

# {Embrace}

Winter 2023 | Your inclusion support magazine



How can I talk to children about Treaty and the Voice?

**+** Struggling with children's big emotions?  
We reveal how one long day care service turned it all around

VICTORIAN  
INCLUSION  
AGENCY

One For All

# { Acknowledgement of Country }



The Victorian Inclusion Agency acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We recognise their continuing connection to culture, land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the strength of family connection and kinship within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their ongoing dedication to educating and caring for children. Sovereignty of these lands was never ceded.

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**The Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA) is excited to announce that our contract has been extended until the end of June 2025. This means that over the next two years, we will continue to work alongside Victorian education and care services on your inclusion journeys.**



As always, this edition of *Embrace* is packed full of excellent resources to support inclusion at your service. Check out our feature article 'How can I talk to children about Treaty and the Voice?' (**page 3**) to delve into two of the most important things happening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and all Australians, right now – Treaty and the Voice.

President of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), Aunty Geraldine Atkinson, breaks down Treaty and the Voice to Parliament in conversation with her granddaughter Vivian – this special piece is the perfect way to approach these big, pressing topics with children.

Check out **page 9** to find out how a long day care service is empowering children to develop agency. With the help of their Inclusion Professional, Nido Early School Kingsbury's team came together to strengthen their inclusive practice and guide children and educators to regulate their emotions. Take this powerful story as an example – there's no better time than the present to engage the VIA for inclusion support!

We look forward to working with you throughout the years to come as you reflect on and implement inclusive practices at your service.

**Jane McCahon**  
Victorian Inclusion Agency Program Manager  
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The Inclusion Support Program (ISP) is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education. As part of the ISP, the Victorian Inclusion Agency is led by Community Child Care Association, and is delivered in partnership with Yooralla and KU Children's Services.

# How can I talk to children about Treaty and the Voice?



**By the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) in conversation with Aunty Geraldine Atkinson and her granddaughter Vivian.**

Not so long ago, it would be rare to find education and care settings in Victoria that were able to engage in a meaningful way with First Nations content, and help introduce children to the rich history and culture of First Nations people. Nowadays, things are changing rapidly.

Every day we are seeing more and more early and middle childhood services incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into their curriculum. Educators are forming connections with their local Aboriginal community and inviting community representatives in to give talks and lead activities. Children are going home to their families full of curiosity, asking questions about Aboriginal people. Children are even teaching their families a thing or two!

In the spirit of these positive changes, we asked Aunty Geraldine Atkinson to tell us about two of the most important things that are happening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people right now: the **Treaty** (in Victoria) and the proposed (national) **Voice to Parliament**.

Aunty Geraldine is a Bangerang and Wiradjuri woman, the President of VAEAI and the former Co-chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, which is the body that oversees the Treaty development process on behalf of Aboriginal communities across the state. Aunty Geraldine is also a grandmother to nine children.

We asked Aunty Geraldine how we could speak to children about Treaty and the Voice – and did she deliver. This is a conversation between Aunty Geraldine and her youngest grandchild Vivian (aged six)...

*Continued on next page*



**Vivian: What is a Treaty?**

**Aunty Geraldine:** A Treaty is an agreement between two parties. One is the government, the other is Aboriginal people. The government has agreed we are going to have Treaties, so Aboriginal people can talk to government about what we want to do with our lives.

**What kind of parties will they have?**

Not the kind of parties you are thinking of. I will explain the work that Nan has been doing with Treaty.

I was the Co-Chair of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. We are a democratically elected body – which means that people voted for us to be in these positions.

What we had to do was set up a process for getting Treaty here in Victoria. We had to get the Treaty process outlined in an Act of Parliament, which went through legislation. Government had to agree, which they did, and it went through both Houses of Parliament.

**Why?**

We wanted to be able to have a say in our official business. For over 230 years, Aboriginal people have been told by government what we should do and how we should live.

You know at the mission, at Cummeragunja? You have been fishing there. Well, a long time ago government decided that they would put Aboriginal people on missions. That was because they didn't know they would fit in with the rest of the population. And government made lots of awful rules for Aboriginal people.

Like your great-grandmother, my mother, did you know she was only able to go to school up to grade three? And she never learned to read or write.

On the mission, they would take children away if they thought they were being neglected, or didn't dress cleanly, or brush their hair, have the right food, all sorts of things. They would take the children off the parents and put them in homes.

So my mother's mother swam from one side of the river to the other, with all of her children, so that they couldn't take her children away.

Aboriginal people couldn't buy food – we had to get rations from the manager. We had to ask the manager permission to go to hospital. Rules were made for us all the time and that happened for a lot of years.



Aunty Geraldine Atkinson (right) with her granddaughter Vivian (left).

*That is like something I learned about the olden days. I learned that it wasn't fair. Girls couldn't play basketball in schools and they got really sad and boys couldn't play with dolls.*

Yes, well that's not fair either.

There will be traditional local Treaties and one big state-wide Treaty. And we are going to be able to talk to government about what we want. How we can make things better in schools, like more culturally aware teachers.

We want to look at how government has put programs in place, like the justice system, where they lock lots of Aboriginal kids and women up for minor offences. If they commit a lot of minor offences they break their bail conditions and then have to be put in jail. We want more doctors and nurses working in jails. A lot of Aboriginal people have died in jail.

We want to work with businesses too, on plans for more employment of Aboriginal people. Like your cousin working at KFC – do you know they have an Aboriginal employment strategy? We want the Big Ws and the Kmart. We want businesses to give scholarships.

**Some Aboriginal kids were actually stolen by grown-ups.**

That's true – we want to stop that happening. We want to stop Aboriginal kids being taken from their parents and put into foster care. That is happening a lot now, the numbers are huge.

