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## **BIG FAT SMILE BUCKS THE TREND WITH MALES IN THE CHILDCARE INDUSTRY**

In an industry where female educators represent 95% of the workforce, Big Fat Smile is bucking the trend, with an early education and care workforce that has 40% more male educators than the Australian national average. It is a topical discussion across the board, with Big Fat Smile strongly supporting more males to enter the industry.

Census data released in 2016 reveals that female educators represent 95% of the industry workforce across Australia, compared to 4.9% of male educators<sup>1</sup>. In addition, out of all Australians commencing their occupation as a child carer, the national average indicates only 5% are male.<sup>1</sup>

Big Fat Smile understands the importance of children receiving a balanced education, delivered by both female and male educators. This is reflected in the organisation's current male workforce being 40% higher than the Australian national average, with 7% of its staff being male.

**Ms. Jenni Hutchins, CEO at Big Fat Smile**, comments: "At Big Fat Smile, we strive to provide the highest quality care to children in an inclusive, diversified and balanced environment. We have a strong, talented and engaged workforce; we support quality educators and we're a provider of choice for males.

"A balanced teaching environment allows children to better reflect on the real gender mix in society, in which they must learn to navigate, and it's the children and their families that will reap the benefits. It's our vision at Big Fat Smile to ensure quality care is available to all children and families, which is why we strongly encourage males to experience the rewarding career early childhood education provides," says Ms. Hutchins.

The issue of gender equality in the childcare industry is echoed worldwide, with a wealth of international research available. A recent observational study (March 2017) indicates there essentially isn't a difference between the care provided by males compared to females. Despite the misconceptions, male and female educators showed the same levels of attention, sensitivity, and stimulation toward boys and girls.<sup>2</sup>

**Mr. Matt Leslie, Director at Big Fat Smile's Woronora Community Preschool** adds: "I've worked at Big Fat Smile as a male educator for 10 years now, but the assumptions around my abilities to care for children are still prevalent. I used to let it affect me, but now I actually see it as an advantage. Children need to learn how to build relationships with both genders, and I believe I, being a male, provide the missing link between the early childhood teaching environment and the real world.

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“Having worked in the industry for so long, I know there’s no difference in the care I provide, compared to my female colleagues. I change nappies, devise and implement programs and, modesty aside; I have a very strong rapport with children.

“Big Fat Smile supports me and my male colleagues by providing an inclusive, supportive environment. I’ve been encouraged to have a voice as I advocate for men in the industry, and the fact that I even have male colleagues means we’re on the right track,” says Mr. Leslie.

Big Fat Smile is proud to support diversity within the workforce. Males bring an original set of skills to the industry which only complement those skills of female educators in order to provide the highest quality of care, teaching children perspective, acceptance and empowerment. Over time, with children being positively influenced by both genders, Big Fat Smile hopes to see the typical female-dominated industry to reach a more stable gender equality balance.

For further information on Big Fat Smile, visit: <http://bigfatmile.com.au/>.

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**For further information, including interview requests, contact LBPR:**

- Interview opportunities are available with Jenni Hutchins, CEO Big Fat Smile upon request.

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### References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census data
2. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, Volume 25, 2017 - Issue 3, Men and women in childcare: a study of caregiver–child interactions (March 2017)

### About Big Fat Smile

Big Fat Smile believes in a braver, brighter, more creative world. It’s their reason for being.

Big Fat Smile engages highly qualified, passionate educators so that every child has the best start to life and learning. Quality is central to everything Big Fat Smile does, with 100 per cent of centres assessed in 2014 and 2015 achieving the coveted ‘exceeding’ rating under the demanding National Quality Standard.

Headquartered in Corimal, Big Fat Smile employs more than 650 staff at 42 early learning and school age care centres in 11 local government areas across the Illawarra, Sydney Metropolitan Area, Southern Highlands, Wollondilly and Tablelands.

For more information, visit: <http://bigfatmile.com.au/>.