

Explore & Develop

Where curiosity leads to learning

do you dream of owning and operating a successful business that also makes a meaningful contribution to your community?

the opportunity

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An Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC) Service is one of the most rewarding businesses to own and operate, both personally and professionally.

Fewer business opportunities can be as satisfying as nurturing, developing and shaping our future generations. With 90% of brain development occurring in the first five years of life, quality education at this time is crucial to a child's development and wellbeing. Research shows that participation in high-quality ECEC leads to better outcomes at school and later in life.

ECEC is also critical to the employment of Australian families, leading to economic growth and improving social, health and economic outcomes for families. The Federal Government continues to invest in the sector, in the form of subsidies and incentives for families and the recent subsidised wage increase for Early Childhood Educators.

The sector is in high demand and continues to experience strong business growth.

Around 24% of the national population live in areas where ECEC is in short supply. This includes 680,000 Australians who live in neighbourhoods where there is no ECEC available at all.

The ECEC sector in Australia is valued at over $22 billion and employs more than 268,000 people. It has grown at an average rate of 7.4% per year over the past five years and it is predicted that the market will continue to grow.

Statistics from *IbisWorld 2025 Industry Research Analysis and Mitchell Institute Childcare Accessibility Report 2024.*

our point of difference

With a successful 22-year history, Explore & Develop is a unique organisation in the ECEC sector in NSW /ACT.

We believe that the franchised owner-operator model is the best way to deliver the highest quality ECEC services to our communities.

This is because families and employees enjoy the many advantages of belonging to a community-minded, locally-run service - as well as reaping the benefit of many decades of expertise, training and resources from the experienced support office team.

In addition, our franchisees enjoy being a part of our supportive and close-knit owner network, with the opportunity to collaborate and share experiences with each other.

We only welcome new owners to the group who demonstrate a sincere passion for the sector and a willingness to contribute to the collaborative culture of our group.
All owners work onsite in their services.



our group

More than half of our network has operated for more than 10 years, compared with a franchising sector average of 7 years.

City of Sydney
Castlereagh St CBD (77 places)

Inner-West
Annandale (56 places)
Breakfast Point (88 places)
Leichhardt (90 places)
Lilyfield (56 places)
Rhodes (70 places)*

South West Sydney
Wilton (166 places)
Leppington (120 places)***

North Shore
Artarmon Campbell St (76 places)
Artarmon Dickson Ave (149 places)
Roseville (98 places)
Waitara (89 places)
Pymble (96 places)**

North West & Hills District
Baulkham Hills (98 places)
North Ryde (71 places)
Norwest (82 places)

Northern Beaches
Brookvale (48 places)
Dee Why (96 places)
Frenchs Forest (93 places)
Freshwater (90 places)
Narraweena (90 places)

Western Sydney
Emu Plains (76 places)
Parramatta (78 places)
Penrith (75 places)
Penrith South (66 places)
North Richmond (75 places)

Newcastle
Newcastle East (74 places)
Newcastle - King St (55 places)

Central Coast
Terrigal (88 places)
Umina (88 places)
Gosford (94 places)**

ACT
Conder (75 places)