**Do Aboriginal kids go to the office?**

Yes, that happens, because teachers don't understand them. They don't understand what Aboriginal kids do and why they behave a certain way. With Treaty we are going to help stop that.

Now I think I should tell you about the Voice. Should we talk about the Voice?

**Yes.**

What we want is for Aboriginal people to have a strong Voice to talk to Parliament. Parliament at the federal level will know how to deal with issues that have bad impacts on Aboriginal people.

The government has worked on the wording of the Voice, and Aboriginal people have too. Nan sits on the Referendum Working Group.

*What people have to understand is that we are not making things any different for people who aren't Aboriginal. We just want Aboriginal people to have better lives, not have to deny their history, be proud, be well educated, know who they are.*

The Voice will speak for the whole Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. We will be represented at all levels: local, regional, national.

Everyone over 18 will be able to vote for the Voice. If they think that the Voice is a good idea, then they will vote 'Yes'. And we will get that Voice to Parliament. Aboriginal people will have a say. We will have Aboriginal history and culture in schools. And strong Aboriginal men and women.

We want to make sure as you grow up that you get to learn in school about Aboriginal language because we had lots and lots of languages and we want [children like you] to learn about them in schools.

And Aboriginal kids won't be sent to the office. Does that sound good?

**Yes.**

*We are only three per cent of the population, so we need that other 97 per cent to be our allies. We need people to talk about the Voice at their dinner parties and barbecues and when they are with their friends.*

And children, they are learning about Aboriginal culture in school, they are acknowledging Country and learning things that their parents were never ever taught when they went to school. So children are coming home and talking to their parents and that's what they should do. Because they are the ones who are going to make this a better country.

- When I grow up I want to be three things.*
- I want to be an Aboriginal culture person.*
- I want to be a person who talks about things that aren't fair.*
- I want to be a woman.*

Yes, and you want to be a proud Aboriginal woman.



Are you speaking about Treaty or the Voice at your service? If you're not sure where to start, or children are asking questions and you don't know what to say, call your Inclusion Professional on **1800 177 017** for more advice.





# All you need to know about the EYLF and MTOP updates

Australia's two national approved learning frameworks for education and care, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) and *My Time, Our Place Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (MTOP), have been updated for the first time in over 10 years. But what do the learning framework updates mean for inclusion? Read on to find out all you need to know.

Of the EYLF and MTOP updates, four stand out as having strong links to inclusion:

1. The addition of the new principle 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives'
2. The strengthening of the principle 'High expectations and equity' to 'Equity, inclusion and high expectations'
3. The revision of the principle 'Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships'
4. Expanding the practice of 'Cultural competence' to 'Cultural responsiveness'.

In the EYLF and MTOP, 'principles' reflects contemporary theories, research and evidence concerning children's play, leisure and learning. These principles underpin the service and educator practices that lead to positive outcomes for children.



Let's explore each of the four updates above and what they mean for your service.

## 1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives

Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in service philosophy and practice is crucial to creating a safe and inclusive environment for First Nations children and families.

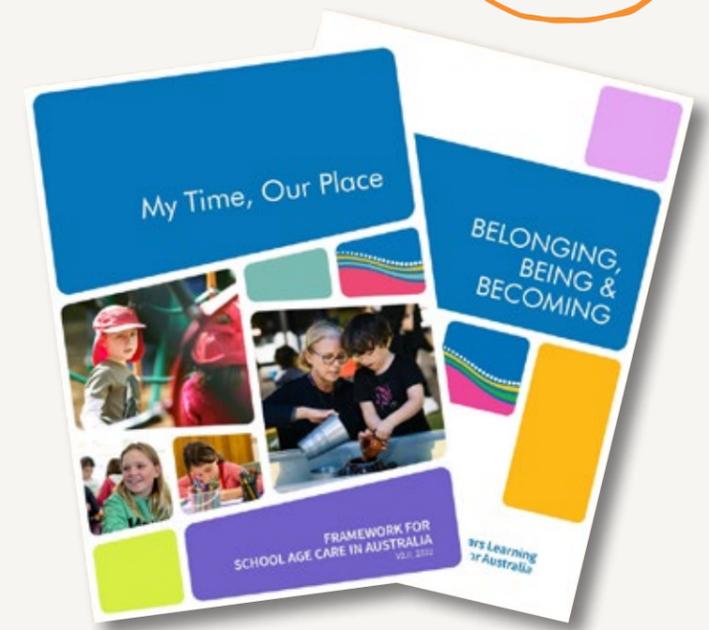
This new principle suggests educators should work with families to deliver continuity for children in areas such as kinship connections, parenting practices and other aspects of cultural life as they enter the education system. With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guidance, educators should also explore cultural traditions, languages and ways of knowing to guide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning for all children.

For non-Indigenous families, this new principle means that every Australian child's right to learn about First Nations' histories, knowledge systems, cultures and languages is closer to being met. It also ensures that the resources and methods used to teach this valuable knowledge are genuine and appropriate.

## 2 Equity, inclusion and high expectations

There has been a huge amount of research and understanding relating to inclusive learning environments and practices for children since the EYLF and MTOP were originally written. Adding 'inclusion' to this principle asks services to continue on their inclusion journeys – to focus on programming that supports all children's inclusion and responds to the barriers to inclusion that some children face, including disability, family diversity, cultural and linguistic diversity, neurodiversity and trauma.

Programming should uphold all children's right to have their cultures, identities, languages, capabilities and strengths acknowledged and valued, while responding to the complexity of children's and families' lives. Educators can do this by genuinely recognising the aspirations that families and communities have for their children, irrespective of diversity, and consider how their curriculum choices can foster all children's sense of themselves as competent learners.



