

8th National Early Literacy Conference Keynote Speakers – some more information

Jennie Cusiter



Jennie is a self-professed literacy warrior and experienced paediatric speech-language pathologist. With over 15 years' experience working with families and young children who are developmentally at risk or vulnerable in the area of communication, Jennie brings a wealth of knowledge and insight to the challenge of ensuring that all children are ready to start school, ready to learn, and ready to read. As part of her PhD, Jennie is currently conducting research into the effect of these innovative programs with her collaborators at South Western Sydney Local Health District and The University of Sydney.

Keynote Address: A Strong First Language is a Strong Language Learner

One of my favourite descriptions of Australia comes from the Australian Human Rights Commission; "Australia is a vibrant, multicultural country...home to the world's oldest continuous cultures as well as Australians who identify with more than 270 ancestries". This rich diversity is one of our greatest strengths, however also presents a unique challenge to ensure that all children regardless of their background have the same opportunity to transition to school successfully and to become strong readers. Literacy is a key milestone that is directly linked to education, employment and health outcomes and whose foundation is laid in the first 5 years of a child's life. This foundation is based on developing strong pre-literacy skills, which includes both oral language and code-focused skill development.

Having a different home language from the language used in educational settings is the critical issue. How do we promote the benefits of a strong first language and cultural connection whilst addressing known pre-literacy and language targets before school?

This keynote will address the critical pre-literacy period, a journey which spans the first 2000 days of a child's life, and provide an overview of the current research on promoting language and pre-literacy learning in diverse cultural contexts.

It will be focused on providing functional and accessible approaches to promoting pre-literacy skills with reference to some innovative projects being trialed in South Western Sydney.

Rachelle Coe and Rosemary Signorelli

NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)

Keynote Address: Creating culturally responsive opportunities to address the effects of trauma on early development for children and families with refugee experiences

This keynote address will discuss the impacts of trauma on the brain, and inform understanding of the family's culture and trauma, support for home language use, and the teaching of skills to enhance parent child interactions within the family through play. These can all positively impact the child's overall progression, literacy, and ongoing learning and also assist families to seek more specialist help when needed. Examples from practice with individual families and groups, and learnings from different communities, inform ways to ensure that services provide culturally responsive and trauma-informed opportunities for early development.

Rachelle Coe



Rachelle Coe is a School Liaison Officer at STARTTS. Her role is to build the capacity of schools to support their students and families with refugee experience, with the aim of improving students' school environment and overall participation in learning. Rachelle has particular interests in the use of movement and play opportunities as interventions for children who have experienced trauma.

Rachelle is an occupational therapist with experience working in the areas of school based occupational therapy, paediatrics and childhood disability in Australia, UK and Singapore. Throughout her career, she has held varied roles as therapist, educator, consultant, researcher and project officer.

Rosemary Signorelli



Rosemary Signorelli is the Senior Early Childhood Counsellor at STARTTS. She has extensive experience as a music therapist, psychotherapist and occupational therapist across the lifespan and different settings: in early childhood, special education, disability, trauma recovery, adult rehabilitation, and aged care.

Following community consultations about the needs of 0-6 year olds and their families from refugee-like backgrounds, Rosemary has written four song-story books called the Monkey Tales. These translated stories relating to trauma recovery and development are geared towards children and their extended family. Rosemary is currently creating another song-story about transition. Previously she published "Exploring Our World With Song – A Multicultural Songbook" for use in aged care.

Assoc Prof Shanti Raman



Conference Dinner Speaker

Dr Raman is a Consultant Paediatrician whose research and teaching interests include health of migrants and refugees, international maternal and child health, poverty, child rights and child abuse and neglect. She is currently enrolled in a PhD in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine, UNSW. In her role as Community Paediatrician in charge of Child Protection services in Sydney South West Area Health Service, she has provided clinical leadership in this field, professional development and training in clinical aspects of child abuse and neglect and developed area-wide relevant policies on children's rights and child protection.

Dr Raman has maintained a strong interest in international health, provided consultancy services in international health (maternal, neonatal and child health), worked on population based research projects in India and been involved in teaching public health. She has been involved with policy development at national (with the Royal Australasian College of Physicians), State (NSW Health), and international (through International Society for Social Pediatrics, International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect) levels. She has set up a number of clinical services for vulnerable populations of children and youth in the area; and is involved in numerous population-based research projects in child health.

She has also been involved with several quality assurance and clinical quality improvement projects for New South Wales Health Maternal Neonatal and Child Health (MNCH) in the Human Resources for Health Knowledge Hub. She has extensive experience and has led many clinical audit and quality improvement projects in hospitals and health services. She has also supervised numerous junior doctors, paediatric trainees and Master of Public Health students.

Dr Liqun Lui



Friday Keynote Speaker. Title of address TBA

Postdoctoral Fellow – Centre for Multilingualism in Society in Society across the Lifespan, Norway
Dr. Liqun Liu completed his Ph.D. in Utrecht University and holds a tenured position at School of Psychology, Western Sydney University. Currently, he is working under his Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Individual Fellowship project at Center for Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan, University of Oslo. He is also affiliated with the MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour & Development, Western Sydney University, Centre of Excellence for the Dynamics of Language, Australian Research Council and Utrecht Institute of Linguistics OTS, Utrecht University.