**opening 2026*
***opening 2027*
****opening 2028*

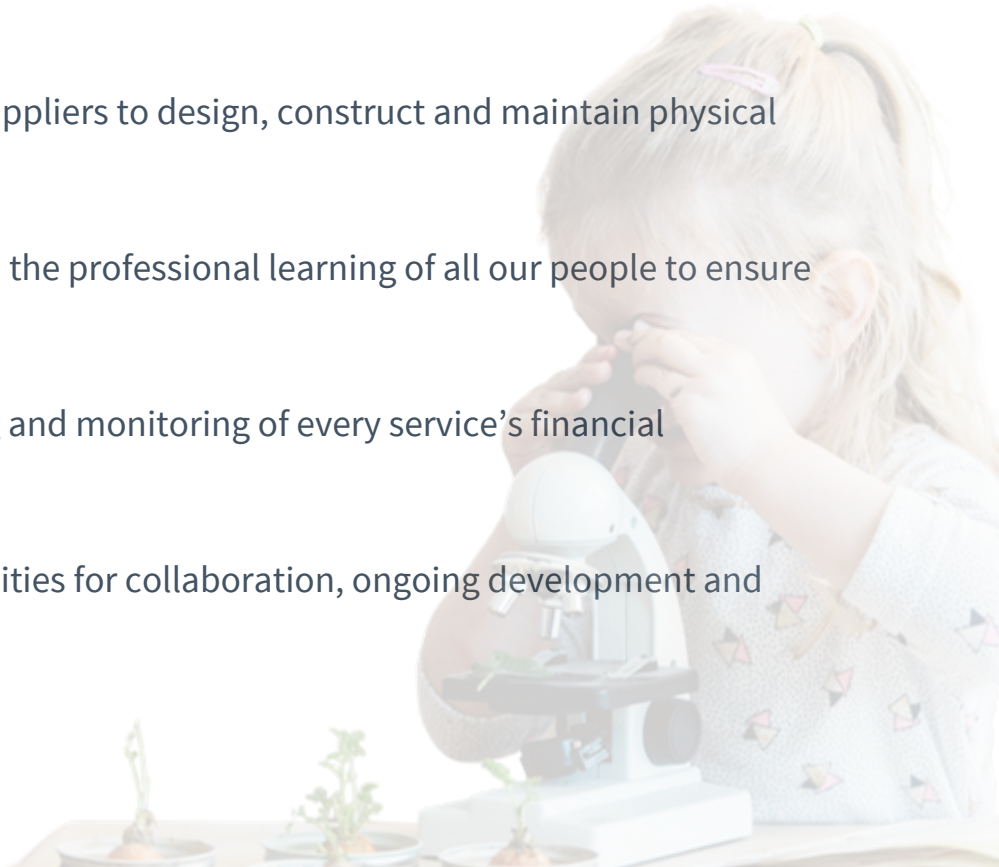
proven success

The Explore & Develop group has a sector-leading average annual occupancy rate of 91% for services trading 12 months or more.

We believe it is our conservative and organic approach to growth that is a contributing factor to the stability of our business.

This consistent approach includes:

- Only opening services in locations with proven demand.
- Capping the number of new services we will open each year to ensure that we can fully guide and support our franchisees throughout the crucial start-up phase.
- A strict and rigorous recruitment process for new franchisees, to ensure our high standard is maintained.
- Partnering with quality suppliers to design, construct and maintain physical environments.
- Continuous investment in the professional learning of all our people to ensure we are sector leaders.
- Consistent benchmarking and monitoring of every service's financial performance.
- Providing many opportunities for collaboration, ongoing development and feedback.



meet our founder



Jenny Mays is an inspiring Early Childhood Professional with a passion for the sector.

Jenny has more than two decades of experience in early childhood education and care and is passionate about giving young children the best possible start in life.

As Co-Founders of Explore & Develop, Jenny and her husband Stephen established the first Explore & Develop service in Frenchs Forest in 2005.

Jenny's philosophy of encouraging child-focused and play-based learning is now considered best practice during the early years.

Jenny's early childhood journey began in 2000, when she and Stephen purchased an established preschool in the Sydney suburb of Manly.

Before discovering her passion for the early childhood sector, Jenny enjoyed a 15-year career in human resources and people management.

Jenny founded Explore & Develop in 2004 with co-founder Alan Grant, with the goal to establish and support a group of high-quality, individually owned and operated early childhood education and care services in NSW.

Launched originally as Lollipop's Childcare, it was the first time in Australia that the franchise business model had been applied to the Early Childhood Education sector.

Jenny and Alan built sound operating principles for the group, based on their shared beliefs and passion regarding the development and nurturing of children and how the franchised owner-operator model can deliver them best.