## 3 Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

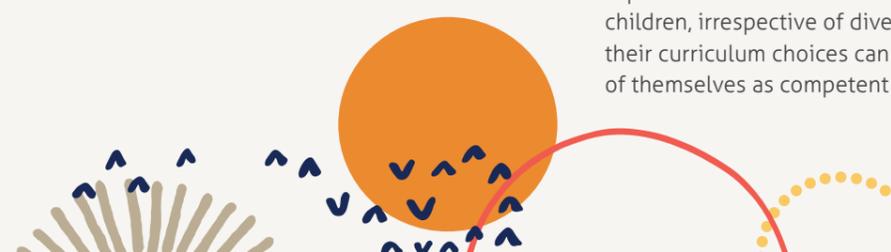
Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships with children are at the core of educators' work. This principle has always aimed to support educators to understand:

- The need to be attuned to children's thoughts, feelings and needs
- That children need to feel safe, secure and supported to be able to explore and learn in their world
- That their relationships with children should be nurturing, consistent, emotionally supportive, genuine and respectful.

The principle has been strengthened by including a new focus on considering cultural safety in relationships and interactions with children, as well as framing relationships within the context of relational pedagogy.

Educators should nurture relationships through culturally safe and responsive interactions and provide children with emotional support. Educators should aim to provide predictability to ensure children develop the skills and understanding to interact with others – this is especially crucial for children who may have experienced trauma.

Versions 2.0 of both frameworks emphasise educators' roles in guiding children to support their own and others' wellbeing and to value collaboration and teamwork.





## How a long day care service is empowering children to develop agency

From the get-go, Nido Early School Kingsbury was committed to teaching children that they are confident and capable learners. But as a brand new service with rapidly growing enrolments and some children presenting with challenging behaviours, the team felt overwhelmed. Here, Curriculum Leader Jessica tells us how the team came together to strengthen their inclusive practice and empower children and educators to regulate big emotions.

Nido Early School Kingsbury opened in mid-2022. As a new service, our educators had varying levels of experience. One of our kinder rooms was a busy space, with many children presenting with behaviours that resulted in a complex group dynamic.

Our kinder team was feeling overwhelmed. We had never experienced such complicated or escalated incidents before. So, we reached out to our Inclusion Professional (IP) Letishia to access immediate support and collaborated to create a Strategic Inclusion Plan.

With Letishia's help, we were able to access funding for additional educators to increase the overall level of support our educators could provide the children. This allowed our team to focus on co-regulating alongside children during moments of distress and emotional outbursts.

Our educators had the opportunity to workshop approaches to children's escalated behaviours with Letishia. We focused on understanding how trauma, neurodivergence and sensory processing can impact children's ability to self-regulate.

On reflection, we found our room routine wasn't always consistent. This meant some children were unable to understand what was happening throughout the day, making transition times difficult for them. So, our team established a consistent daily routine. We strengthened our new routine with visuals depicting times and images of what would occur throughout the day.

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### 4 Cultural responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness, as opposed to cultural competence, reflects the need for services to go beyond having an awareness of difference, and commit to developing a deeper understanding of all cultures represented by the children and families attending.

It's important to note that 'culture' does not just encompass ethnicity – it includes individual and family values, gender, sexuality, language, histories, traditions, religions, abilities and more. A child or family's culture takes into account their entire lived experience.

#### Cultural responsiveness encompasses:

- ✓ Awareness of one's own worldview and biases
- ✓ Respect for diverse cultures
- ✓ Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as the custodians of the land we learn on
- ✓ Gaining knowledge of cultural practices and worldviews
- ✓ Communicating effectively and sensitively with people and recognising diverse ways of communicating across cultures and abilities
- ✓ Everyday practices including routines and rituals
- ✓ Making decisions and taking actions that build children's and young people's cultural competence.

#### Culturally responsive educators are:

- ✓ Knowledgeable of each child's and family's context
- ✓ Active in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all aspects of the curriculum
- ✓ Implementing anti-bias approaches, including social justice approaches to address racism/bias in the setting/community
- ✓ Embedding democratic and fair practices in their setting, including the importance of being a responsible citizen
- ✓ Supporting children and young people to take culturally responsive actions in the face of fairness/discrimination
- ✓ Collaborating with colleagues, children and young people, families and their communities to build culturally safe environments.



#### Check out the updated frameworks:

- EYLF V2.0: [bit.ly/3zS04sY](https://bit.ly/3zS04sY)
- MTOP V2.0: [bit.ly/3MCLTzM](https://bit.ly/3MCLTzM)



We discovered that being calm and approachable, and communicating with the children, was the best way to support emotional regulation. Our team found that labelling feelings and emotions and validating them was really helpful. We would say things like, *'I can see you're frustrated and that's OK. How can I help you calm your body?'*. This showed the child we were there to support them.

As a group, we encouraged children to join the discussion on *'What can we do instead of...?'*. This empowered children to feel seen as capable and develop agency. With the children, we created a list of strategies to help them navigate different emotions or states of regulation. Sensory learning was a major focus for us – we increased sensory experiences and resources, such as fidget toys, which helped children regain focus and self-regulate. We found that attuning our learning program to build on children's individual strengths helped them foster a positive self-identity.

Educators looked for moments in the routine to offer connection or engage with children, such as watering the garden, playing board games, reading stories and setting up obstacle courses. We started to provide small breaks from the hustle and bustle of the busy room by going on walks around the service. Our most successful strategy allowed children to spend time co-regulating with a key educator in our piazza (dining room) by

drawing, reading a story or moving their bodies together. Then, they could return to the main room when they felt regulated and ready.

We also looked at how educators might be feeling in certain situations and how our own state of distress can affect our volume, tone or body language. Validating and acknowledging the overwhelm we all were experiencing at times helped us start exploring how to best support one another in those stressful moments.

