

RATIONALE

This policy has been developed and is important to the service because of the following documents:

- United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- Centre's philosophy,
- Early Childhood Australia (ECA) Code of Ethics (2005), and the
- Centre's Staff Code of Conduct

Children and families

The services have a range of guidelines and strategies, which meet the individual needs of children and families. Equitable and inclusive practices are a continuous process and should occur every day.

Identifying and supporting individual needs

The services have a range of strategies to support children and families with additional needs. The service encourages visits to the service from all members of the child's support team.

'Additional needs' is a broad term of reference and can include children and families with:

- intellectual or cognitive delay.
 - Initial discussions with the family will include: information about the Inclusion Support Scheme (scheme funded by the federal government that enables the centre to apply for funding to employ an additional carer to improve ratios in the child's room), extensive information regarding specific details about the intellectual or cognitive delay and any strategies that are used by the family or therapists to improve intellectual or cognitive development.
 - Staff members will attend any relevant training e.g. Autism and downs syndrome
 - The additional needs staff member will establish a communication book that will include both information from the parents, staff (both childcare and kindergarten) and specialist services i.e. it needs to stay with the child and be taken from the centre to home and back to the centre. When this book is at the centre it is the responsibility of all staff to refer to this book and include any relevant information.
 - The additional needs staff member will also establish an 'Inclusion Support' folder that includes any medical information (e.g. paediatric reports), funding details, minutes of any meetings (e.g. with occupational therapists and parents), observations, relevant program details, developmental tests and any other relevant information. A summary of the child's condition will also be included on the inside cover for easy referral by a relief staff member. The summary is to be reviewed annually by the additional needs staff member. The communication book will be kept in or near this folder while the child is at the centre.
- language requirements, which can include diagnosed medical conditions that delay speech development, such as oral or verbal dyspraxia.
 - Initial discussions with the family will include: information about the Inclusion Support Scheme (scheme funded by the federal government that enables the centre to apply for funding to employ an additional carer to improve ratios in the child's room), extensive information regarding specific details about the speech delay and any strategies that are used by the family or therapists to assist in the development of speech (e.g. use of Makaton)
 - Staff members will attend any relevant training e.g. Makaton.
 - The additional needs staff member will establish a communication book that will include both information from the parents and staff i.e. it needs to stay with the child and be taken from the centre to home and back to the centre. When this book is at the centre it is the responsibility of all staff to refer to this book and include any relevant information.
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- Language requirements, including bilingual and deafness
 - The centre is able to access a Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50
 - The centre is able to translate the Parent Information Handbook and Enrolment form upon request.
 - Once the child has enrolled, the translating and interpreting service should be accessed to exchange information on the settling of the child into the service.

- Specific medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, anaphylaxis or cystic fibrosis.
 - The service can provide action plans for asthma and anaphylaxis; these need to be completed prior to the child officially starting at the service.
 - Copies of these action plans (with photos of the child) will be displayed in the relevant rooms of the service.
 - Initial discussions with the family will include: information about the Inclusion Support Scheme (scheme funded by the federal government that enables the centre to apply for funding to employ an additional carer to improve ratios in the child's room), extensive information regarding specific details about the medical condition.
 - The service will access special equipment, if required, from Upper Murray Family Care, to assist in the inclusion of the child with a medical condition.
 - Staff members will be briefed by the Team Leader with strategies to ensure the child is treated equitably and offered play and learning opportunities with the same outcomes as other children.

- Child rearing practices that differ to the service's practices. These include belief systems regarding gender roles in play, independence, self-help skills, behaviour guidance and nutritional needs;
 - A meeting will be set up with the family and staff member to establish clear guidelines that are acceptable to the centre and family.
 - These guidelines will be reviewed as necessary.

- Diverse family lifestyles and structures. Services should consider those families which do not represent the 'traditional' family structure. For example, extended, single-parent, same-sex, foster, relative or kinship care families.
 - A meeting will be set up with the family and staff member to establish strategies to support the family.
 - These strategies may be included in the program, and may consist of role-play activities and relevant stories.