In 2008, through collaboration with the community, the organisation was rebranded to Explore & Develop to better reflect the group's values and the excellence in ECEC that was everyone's objective.

meet our CEO

Belinda Ludlow is a collaborative leader with decades of experience in business and franchising.

Belinda has been with Explore & Develop for more than a decade. She started her ECEC journey as Commercial Operations Manager in 2012 and was appointed Chief Executive Officer in 2017.

Belinda has more than 25 years experience in franchising and business operations. A natural innovator, she is passionate about creating a culture where all members of the Explore & Develop group strive for the very best outcomes in line with our Group Values of *Ethical, Collaboration and Excellence*.

Prior to joining Explore & Develop, Belinda honed her franchising and business operations skills working with major brands in the financial services sector.

Belinda heads up an experienced and dedicated team at the Explore & Develop Support Office, a small but mighty team of early childhood sector professionals with specialist expertise ranging from Operations and Policy through to Marketing and Business Management.

The Support Office team helps our network of owners to operate their ECEC services to an outstanding level of excellence, supported by the latest resources, best practice policies and sector-leading training programs.





“The Explore & Develop Support Office team has shown a huge commitment to ensuring I feel supported and informed through our start-up phase. We have been blown away with the amount of time given to our project!

From initial consultation right through to site sourcing and now construction, they have not missed one thing to ensure we are successful in this process.

The Support Office staff are clearly experts in their field and have such a genuine relationship with their Franchisees. From the start we have felt valued and important to the team. It feels like you have your own private cheer squad as you move through each phase of the start-up process.

It’s clear to us that there is a strong culture of connection, respect, knowledge, and of course good fun! What a wonderful team to be a part of... I can really see that Explore & Develop is truly wanting the best for the children, their families and all the operators.

This feels like the best decision I have ever made.”

Merran Bardsley
Owner, Explore & Develop Baulkham Hills



“Words can’t express how truly grateful we are for the assistance, encouragement and guidance that the Explore & Develop Support Office has given us.

They demonstrated professionalism and expertise right from our initial meeting, giving us the confidence to build our Service, our business and livelihood, into something we are immensely proud of.

They are adaptable, collaborative and forward thinkers.

We have confidence in their approach and feel part of a larger ‘family’.

Opening our own Service has been the best business decision we have made and has given us flexibility in our lives to achieve both our personal and professional ambitions.”

Alison Evans
Co-owner, Explore & Develop Leichhardt &
Explore & Develop Rhodes

employer of choice

Finding strong employees is one of the key challenges for the ECEC sector. Being part of the Explore & Develop group offers benefits to your employees that assist with attracting and retaining top talent.

Our group wide survey shows that employees of Explore & Develop services appreciate the workplace culture and environment, saying they feel supported, respected and motivated to achieve in their roles due to ongoing professional development and training opportunities offered by Explore & Develop.

91% are proud to work at Explore & Develop.

97% believe their work is meaningful.