I wanted my team to feel supported, so I focused on celebrating the amazing work they were doing to include all children. I noted small wins, like *'All children joined group time today'* or *'We only had two emotional outbursts'*. We focused on changing our mindset from *'This is too hard'* to *'How can I support myself, the child and the room during this time?'*.

We had a challenging year, but my team grew stronger together and learnt the importance of reflecting on our practice when facing challenging behaviours. We discovered that colleagues are our greatest asset – leaning on each other when we feel overwhelmed or exhausted is essential to maintaining wellbeing in the workplace. Further, reaching out to allied health professionals, inclusion support and Preschool Field Officers is so important. Without the support of our IP, our year would have been very different!

So, why were the Nido Early School Kingsbury team's new strategies so successful? Here, their IP Letishia breaks down some of the theory behind the excellent inclusive practices observed at the service.

### 1 Routines

Consistent routines help children thrive as it helps them to predict what comes next in their day, which reduces anxiety. For children who may be neurodivergent, or who may have experienced early adversity or trauma, consistent and predictable routines that focus on connection, are unhurried and use playful transitions (e.g., songs, games or movement) can lower the fight-or-flight response and offer increased emotional regulation.

Using visuals as part of the routine supports children to have an increased understanding of what the expectations are. A visual routine could be a visual cue that supports children in transitions. For example, educators could create lanyards for children which depict the routine, allowing children to check what's going to happen later on if they're feeling unsure.

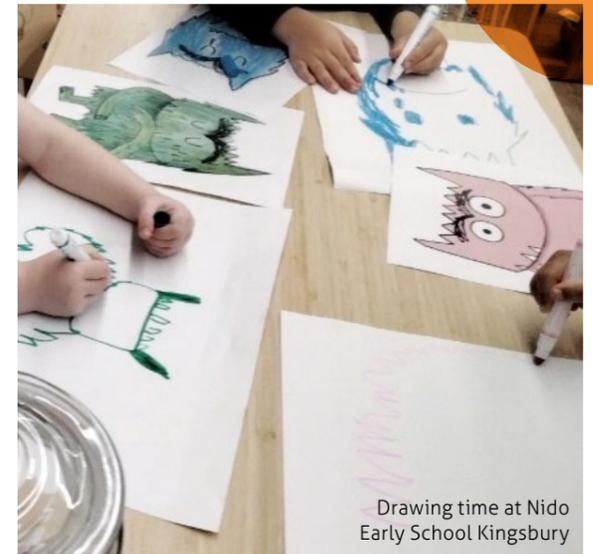
### 2 Co-regulation

Co-regulation involves children being able to 'borrow' from the educator's nervous system. As a child becomes heightened or dysregulated, the educator can become a stable, calming lighthouse in the storm. This may look like educators being at children's level, using softer voices, taking deep breaths, offering safe, consensual touch (e.g., holding hands or hugs) or going for a walk outside and practising mindfulness (e.g., noticing the trees, the sounds of birds or the feel of the ground).

Co-regulation can only occur when stressed educators have been able to activate their own self-regulation strategies (e.g., taking a two-minute break, taking deep breaths, swapping out with another educator, having a drink of water, moving the body, walking outside, smelling something aromatic, or engaging in some art-making).

### 3 Collaboration

It's so important to build equitable partnerships with the people and services directly supporting the child and their family. This might look like inviting families for meetings and using a strengths-based approach to understand what the child and family are experiencing, and what support they might need.



Whilst we can offer strategies or link families with other support networks, it's important to continually reflect on how we engage with families, ensuring we are respecting diversity and empowering them. Connecting with allied health or local support services provides the opportunity for strategies and skills to be shared.