- Emotional needs resulting from trauma, abuse or grief. For example, the death of a family member or friend; family displacement due to war or refugee status; domestic violence; family members suffering from depression; or separation and divorce.
 - A meeting will be set up with the family and staff member to establish strategies to support the family.
 - These strategies may be included in the program, and may consist of role-play activities and relevant stories.

Enrolling, orienting and settling families and children into the service

- Enrolment and orientation is often a family's first impression of a service's diversity and equity values.
- The service ensures that the enrolment and orientation process is equitable and fair by:
 - The centre is able to access a Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50
 - The centre is able to translate the Parent Information Handbook, Enrolment form, service policies and procedures upon request. The service is also able to provide these documents on an audiotape upon request for visually impaired families or those families with literacy issues.
 - The orientation process asks the family of the best form of communication e.g. verbal, newsletter, email etc.

- The service understands that the settling period can be stressful for many families and each family deserves an individual approach to the settling of their child.
- Settling children and families into care is a process that continues after orientation and should be maintained throughout the lifetime of a child's enrolment in care. For example, children who have been attending the service for an extended period of time can still have days when they are upset or distressed. They deserve the same attention and comfort as a child who is orientating or settling into care. This reflects an equitable approach to caregiving strategies.
- The service ensures that the settling period is equitable and fair by:
 - The centre understands that
 - Once the child has enrolled, the translating and interpreting service should be accessed to exchange information on the settling of the child into the service.
 - The centre will provide a written summary of the daily activity and experiences in a book that is maintained near the sign-in/out sheet. This can be translated/interpreted upon request.
 - A verbal summary of a child's day at the service will also be provided.
 - A communication book will be maintained for any children with additional needs.

Staff/Carers, students and volunteers

Selection and recruitment

- Refer to Recruitment and Selection of Staff Policy and Procedure

Relief staff, students and volunteers

- Relief staff are required to read the Philosophy Statement and the Diversity and Equity Policy prior to commencement.

Staff/Carer professional development opportunities

- The service will support staff/carers in developing diverse and equitable partnerships with stakeholders through the discussion of inclusion and equity at staff meetings. Furthermore, the service will encourage staff to attend diversity and inclusion professional development courses that are held in the N.E. Victoria.
- Information about inclusion and diversity are included in annual professional appraisals to provide a forum for formal discussions.
- Please refer to Training and Development Policy.

Management/Coordination unit staff

Non-compliance of the Diversity and Equity Policy

- The service will not tolerate any types of prejudicial or biased behaviours, including those of a racist or sexist nature.
- These behaviours will be managed through the Grievance Policy and Procedure.

Anti-bullying practices and guidelines

- Bullying is often the behaviour from those individuals who are prejudicial or biased against others. Types of bullying include: sexual harassment, physical aggression, taunting, practical jokes, offensive language or visual materials, inappropriate body language or physical contact.
- The service will not tolerate any type of bullying.
- These behaviours will be managed through the Grievance Policy and Procedure.

Compliance with legislation and equal opportunity requirements

- The Occupational, Health and Safety Act 2004 covers bullying in the workplace. More specifically the Guidance Notes on the Prevention of bullying and violence at work. A copy of this document is available on each computer under My Document/OHS

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Communication with different stakeholders

The services' communication strategies with each stakeholder promote and reflect diverse and equitable behaviours and practices.

Children

- The service strengthens and reinforces diverse and equitable behaviours and practices with children, and challenges prejudice and bias in a number of ways.
- Children have incidental opportunities to question and explore the social constructions of gender, race, language, lifestyles and additional needs in addition to opportunities through the educational program.
- Children's questions about bias are answered by staff/carers, students and volunteers with compassion and an emphasis on inclusion.
- Preconceived notions of gender roles are challenged and addressed through incidental opportunities in addition to opportunities through the educational program.
- Staff/carers encourage children to understand the right of individuals to have their thoughts, feelings and ideas heard and respected through a positive emphasis on diversity.
- Diverse cultures and abilities are represented in the service for children to explore and challenge in reading material, toys (such as dolls) and visual displays (such as posters).
- The service has resources to encourage critical thinking about similarities and differences.
- Instances of prejudices are confronted in the service's environment through activities such as role play, group time, story time and songs.