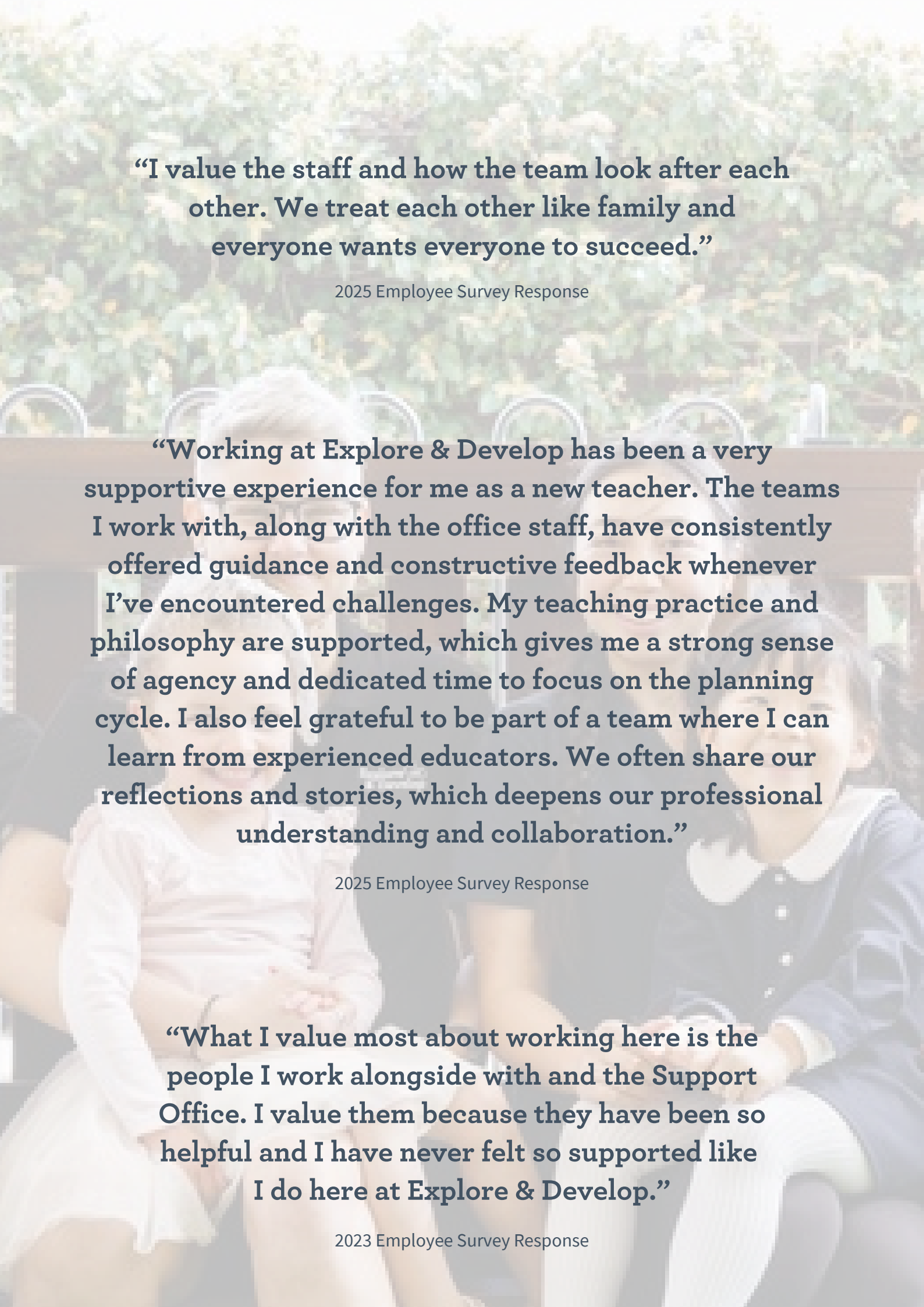
98% feel that Explore & Develop consistently aims for a positive impact on families and children.

91% would recommend their service as a good place to work.

96% say that Explore & Develop consistently aims for best practice in the early childhood education and care sector.



Some Explore & Develop educators at a recent professional learning event



“I value the staff and how the team look after each other. We treat each other like family and everyone wants everyone to succeed.”

2025 Employee Survey Response

“Working at Explore & Develop has been a very supportive experience for me as a new teacher. The teams I work with, along with the office staff, have consistently offered guidance and constructive feedback whenever I’ve encountered challenges. My teaching practice and philosophy are supported, which gives me a strong sense of agency and dedicated time to focus on the planning cycle. I also feel grateful to be part of a team where I can learn from experienced educators. We often share our reflections and stories, which deepens our professional understanding and collaboration.”

2025 Employee Survey Response

“What I value most about working here is the people I work alongside with and the Support Office. I value them because they have been so helpful and I have never felt so supported like I do here at Explore & Develop.”

2023 Employee Survey Response

the financials

The cost to establish an ECEC service can vary considerably and depends on many factors such as the location, size of service, type of development, etc.

