



Jane Bourne
Chief Executive Officer, Gowrie (QLD)



I have such a long history in EC and if I had enough time I would tell you all about it. It is very much a moment of 'are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. Once upon a time ...' Hopefully you as a reader will be able to do the same in 40 years' time!

I wrote an article for *Reflections* magazine in 2002 and stated then that I am still learning about management and EC—I will probably never stop. And I haven't. That was 15 years ago. Now I am the CEO of Lady Gowrie Queensland and it is one of the most amazing jobs one could have. If someone had told me 15 years ago I would be working with Lady Gowrie, I would have said 'I wish!'

My wish came true. The best thing about this position as I look back over the years is what I have accomplished to be here. To earn my place. My whole career has been an apprenticeship for this position. An apprenticeship for understanding strategic planning and social entrepreneurship.

Looking back, there was never any doubt that I would be a teacher and I worked hard to become one. I worked in England and learnt so much from four and a half year olds who lived in a low socio-economic area in Birmingham. I thought I could change the world with these children, all 42 of them; however, it takes a lot more than a 22-year-old first-year teacher. They taught me resilience, capture the moment, hard work and unconditional love. They taught me that every moment is precious if you want to know about learning, about life. They also taught me that I was not a saviour, I was in their moment. Good advice, which has never left me.

Thirty years ago I landed on Australian shores and went to work as a kindergarten director/teacher in Brisbane. I worked eight wonderful years teaching in this community sector, where staff, families and their children are all part of a very large community and as a teacher I worked tirelessly to earn the community respect and become a pivotal part of the daily lives.

I learnt something very personal in these years. I learnt that when I worked with the children, we became one team, one experience of many (if you understand). No one, not even families, fully understand the work we all do together to make everyone's day meaningful, joyful, inspirational, and full of trust and absolute learning. Learning about oneself, each other and the world around us, our environment and beyond. This is a pretty powerful statement to make; however, it was what I was blessed with. I am still blessed as I meet many of the same children now in their late twenties and early thirties. We laugh, we reminisce and we sing songs and recite old rhymes. This is what teaching is about. This is what we are about! There are friendships and networks made, opportunities for understanding better, what more can be done, what more I can do.

I had the opportunity in the next 15 years to work as a senior manager/leader in three management organisations. It was exciting and challenging and what was best was I could advocate for the right for children to learn at an early age—to be inspired—and I could do the same for the educators and teachers.

I worked hard to learn about the business of 'for-profit' childcare, the good and the not so good. I travelled all through Australia, to every major city, meeting people and making sure that all educators and teachers in the services knew me, were able to speak with me and had the opportunity to tell me their stories. I

was a teacher just like them. I was also a leader who continued to test the social, cultural and environmental goals. I became an influencer (although I didn't realise this). So, for 15 years I learnt a new profession while wielding my lifelong goal to support children in their learning.

The one sure thing about my positions was that I never forgot who I was and my professional judgment and beliefs would never be compromised. A saying that has stayed with me is, 'you never know when you are entertaining an angel'. Everyone I met was and is important to me. They have been and are pivotal in my role then and now. Opportunities are far easier to make real if there are others by your side who listen, often speak the same language or who want to learn what EC is really all about. So then the position of CEO for Lady Gowrie Queensland was advertised.

It's a 'not-for-profit' organisation who believes without question or compromise in early learning and care, working in the community for 76 years. As the stars align, this organisation has grown rapidly throughout Queensland in the past six years. We work in many different sectors: family day care, long day care, an early year's centre and many community kindergartens. We work in the cities of Queensland and in remote areas such as Blackall, Eidsvold and Thursday Island.

Sustainability is of great importance to our success. People are important to our success, from our Board of Management, who has faith in what we do, to our employees and affiliated services, who trust our judgment and acknowledge that we work hard and advocate for social outcomes and the right of education of young children and families. What we get out of this is pride in our organisation and pride in one another. It would be a cliché to call Lady Gowrie Queensland a family affair; however, we gather community wherever it may be to believe in the rights of the family and the education of our children. This is now exactly where I want to be and where I will work to make a success out of a wonderful organisation, never forgetting that I have a role to play in influencing government and speaking up for our educators. Someone once said, 'Teaching is the greatest Act of Optimism'. What a truly wonderful sector to be a part of—no matter which part.

Published 2017