Staff/Carers

It is the role of staff/carers to :

- interact with children, families and peers equitably and respectfully,
- discuss with children evidence of biased and prejudiced behaviours and practices,
- actively monitor their responses and behaviours towards biases (formally performed at monthly staff meetings and with annual performance appraisals),
- use language that promotes equity, encourage empathy and fairness towards others,
- challenge stereotypes that promote prejudicial and biased behaviours and practices,
- counteract biased or prejudicial behaviour and practices,
- avoid making comparisons between children, families and staff/carers,
- identify scenarios or situations that may create acts of prejudice or bias,
- use their diverse life experiences to contribute to and enhance the program and environment, and
- support and encourage children to be fair and respectful of others.
- ensure active play experiences encourage and are inclusive of all children.

Staff/Carers, students and volunteers as role models

- Children learn through example and modelling is an important way to teach children about the values that support diversity and equity. Staff/carers are important role models in guiding and educating all stakeholders in relation to diverse and equitable behaviours and practices.
- Children also learn from modelling and staff/carers, students and volunteers need to be aware that their actions, language, gestures and behaviours may communicate biased or prejudiced opinions or feelings.

External support agencies

The service will utilise resource and support agencies such as the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50, FKA Multicultural Resource Centre and the Upper Murray Family Care (inclusion support agency).

Experiences

Diverse and equitable experiences encourage stakeholders to question their own belief systems and the values that they place on people of different backgrounds, cultures and lifestyles.

The service acknowledges and respects differences and similarities by ensuring that play and learning experiences are child-focussed, relevant and meaningful. Placing token values on differences and assuming that one interpretation of a culture, race or lifestyle represents everyone from that background, is not a sign of diversity and equity. It makes an assumption about the lives of individual's or groups of people, which may not be a true reflection of who they are. This type of assumption emphasises difference and diverts attention away from the similarities between people.

For example, people in other countries may assume that all Australians have held a koala. This places a token value on what people perceive as being the normal Australian lifestyle or experience. Likewise, assuming that a child from an Asian ethnicity knows how to use chopsticks places a token value and assumption on the child's lifestyle and history, before seeking information from the family.

Similarly, organising a one-off 'cultural celebration days' where children are exposed to cultural signs and symbols that they are not exposed to on any other day, limits children's experiences. Services aim to create an environment where people of different backgrounds are considered equal to others, and therefore their culture is celebrated every day.

Effective planned experiences:

- ensure diversity and equity is reflected in children's individual and group experiences;
- discuss the common values, concerns and triumphs that are shared among people;
- reflect the diversity of children's families and lifestyles, and encourage children to explore experiment and question the culture they live in;
- encourage services to identify how differences and similarities can be embraced and respected through play and learning experiences;
- encourage children to broaden their understanding of different groups of people in their local community and society.

Areas of focus for experiences can include:

- cultural diversity
- language and bilingualism, including non-verbal and written language. Services may also decide to include elements of sign language;
- gender role differences and similarities;
- family lifestyles
- festivities and celebrations
- identification of prejudice and bias experiences; and
- the development of critical and analytical thinking.

Routines

- Routines can include: rest and sleep, clothing and comfort, nappy changing, toileting and mealtimes. Families may have different expectations about routines to the service.
- Services and families should engage in open, honest conversations during the enrolment and orientation process to determine if there may be potential differences in expectations and develop strategies to communicate needs that can be resolved positively and effectively.

Excursions

- Excursions are chosen and planned for to include those children and families from different backgrounds, experiences or age ranges.
- Services should consider the following reflective question during the planning process of an excursion:
 - Are there nappy changing facilities available for younger children?
 - How does the service ensure that excursion venues have facilities for accessibility, such as disabled toilets, lifts and/or ramp access?
- Services that provide care for children with additional needs can identify the strategies that assist in planning for excursions, which include transportation or care requirements.

Community

- The service embraces diversity in the local community.
- The service is able to translate its resources or documents in other languages as needed.
- Involvement in the local community can be incorporated into children's play and learning experiences. For example, staff in a service may have a relative in an aged care facility; a community link may be established that promotes and encourages inter-generational experiences and conversations.