member): “**Things were pretty bad in Echuca; Echuca was a pretty racist little town. We were only allowed two aboriginal kids at kinder a year. And lots of our children went through what was called a ‘special grade’ – all the aboriginal kids – through their entire schooling, and I think that’s disgusting.

My cousin and I, Val, used to fight – well, not fight, but really try hard just to get in our children in there. Because we realised the importance of our kids knowing other children before they went to school.”

**[00:40] Karlisha Egan (Parent): “**The key ingredients in the success of this centre is the commitment of the staff, over the last 25 years.”

**[00:50] Aunty Melva Johnson (Elder, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. Life Member):** “When we started this was just like a playgroup, this was a really old house here, yeah. Um, but we’re that proud of it, y’know. And the children started coming, and kept coming, y’know. It was a hard fight the way I’m talking now, it was so easy but we had a lot of support.

We wanted our kids to gel together; we wanted our children to know who they were, who their families were and who they were related to. Everyone was ‘aunty’ and ‘uncle’ you know, respect. Um, that was the main thing we wanted our children to do. Because y’know you live in a town and you can get lost.”

**[01:30] Christina Drummond (Principal Lockington Consolidated School):** “I’ve worked with a lot of early childhood centres in my job as transition co-ordinator, at Echuca East Primary School. And what makes Berrimba stand out is that these kids are getting the best possible start in a culturally appropriate setting, and then they’re coming to us at school with that confidence. “

**[01:49] Kellyann Edwards (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Koorie Engagement Support):** “When they come to Berrimba, they um, y’know they see their connection they physically see the connection because they’re playing with their cousins and their aunties are teaching ‘em. Y’know they’re nurtured by their mob. So uh, I think that the best part of Berrimba and it’s something that makes it unique and it’s culturally relevant for us.”

**[02:06] Joyce Ward (Parent & Berrimba Childcare, Team Leader 3-5 Room):** “I started at Berrimba as a child; I would’ve been 3 or 4 years old, my Dad’s auntie worked here. I became a mum young, and Berrimba’s always supported me through my parenting.”

**[02:21] Christina Drummond (Principal Lockington Consolidated School):** “For some parents, it’s a connection to get help with parenting, a connection to connect with other families. It opens up conversations about their children and what we can do to best support them. I would like to send some of our teachers in here to watch the practitioners in here and how they relate to the children, their knowledge of early childhood. The staff here gave us invaluable information on how to make school successful for these students.”

**[02:52] Kellyann Edwards (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Koorie Engagement Support):** “To help kids be school ready – the school that I’m currently based at currently in Echuca East y’know we get one of the lead prep teachers to come in and start making connections with the kids here because this is a safe environment for ‘em, and this is something that they know.”

**[03:05] Karlisha Egan (Parent):** “Berrimba encourages all the kids that come through here to get into the mainstream kinders once they’ve come through playgroup and then the 3 year old kinder - because that gets them ready for school.”

**[3:19] Joyce Ward (Parent & Berrimba Childcare, Team Leader 3-5 Room):** “We provide breakfast, morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. “

**[03:25] Kellyann Edwards (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Koorie Engagement Support):** “I’ve talked to parents where they haven’t had enough time to make a lunch for their kids or whatever and y’know, Aunty Vicky will say “Don’t worry about it, we’ll make sure they’ve got their lunches” and then they’ll take them on the bus run so it’s not just a day-care centre or anything like that. They look after the whole child and the whole family.”

**[03:42] Karlisha Egan (Parent):** “The buses are an important part in our community as we have a lot of parents that don’t have cars and everything, and we need their kids in here to help them get an education and to get ready for their transition into school.”

**[03:56] Aunty Melva Johnson (Elder, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. Life Member):** “Some parents haven’t got cars, um, but I think the biggest challenge is the funding now. Um, I think it’s really hard for some to be able to come.”

**[04:01] Yvonne McKenner (Parent / Berrimba Childcare, Team Leader Toddlers room):** “There’s a lot of single parents as well, which, I mean they barely can pay now so imagine if they had to be… a lot more expensive – there’s no way that – yeah – it would not be a good thing. It would be very negative.”

**[04:21] Karlisha Egan (Parent):** “With this centre it’s affordable, as a working mum myself, um I don’t think I could work in this role – if I had to utilise mainstream. I’d probably have to not work because I wouldn’t be able to afford that. Berrimba supports the children and the family’s wellbeing by making links between other services that will address the issues that they’re facing.”

**[04:51] Christina Drummond (Principal Lockington Consolidated School):** “And I think they do that in a really culturally sensitive way, whereas other pre-schools or child care centres don’t have that knowledge of how to do it in a culturally sensitive way.”

**[05:02] Leona Cooper (Berrimba Childcare, Kindergarten Assistant):** “So I’ve been here for 3 years, and I’ve been supported in studying through TAFE and now I’m doing my bachelor in Geelong – so yeah they are very flexible and helped me to obtain my studies and my certificates.”

**[05:18] Joyce Ward (Parent & Berrimba Childcare, Team Leader 3-5 Room):** “I wanna be a good role model to kids and show them the importance of what it’s like to work and that you can help out.”

**[05:30] Christina Drummond (Principal Lockington Consolidated School):** “The base of Berrimba and being an aboriginal centre is meaning they’ve got this foundation of identity, that then they’re willing to share with others – so I think that’s extremely important.”

**[05:41] Aunty Melva Johnson (Elder, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. Life Member):** “You can face anything if you know who you are, you know kids could call you what they like, and teachers look down their noses at you, but if you know who you are, you can fight it.”

**[05:54] Joyce Ward (Parent & Berrimba Childcare, Team Leader 3-5 Room):** “As a kid here, the friendships I made, I still am close to a lot of kids I went to here.”

**[06:01] Christina Drummond (Principal Lockington Consolidated School):** “This is really a best case practise that I look at of how to transition indigenous children into school.”

**[06:09] Kellyann Edwards (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Koorie Engagement Support):** “Y’know we’re gonna have strong Koorie kids in our community, and hopefully strong Koori leaders… in the future. That’s why we’ve got strong leaders in our community today, ‘cause we’ve all been through here.

I couldn’t see Echuca without it. I’d be very upset if this was never here for, y’know, my great nieces or anyone else in this community. Y’know, this is where they learn who they are.”

**[06:33] Karlisha Egan (Parent):** “Understanding who we are and how we all connect is the heart of-of having this service and it’s for the best of the children and to see them go onto become, y’know, educated and off to ‘uni’.”

**[06:49] Kellyann Edwards (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Koorie Engagement Support):** “Y’know you see kids walkin’ past here that’ve been through Berrimba, now they’re at school or at high school and they all still stop in here to say “hello” to Aunty Vicky or say “hello” to Aunty Loulou or whoever their workers were – or just to come and see their cousins because sometimes y’know within the community you’re dispersed and sometimes you live your own little life, but when you’ve got places like Berrimba, it brings it all together.”

**[07:11] Joyce Ward (Parent & Berrimba Childcare, Team Leader 3-5 Room): “**Like I’ve been here, my kids have coming through here. My nephews are coming through here, our cousins – hopefully it’ll still be here so my kid’s kids can come through here.

You know that your kids aren’t just a number; they’re being supported in here. We try our hardest to make ‘em feel loved.”

**[07:35] Aunty Melva Johnson (Elder, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. Life Member):** They’ve got somewhere safe they can come to or feel good, y’know, if things are not going too good at home, y’know, yeah. I think it’s been the best thing we’ve done in Echuca.