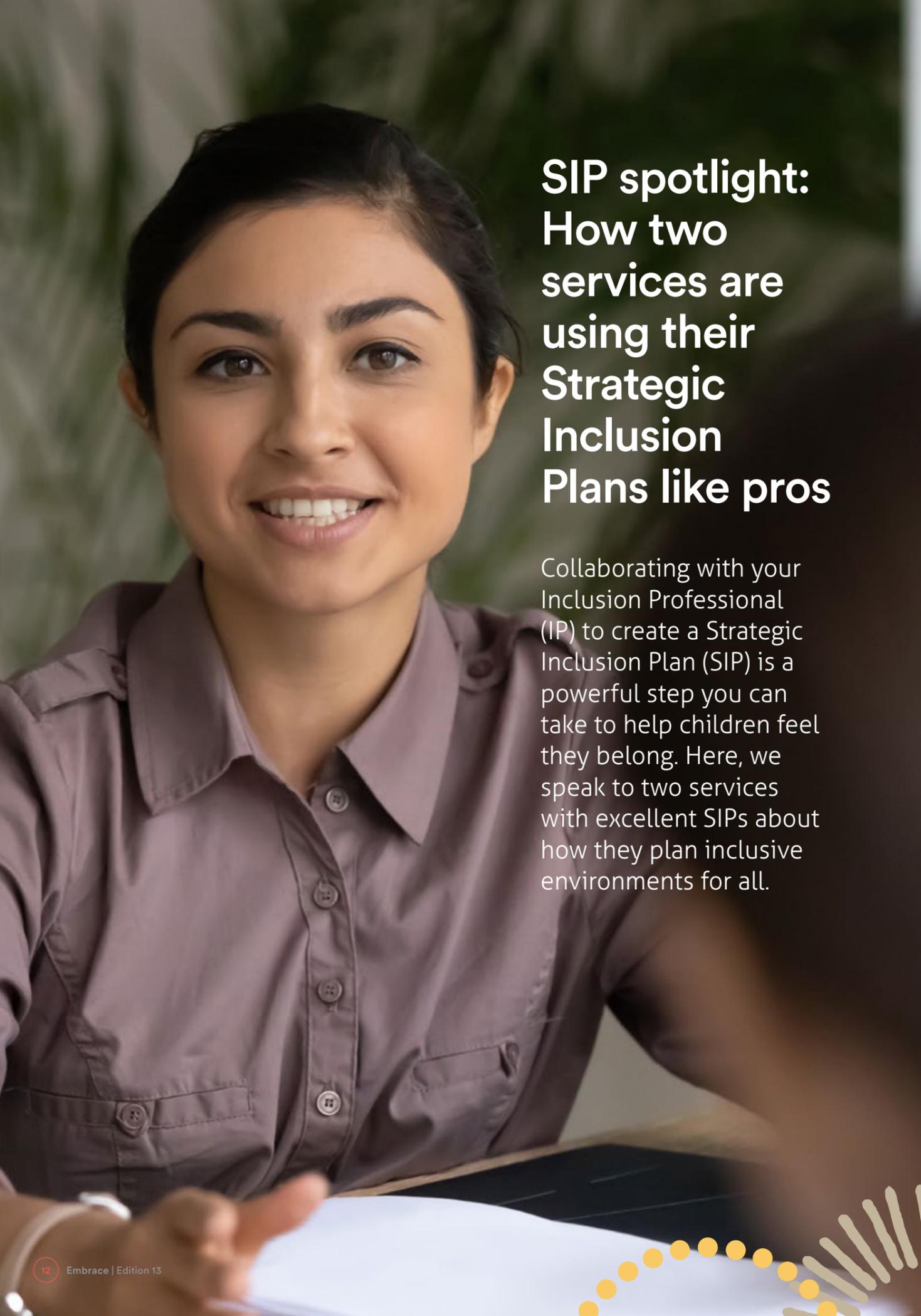
### 4 Trauma-informed practice

Learning about how trauma impacts children's brain development, behaviours and attachment can support educators to understand children's needs in the learning environment. In trauma-informed practice, supporting children to feel safe and secure is educators' highest priority. This means building trusting relationships that are predictable and scaffold healthy attachment.

To strengthen trauma-informed practice, the learning environment should be set up with consistency to reduce unpredicted changes and potential triggers (e.g., unknown adults, loud noises or large groups).



If you need help with any of these strategies, contact your local Inclusion Professional on **1800 177 017**. It's free!



## SIP spotlight: How two services are using their Strategic Inclusion Plans like pros

Collaborating with your Inclusion Professional (IP) to create a Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP) is a powerful step you can take to help children feel they belong. Here, we speak to two services with excellent SIPs about how they plan inclusive environments for all.

Club House Boot Camp  
Vacation Care Founder  
and Director, Cath, chats  
with their IP, Emma...

**Emma: What is Club House Boot Camp all about?**

**Cath:** Club House Boot Camp provides before-school, after-school and vacation care services in Gippsland. My team and I review our SIP before and after each seasonal program, due to the changes in enrolments, staff knowledge and experience and the changing needs of our community.

We strive to provide an inclusive environment that helps all children feel safe, respected, important and valued. We want to offer a predictable environment for children and families where differences are valued, experiences are validated and wellbeing is promoted.

**How does your service plan for inclusion?**

With up to 60 school-age children per day at each of our vacation care sites, it's important that our inclusive practices are well thought out and documented. Whenever we welcome a new family, I stop and think about whether there is anything we know about their child that may require some strategic inclusion planning.

Sometimes this presents clearly at the time of enrolment. For example, when enrolling a child who was a wheelchair user with specific continence care requirements, we knew there would be barriers we needed to overcome before the child attended for the first time.

Other times, barriers to inclusion are not as clear-cut and can only be understood after the child has attended the program. This has sparked in-depth planning at our service, to support mixed-age groups, social interactions and challenging behaviours.

Understanding the inclusion needs of each child through observation is critical to ensure we are equipped to provide adequate support for the child, educators and the other children attending. Observing children in our setting shows us how confident and capable our educators are in supporting the inclusion of each child – through observation, we can also identify anything we might need to build our educators' capacity.

**Can you tell us how families have been included in the SIP development process?**

We connect with families directly during our SIP review and development. This is so we can share strategies that have worked for us and so families can share children's progress at home as they grow and develop.

These kinds of conversations are imperative to maintaining strong relationships, and our families are always extremely grateful for the time and effort we put into planning for their child's inclusion. It lifts the spirits of families to hear about the successes their child has experienced being included with other children in meaningful ways.

**Can you tell us about the reflective process throughout the year that informs the planning and delivery of inclusive programs?**

I work closely with my IP in the lead-up to vacation care programs to develop a comprehensive SIP. We reflect on previous programs to understand our learnings and consider these in our next program – this usually follows with a SIP update.

The SIP can be a heavy load at times, but the ideas shared by my IP along the way are nuggets of gold! I then share this wisdom with educators at our pre-program staff meeting, which typically alleviates any anxieties our less-experienced educators may have. Educators also have much to contribute to this process as they reflect on their inclusive practices and progress towards positive and inclusive outcomes for all.

**How has planning and implementing a SIP strengthened educator practices?**

Our SIP is discussed at each staff meeting so educators understand what things we consider when looking for ways to support children's inclusion needs. This leaves educators better equipped to observe or engage with the children.

### Each educator is encouraged to contribute their ideas to the SIP.

Keeping all educators engaged with the SIP means their skills, knowledge and experience are being shared, and discussing how the SIP is developed opens educators' minds to being more solutions-focused. If we have any last-minute bookings or unexpected arrivals, educators can instantly reflect on any child-specific barriers previously identified and be inspired by the inclusive strategies that have been developed.

