

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE ELIZABETH HILDEBRAND ROOM
ARTHUR DICKMAN CHILDCARE CENTRE, SHEPPARTON
22 OCTOBER 2008

I acknowledge the traditional keepers of the land on which we gather, and those who have followed, in safeguarding this important space for the infants and children of Shepparton - a vital support to parents, carers and families.

My friends, thank you for your warm welcome to me this morning.

Indeed, as Michael and I have travelled through the northern and western regions of the Murray Darling Basin in recent weeks, and now, its southern parts, we've been greeted with such generosity and affection at every stop.

Women and men, young people, families, elders and leaders, have paused in the midst of their troubled times to open their arms to us and lead us into their lives and communities.

How privileged and humbled we've been to listen to their stories of hardship and suffering, courage and hope.

Most of the towns we're visiting are new territory for me, and yet only hours pass before they feel more like old friends, with much to catch up on.

I am so fortunate in this role to have the opportunity to journey to the heart of communities, to observe their energy and beauty from within, to sense their unique rhythm.

There are certain places in a town that are a steady gauge of that rhythm.

This centre is one of those places - where the quality care and development of young children are central to your ethos and practice.

Some 15 years ago I chaired the National Childcare Accreditation Council.

Groundbreaking work was being done in small rural centres with limited financial resources and the finest of professionals.

I learnt about excellence in early childhood education and care.

I learnt too about the importance of having mentors in our working lives, and the power of networks and collaboration.

These principles and standards sustain and guide us always.

Elizabeth Hildebrand worked by them for nearly 30 years, and shared so much of her knowledge with so many.

In 2008, she remains part of your working capital, which continues to grow with your investment of expertise and compassion.

The demands on you are high.

It is well documented by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and early childhood specialists that:

- . the changing shape of the family and of women's role in society,
- . and the greater economic need to participate in paid work,

have meant that child care has become one of the biggest issues for Australian families and social policy makers.

You are important contributors to the discussions that must be had.

And, as families face the mounting pressures of modern life, and in many cases, the additional burdens and consequences of inadequate income, limited language skills, physical and mental illness, and disability, you are a critical link in the circle of care.

My friends, on this Universal Children's Day, in National Children's Week, I express my greatest admiration for:

- . your commitment and efforts,
- . your utmost respect for the individualism, worth, and competence of every child,
- . and your contribution to their wellbeing.

May the Elizabeth Hildebrand room serve as your beacon - your source of inspiration and encouragement in your ongoing work with young children and their families.

It is now my most sincere pleasure to officially open her doors.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.