We recommend that applicants need access to approximately $1m to $1.2m in funds.

For most people, having some equity available in a property is a good place to start. In addition, we can discuss options for commercial funding, for up to 50% of the funds required.

More information about upfront and ongoing licensing fees will be discussed with you during the application process.



do you tick the boxes?

- You appreciate and value the contribution that high quality ECEC makes to children, families and the local community and have the desire to make a positive contribution in your local community.

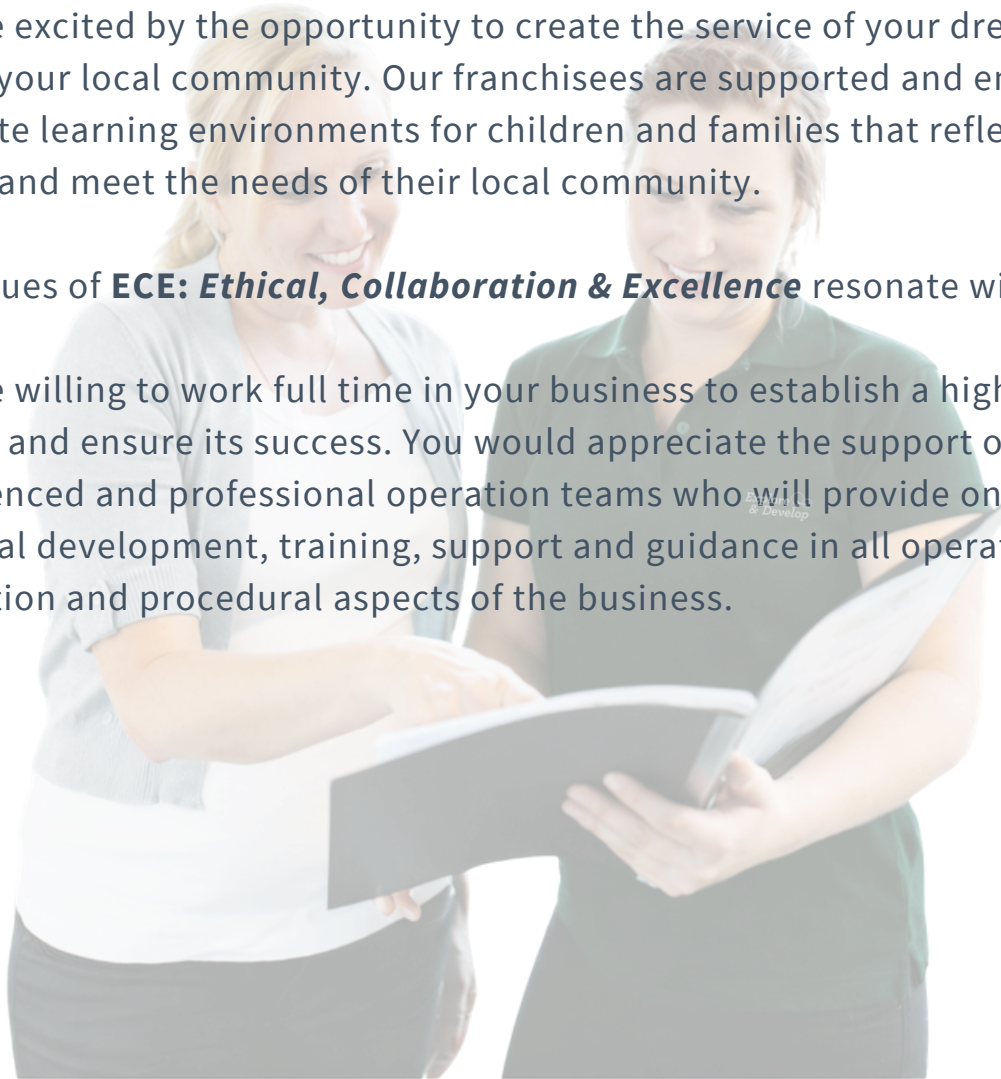
- If you don't come from an ECEC background, you are prepared to undertake a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education & Care and a Working With Children Check. If you already work in the sector, you have had two years experience in a senior leadership role.