Continued on next page



Macclesfield Primary School OSHC Coordinator, Selina, chats with their IP, Monica...

**Monica:** Tell me about your first experience developing a SIP.

**Selina:** The first SIP was all about getting some funding support to assist me. Back then, I was single-staffed and trying to include a couple of children with additional needs. It was a real struggle. The SIP was basic. It was not so much about shifting educator practice or having a plan of action that was going to change the program. I was seeking additional support just so I could cope day to day.

**You now have a fantastic and thorough SIP in place. What changed?**

The dynamics of the program were changing, but the main change was my attitude. With more children with high support needs attending, I needed to apply for renewal funding however I also knew I couldn't maintain the same practices and churn out the same old SIP. I had to think about this more and really identify the barriers to inclusion that were presenting.

I unpacked this with my IP and worked out a few new ideas that I could try to make some shifts to the daily status quo of operating the program.

**What strategies and actions have you implemented?**

We've been fortunate to engage in a year-long Innovative Solutions project on trauma-informed practice, coupled with a feelings/art therapy-based program. These approaches have been powerful ways to work. We focus on what we can change and do, so the program structure is another recurring area in the SIP.

We have implemented a sensory trail, calming resources and fidget items. We have created calm retreats inside and out and have lots of visuals regarding program expectations. Our feelings board features lots of Lego emotions that children engage with daily.

We have three children with toileting challenges – who would have thought that displaying the simple picture steps for toileting would assist all the children! Our visuals are a constant. If we drop the ball with using these, we see problem behaviours creep back in. They really make a difference.

We reflected on why incidents were occurring and made a conscious shift to be proactive and creative with implementing new ideas in response to needs and barriers. As a result, we really focused on our chosen strategies and actions.

We now see the SIP as a working document for change and improvement. We say that we have never arrived or reached the end of the journey, the journey continues as the children change. We are continually looking for ways to improve.

**What have you noticed most about your team's practices as a result of your SIP?**

In the past, we couldn't be calm when confronted with big behaviours as we didn't know what we could do to support the children. But now we do. As educators, we read the children and their needs better and respond better. We are less reactionary, more confident and are enjoying being with the children more. We provide consistency and predictability. 'Working calm' is something we value. We have strategies and a plan to draw on, so there is reassurance and safety in the way we work. The SIP is our backup – it has our back.

Our successes and achievements really are measured in the children's involvement. To think if we now see a child who is beginning to show signs of restlessness, by just placing a fidget toy into the child's hands without commenting or disturbing the play, we can settle the child long enough to then prepare for a suitable transition. Prior to our learning and Innovative Solutions project, we would never have done this so easily and effectively.

**What have you noticed about the children?**

There is a stronger sense of community among the children. Older children are helping the younger ones and there is more tolerance. Is this because they are seeing us work differently – that they see us respond to situations in ways that help them to feel reassured and safe?

Our aim is to set the children up for success with social relationships, so we foster their sense of belonging. Children feel good about coming to OSHC. It's fun and relaxed. Children are feeling good about themselves. Their self-image is more positive as there are fewer incidents where they would otherwise stand out.



Macclesfield Primary School OSHC's sensory trail

**How has families' view of the service changed?**

Our families are our biggest fans, next to the children. Families see firsthand the engagement of their children. Children are happy to be here. Our families of children with high support needs have noticed some big improvements in the way their children now engage with educators, other children and the environment. Some families will often collaborate with us on ways to support their children and spend more time at the services chatting and watching the children play.

**Do you have any tips or suggestions for other OSHC teams when developing a plan for inclusion?**

Embrace your SIP. Use it to improve all areas of the service, and most of all, be creative and flexible with your ideas. Keep the SIP visual and refer to it often. It also helps to review and note the progress towards achieving your aims. Develop a good relationship with your IP as they are your strongest support through this process.



If it's been more than twelve months, your SIP is due to be updated. For help, contact your Inclusion Professional on **1800 177 017**.

# Supporting diversity, equity and inclusion in education and care settings



**RHONDA LIVINGSTONE**  
National Education Leader & General Manager of Leadership, Quality and Regulatory Support, ACECQA

Every child and young person has the right to access, participate and be included in all aspects of community life, including at education and care services. As educators and service leaders, it is part of our daily work to support diversity, equity and inclusion.



Diversity, equity and inclusion underpin the National Quality Framework (NQF), and the National Quality Standard (NQS) embeds this commitment in element 6.2.2, which focuses on access and participation.

Most recently, our two national approved learning frameworks for education and care have been refreshed. A change in the refreshed learning frameworks is the inclusion of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) and making reasonable adjustments for all learning outcomes to ensure engagement in learning for all children.

To support the inclusion of children, young people, colleagues, families and others with disability, it is important to understand our obligations under the DDA. This legal framework makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of a person's disability. This includes discrimination that occurs in the context of accessing and participating in children's education and care services.

