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2024 HESTA Early Childhood Education & Care Awards winners announced

Following more than 200 nominations submitted from across Australia, HESTA is proud to announce the three winners in the **2024 HESTA Early Childhood Education & Care Awards**.

They are a NSW early learning centre recognised for its inclusive culture, a QLD kindergarten dedicated to improving First Nations children's outcomes, and a transformative NSW educator and leader for a 30-year career of service in Australia and abroad.

Nine incredibly worthy finalists had made the shortlist.

The **HESTA Early Childhood Education & Care Awards** – which have been running since 2010 – recognise the educators and carers at the very heart of Australia's early childhood education system.

HESTA CEO Debby Blakey expressed her heartfelt congratulations to the winners and finalists.

"Congratulations to all winners and finalists. Early childhood educators play such a pivotal role in helping shape the futures of young Australians, and it's an honour to recognise their outstanding contributions through these awards," Ms Blakey said.

"The dedication and passion these educators and carers demonstrate to educate, care for and develop our future generation is truly inspiring."

The winners shared in a \$30,000 prize money pool to be used for further education, service improvement, or team development, courtesy of longstanding HESTA Awards supporter ME (a subsidiary of Bank of Queensland – BOQ).

BOQ Group Executive of Retail Banking Greg Boyle congratulated the winners on behalf of ME.

"ME is privileged to celebrate the well-deserved winners of these awards. Their consistent display of exemplary leadership in early education and care goes above and beyond, giving our children the best chance to reach their full potential," Mr Boyle said.

Introducing the 2024 HESTA Early Childhood Education & Care Award winners:

Individual Leadership Award:

**Katrina Hendry,
KU Children's Services,
West Pymble, NSW**

Katrina was recognised for her transformative impact on early childhood education, shaped by tenure in Gambia, Africa and extensive academic and practical experience.

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For Katrina, winning a HESTA Early Childhood Education & Care award is a testament to her work over three decades.

"This award is the highest recognition of appreciation for my contribution in leading early childhood services over 30 years. My work has always been done in collaboration with great teams and within organisations that facilitate and promote professional growth", Ms Hendry said.

"I am honoured to be recognised and celebrated in a way that highlights my commitment to children in West Africa, Spain and Australia, embracing the diverse elements of culture, environment and economic climate. Providing access to sustainable, quality early years programs for all children has been a life investment I am truly proud of."

Advancing Pedagogy and Practice Award:

Goodstart Early Learning Tuggerah, Tuggerah, NSW

Goodstart Early Learning Tuggerah was recognised for its innovative Interability program, developed in collaboration with local disability service AMPEY, which fosters inclusivity, social skills, and empathy through interactions between neurodiverse individuals and children.

Goodstart Early Learning Tuggerah's Centre Director, Tearne Martin, credited the whole team at Goodstart Tuggerah and AMPEY for winning the HESTA award.

"The most rewarding aspect of our work in the program is seeing the positive impact we have on the children's growth and development and our neurodivergent community members," Ms Martin said.

"Building strong professional partnerships with the community and knowing that our efforts contribute to an inclusive and equitable environment where everyone is seen and can get what they need to succeed provides a deep sense of accomplishment and purpose."

Outstanding Service Award:

C&K Walkervale Community Kindergarten, The Creche and Kindergarten Association, Bundaberg, QLD

C&K Walkervale Community Kindergarten was recognised for its dedication to improving outcomes for First Nations children and families. The team partnered with the Taribelang Aboriginal Corporation to overcome barriers to enrolment and attendance, fostering a culturally safe and inclusive learning environment.

C&K Walkervale Community Kindergarten Teacher and Director Kellie Aldridge said the team were thrilled to win a HESTA award.

"As educators, we often forget the amazing things we do daily. Winning a HESTA award reminds us of all those amazing little things we do that join to form a bigger picture. It has prompted us to reflect on where we have come from and the positive changes we have made. It gives us a sense of pride in our work, and we feel valued," said Ms Aldridge.

“Sharing knowledge with other centres and bringing in new knowledge to our services while all learning together is very fulfilling. In our time at the centre, we have built respectful and meaningful relationships with our children and families that allow them to feel safe and included, leading to better outcomes, access and inclusion for our children.”

About HESTA

HESTA is one of the largest superannuation funds dedicated to Australia’s health and community services sector. An industry fund that’s run only to benefit members, HESTA now has more than one million members (around 80% of whom are women) and currently manages approximately \$87 billion* in assets invested around the world.

*Information is current as at the date of issue.