- Regardless of your career background, you have proven leadership and people management skills that will allow you to lead your team from the front and inspire them to be their best. You are an excellent communicator.

- You are excited by the opportunity to create the service of your dreams within your local community. Our franchisees are supported and encouraged to create learning environments for children and families that reflect our values and meet the needs of their local community.

- Our values of **ECE: *Ethical, Collaboration & Excellence*** resonate with you.

- You are willing to work full time in your business to establish a high quality service and ensure its success. You would appreciate the support of a highly experienced and professional operation teams who will provide ongoing personal development, training, support and guidance in all operational legislation and procedural aspects of the business.



FAQs

WHY OWN AN EXPLORE & DEVELOP?

Partnering with Explore & Develop means you will be supported with all of the ECEC sector regulatory requirements, leaving you more time to focus on your children, families and employees. You will have the autonomy to create the service of your dreams, with a program that is tailored to the needs of your community and reflective of your own ECEC philosophy. You'll also reap the benefit of affiliation with our brand and well-respected 20+ year history in the sector.



WHAT WILL I GET?

The backing of our highly experienced Support Office team, with specialist expertise in all of the important areas including operations, policies and compliance, HR, marketing, business management and assessment and rating. You'll have a dedicated Operations Manager to help guide you and access to daily support whenever you need it.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

The cost of opening a service can vary widely. We charge a flat upfront fee and ongoing franchise fees or talk to us about your financial options . Our ongoing fee is a similar annual cost to that of employing an additional staff member.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Not just anyone can become an Explore & Develop franchisee. We only partner with a few applicants each year in line with our goal of providing the highest quality ECEC services. The process generally takes 2-3 years for a new service to open, depending on location. Please contact our Franchise Business Manager to start the conversation.

Explore & Develop

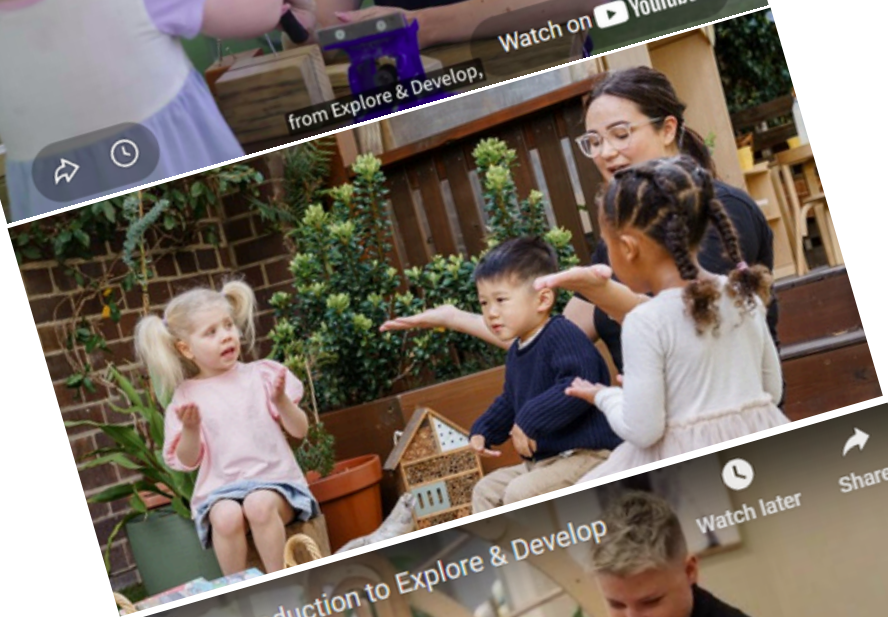
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Hear more from one of our franchisees





A short introduction to our group

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