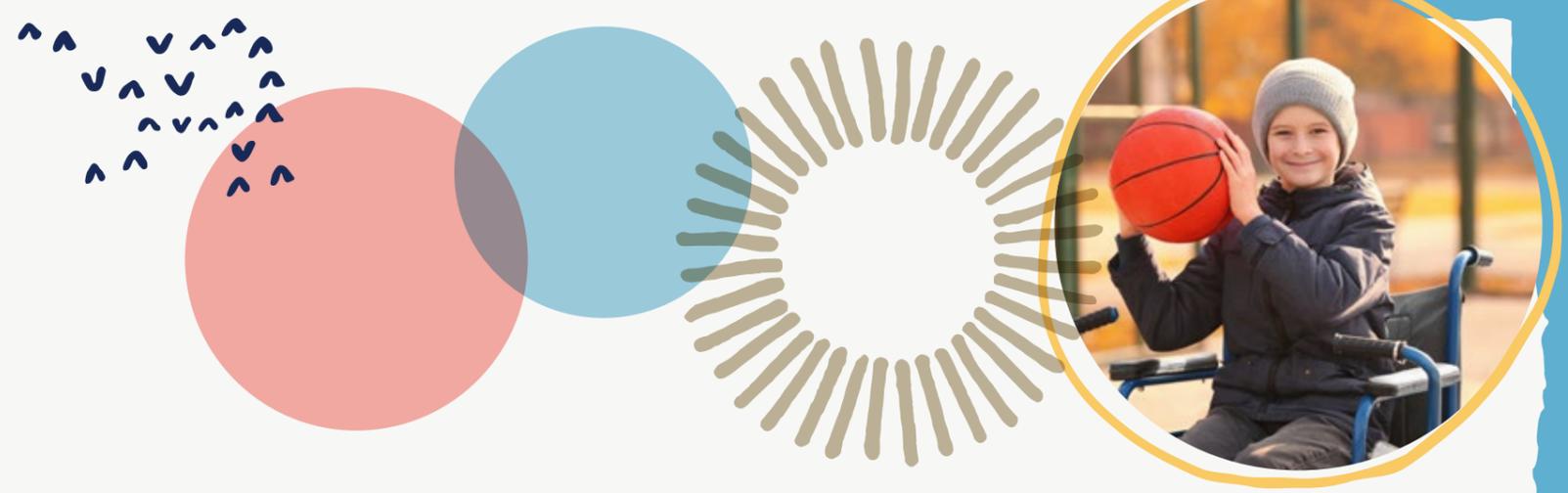
All education and care services must comply with the DDA. Disability is defined broadly in the DDA. It does not rely on a formal diagnosis and can be visible or non-visible. Some people are born with disability, others may acquire a disability during their lives.

### **What can approved providers, educators and staff do to promote diversity, equity and inclusion for children and families?**

*Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) and *My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (MTOF) advocate that educators:

- ✓ Engage in critical reflection, challenge practices that contribute to inequities or discrimination and make curriculum/program decisions that promote genuine participation and inclusion
- ✓ Recognise and respond to barriers that some children and young people face, including attitudinal and practical barriers.

While educators and service leaders have an important role to play, the reality is that DDA compliance is everyone's responsibility. Approved providers have an additional responsibility to ensure all educators and staff understand their responsibilities under the DDA.



There are a number of steps approved providers, educators and all staff can take, including:

- ✓ Building an understanding of the DDA, including what discrimination, harassment and victimisation might look like within the context of a children's education and care service
- ✓ Embedding inclusion into policies, procedures, induction resources and programs, to explain the reality that it is unlawful to harass, victimise or discriminate against children or other people with disabilities
- ✓ Regularly reviewing service operations, enrolment and employment procedures, policies and practices to ensure these do not discriminate against children or others with disabilities
- ✓ Proactively identifying and addressing barriers to access and participation for people with disabilities
- ✓ Creating welcoming, inclusive learning environments and adopting flexible and informed practices, including making reasonable adjustments to optimise access, participation and engagement in learning by all children
- ✓ Engaging with relevant support agencies, such as those delivering the Inclusion Support Program

ACECQA has published the following resources on its website to build knowledge and understanding of the DDA:

- An information sheet that outlines service obligations under the DDA including reasonable adjustments: [bit.ly/3KwG2cl](https://bit.ly/3KwG2cl)
- A tip-sheet that includes 'know, think and do' tips to promote discussion and reflection: [bit.ly/3KSL3xl](https://bit.ly/3KSL3xl)
- An infographic poster that includes a summary of obligations under the DDA: [bit.ly/3MHi29r](https://bit.ly/3MHi29r)
- NQS and DDA posters that outline how the DDA aligns with the seven NQS quality areas: [bit.ly/3ZW21PT](https://bit.ly/3ZW21PT).

### **What is a reasonable adjustment and what might it look like in practice?**

Reasonable adjustments are changes to a policy, practice, procedure, program or environment that enables a person with disability to access and participate in the service on the same basis as others.

When making reasonable adjustments, considerations include:

- The views of the child and their family or carer
- How the child's disability impacts their access and participation in the service program
- Whether the adjustment will enhance the child's access and participation, and support participation on the same basis as a child without disability
- The timeframe in which the adjustment can be made.

The ACECQA DDA resources listed in this article provide a range of tips for making reasonable adjustments at education and care services, including:

- ✓ Changing the routine to be more flexible with fewer transitions throughout the day
- ✓ Using resources like sensory toys to support a child to feel calm and focused
- ✓ Moving equipment and resources to a lower height
- ✓ Using a visual timetable to help children see what will be coming next in their day
- ✓ Making adjustments to the environment to address barriers to access.

### **Here are some questions to provoke discussion and reflection for service teams:**

- How do we ensure children with disability and their families feel welcome and included?
- How do we provide opportunities in our program to promote respect for diversity and value the contribution of children with disability?
- How can we meet our obligations under the DDA, including making reasonable adjustments to our program, practices and assessment of children's learning to focus on the individual strengths of children with disability?
- What tools are available for approved providers and educators to use to promote fairness, equity and inclusion for children and families?



## How to cater for diverse age groups and needs in OSHC programs

**DONNA BRIFFA**  
Inclusion Hub Manager,  
KU Children's Services

Let's look at a day in the life of a school-aged child who accesses an OSHC program. Their day might involve an early start, arriving at OSHC at 6 am. An after-school care program may see a child heading home as late as 6.30 pm. All of this comes on top of their regular school day.

