



Dear OSHC Educator,

To the one standing on the bridge between home and school, where childhood thrives – I want to take a moment to write to you. Yours is a role both humble and significant, one that shapes the lives of children and young people every day.

Picture the child, weary from their day, lining up to sign in with shoulders that slump and eyes that barely lift. Or another, frustrated, pushing to the front of the line or refusing to line up altogether, as tensions rise and pushing and shoving begin. You see it daily – their Freedom Cups® draining after a day filled with structure – where they've been told when to play and for how long, during two brief moments also filled with eating, going to the bathroom, and regrouping. Then it's back to class, where they're required to ask permission for everything, from bathroom breaks to where they sit, all while following predetermined schedules.

When they finally arrive at OSHC, perhaps the first interaction is waiting in line, then gathering in a designated area to eat while being signed in and counted, only to hear that the playground or oval will open in 30 minutes, probably after the next headcount. These moments – these stories – are your reality. As an OSHC educator, you don't need to imagine these scenarios; for most of us, it's our lived experience. And more often than not, scenarios are often more intense than this.

THE UNIQUE ROLE OF OSHC EDUCATORS

Yet, you stand tall in this space, uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between what is and what could be. It's no secret that the research and support in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector often feels aimed elsewhere at the Long Day Care arm and those first five years of a child's life. OSHC, as a field, is still relatively young, and

in many ways, for some it can feel as though we've been left behind.

But children are children, regardless of their age. Human needs are human needs, no matter the stage of life. The insights and research focused on early years are not irrelevant to us; they are tools we can use to guide and deepen our practice. You, as OSHC educators, play a vital role in supporting children through the next steps in their lives—as they emerge from early childhood, beyond these foundational five years. By taking these insights and applying them to your unique context, you strengthen your impact and expand your influence on their OSHC experience and childhood.

A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE

It's not uncommon to hear OSHC educators describe their role as "picking up the pieces" of a child's day. Perhaps you've even said it yourself. But when we know better, we do better (*Maya Angelou*). By shifting the lens through which we view a child's behaviour and transitions, we can transform those moments into opportunities for trust and connection. Instead of being reactive adults, we become proactive champions of their play, leisure, and overall, wellbeing.

THE POWER OF INTENTIONALITY

Your choices matter. As an OSHC educator, how you show up each day holds immense power. Your connections and interactions with each child and young person speak volumes. The simple yet profound sentiment of "I'm here for you" takes on a deeper meaning in this context. You are quite literally there in that space, every day, for them.



For some children and young people, your presence in OSHC represents the connection and safety they've needed all day. Whether it's through a reassuring smile, a listening ear, or simply the consistency of you being there, your role offers them a vital anchor. Your intentional actions—be it refilling their Freedom Cup by fostering their autonomy or providing space for them to create and play—are not just about meeting needs in the moment. They are about showing them that they are seen, valued, and supported. Regardless of their background or circumstances, you communicate: *"I see you. I hear you. I am here for you."*

Consider the child whose Freedom Cup is empty, told all day where to sit, when to move, and how to act. Through play and laughter, you help refill that cup. Or think of the large loose parts available in an outdoor space, where the joy of creation and innovation shines through. These are not just activities; they are opportunities to restore choice and autonomy through play.



HOLDING SPACE FOR CHILDHOOD

You are more than a "carer"; you are a guide, a protector, and an advocate. You hold space for children to express themselves, to prepare for their day, to recover from their day, and to thrive. This work is both a privilege and a responsibility — a sacred duty to champion childhood and safeguard their right to play and leisure.

So, to you, the OSHC educator, I say this: You are vital. Your role is indispensable. Keep building those bridges, fostering connections, and advocating for the children and young people in your community and space. Through your intentional actions, you remind every child and young person that they matter – not because they must, but because you choose to show up for them every single day.

With gratitude and respect,
A Fellow OSHC Educator and
Advocate for Childhood,

Annette