With this in mind, we can see how creating opportunities for play, leisure and relationships are crucial to supporting children and young people who access OSHC programs.

The National Quality Framework aims to drive continuous improvement through a set of standards for services to use as a benchmark for quality. The standards include a series of questions to prompt services and their educators to reflect on the quality of their practices. For OSHC services, where educators are catering to school-aged children and supporting diverse age groups and needs, this is certainly the place to begin.

Keeping in mind the diversity of family and community life in Australia and across children who access OSHC programs, what is it that children and young people need from their learning environments? How do we take the time to understand their needs?

Through the lens of the NQS Areas, unpack these reflective questions with your team to ensure you're catering for all children.

For outside school hours care (OSHC) educators, finding innovative ways to support all children's wellbeing, learning and development can often be complex and challenging. Keep reading to find out how to cater for diverse age groups and needs by reflecting on the National Quality Standard (NQS) Areas.

### Quality Area 1 – Educational program and practice

- How do we learn about each child's knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests?
- How do we make decisions about children's daily experiences and routines, and who is involved in making these decisions?
- How do we ensure that experiences and routines are child-centred rather than adult-directed or 'clock-driven'?
- How do we use conversations and interactions with children to make routine times enjoyable and meaningful learning opportunities?
- How do we extend the program and experiences being offered to each child and/or group of children?

### Quality Area 2 – Children's health and safety

- How do we find out about individual children's routines and ensure that all relevant staff members are informed about these?
- How do we seek information from children and families about children's wellbeing and physical comfort or personal needs, and support children sensitively within the service?
- How do we encourage play and recreational experiences that are child-initiated, child-directed and appropriate for the age and capabilities of school-aged children?

### Quality Area 3 – Physical environment

- How does the environment support children's learning?
- How is the environment equipped and organised to cater for all ages and levels of capability?
- How do we plan to use the physical space to support children in building relationships?
- How do we provide spaces that promote safe exploration, learning through play and interaction with the environment for children of all ages to provoke interest, creativity, sustained shared thinking and collaborative learning?

### Quality Area 4 – Staffing arrangements

- How do our staffing arrangements support each child's learning and development?
- How do our staffing arrangements support educators to direct their full attention to their work with children, including getting to know each child?
- How does our staffing roster support continuity of care and positive experiences for children on a day-to-day basis?
- How do our staffing arrangements support educators to develop positive and respectful relationships with families?

### Quality Area 5 – Relationships with children

- How do we ensure children of all ages, abilities, genders and backgrounds feel that they belong and are included in the service, can participate in all learning experiences and that their contributions are appreciated and recognised?
- How do we identify and overcome potential barriers to inclusion at the service so that each child's participation is supported?
- How do we respond to the distress some children experience when they have to adapt to unfamiliar routines, new people and new places?
- How do we respond sensitively and appropriately to all children's efforts to communicate?
- How is a culture of respect, equity and fairness encouraged at the service? How is this communicated to educators, children and families?
- How do we promote a sense of community within the service?
- How do we meet older children's needs for independence and greater freedom?
- How do we ensure a consistent approach to guiding children's behaviour between school and the service, as well as meeting the rights of children in a recreation and leisure program?

### Quality Area 6 – Collaborative partnerships with families

- How do we help all families to feel comfortable, welcome and valued at the service?
- Does our concept of family reflect the diversity of family structures in the service and the wider community?
- How do we promote a common understanding of inclusion?
- How can we engage in genuine partnership with families to challenge and address stereotypical or biased views of family compositions and include diverse perspectives in the educational program?
- What techniques or strategies do we use to communicate with families who have specific or diverse communication preferences?
- How are we assisting children and their families to develop a sense of belonging to their local community?



# Inclusive practice checklist

Are you ready to strengthen inclusive practice across your entire service? Check off all of the examples below that already apply to your service – well done! If any practices below are unfamiliar, jot them down and set aside some time to chat with your Inclusion Professional about how to achieve every inclusive practice on the list.

## ✓ LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

- When you need to communicate with families, do you share information in a language that is accessible to them?
- Are your communications delivered in a way that is inclusive of diverse family situations (e.g., instead of addressing communication to 'mums and dads', try 'families', 'guardians' or 'adults')?
- Do you model inclusive language when addressing groups of children? Instead of 'boys and girls', could you use terms such as 'everyone' or 'team'?

## ✓ ALL-ABILITIES AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Do you have different methods of delivering instructions to communicate according to children's needs and differences? (E.g., spoken instructions, visual cues, songs, etc.)
- Do you plan learning experiences that can be modified or adapted to meet a variety of needs?
- For children who require additional support, is this done in a way that minimises impact to the child's day?
- Do you encourage all children to engage in tasks and activities as independently as possible, at their own pace, only providing support when needed?
- Does your service have a quiet space for children to co-regulate if they feel big emotions?

## ✓ CULTURAL SAFETY AND AWARENESS

- Do you know about every child's language and culture? Not just the traditions of their culture, but the ones that are meaningful to their family?
- Do you have a relationship with your local multicultural services?
- Are all children's names spelt correctly on lists and displays – and do you, other staff and children pronounce them properly?
- Do you have a relationship with local Aboriginal services and does your setting include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives?
- Does your service calendar include important days of celebration and commemoration for all of the cultures in your setting and local community? Do you acknowledge and teach children about these events?



## You've got mail

Fancy a carefully curated, digital dose of educator resources in your inbox between issues? Our **monthly newsletter** for early childhood and OSHC offers just that.

To receive our newsletter straight to your inbox (with the opportunity to opt out at any time), visit [viac.com.au/resources/via/inclusion-news](https://viac.com.au/resources/via/inclusion-news)

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