

{Embrace}

Spring 2024 | Your inclusion support magazine

**Inclusive practice
for children with
high support needs**



**10 low-cost activities and
resources for sensory play**



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. We support Treaty.

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Contributors

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How to approach First Nations days of significance at your service

By Merle Hall, Innovative Solutions Cultural Facilitator, Victorian Inclusion Agency

Recognising days of significance is an important part of valuing First Nations cultures and respecting some of the most important moments in Indigenous history. This fosters a sense of curiosity and encourages learning about First Nations cultures, even if Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children are not currently enrolled at your service.

Reconciliation can be explored through play-based opportunities that encourage children's deeper understanding of empathy and compassion. Encouraging children to delve into the beauty and richness of Indigenous art and storytelling not only helps them find their creative side but also learn from First Nations people of the past.

How can services prepare for these key dates?

There are many resources that can be used by educators to commemorate and celebrate First Nations days of significance. Educators should research each key date to understand its significance and history. They can seek out resources and ideas created by First Nations people and organisations, both locally and online. To avoid tokenistic activities, educators should reflect on the significance of the day and its history, and demonstrate why they are commemorating or celebrating it and why it is important.

Where possible, services should engage with local First Nations communities and Elders and invite families of children at the service to participate. First Nations families enrolled at the service are valuable resources

as they often know of local events and celebrations within the broader community. If unable to host Elders or community leaders at the service, educators can find videos of Elders speaking about the significance of these days online.

If you're unsure about how to begin, I encourage you to attend an event in your community to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of a key date and how it is commemorated. Once you've built up your confidence, share what you've learned with fellow educators and begin planning to ensure your service approaches the date in an informed, respectful and understanding manner.



Want FREE support to boost culturally inclusive practices at your service?

Get in touch with your Inclusion Professional on **1800 177 017**.

First Nations dates of significance

There are many First Nations key days of significance you can recognise at your service throughout the year. Print this poster and display it in your staffroom as a reminder of what's coming up and when.

26th January

Survival/
Invasion Day

13th February

Anniversary of
National Apology

21st February

International Mother
Language Day

Third Thursday of March

National Close
the Gap Day

21st March

Harmony Day

26th May

National Sorry Day

27th May

1967 Referendum

27th May to 3rd June

National Reconciliation Week

3rd June

Mabo Day

1st July

Coming of the Light

First Sunday of July until the following Sunday

National NAIDOC Week

4th August

National Aboriginal
and Torres Strait
Islander Children's Day

9th August

International Day
of the World's
Indigenous People

**First Wednesday
of September**

Indigenous
Literacy Day

13th September

Anniversary of the United
Nations Declaration on the
Rights of Indigenous Peoples



Original artwork by Gary Saunders,
Bangerang, Taungurung, Wiradjuri,
Yorta Yorta and Djarra man.
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Inclusive environments: A photo story

What do inclusive environments look like? Well, just like inclusion itself, they can be beautifully diverse in form and function, responding to different needs at different times. Educators do an amazing job creating spaces that help children feel a sense of belonging, worth, safety and equality. In this photo story, we showcase three different services' approaches to inclusive environments.

Tulip Street Private Kindergarten, Cheltenham

Inclusion is a key aspect of our curriculum and something we highly recognise and value. We work collaboratively as a teaching team to ensure that all children have equal opportunity to participate fully in all areas of the kindergarten and feel as though they belong, regardless of their abilities, culture, background, age or gender.

Our kindergarten philosophy states: *'The complexity and variety of children's learning is recognised and observed, with curriculum decisions being made based on the inclusion and participation of all children.'*

Following Harmony Week and discussions around inclusion, diversity and equality, children and educators brainstormed all the different types of people who make up families. The children drew characters which we made into blocks for role play, arranging these to reflect the different family dynamics and cultures that make up our kindergarten community. We extended this activity by learning the names of grandparents in different languages including Romanian, Yiddish and Chinese.

The setup was arranged by children who chose to place the blocks and figurines inside. The display has evolved as the year has progressed, with elements added and changed depending on what the current learning focus is.



The roof of the children's display with the words 'inclusion', 'diversity' and 'equality' written above the phrase 'everyone belongs'.



Posters on the wall behind the children's display feature discussion prompts such as 'You will always belong when you sing your own song'.



Children's drawings of family members on blocks used for role play include sisters, brothers, mums, dads, pets, grandparents, cousins, babies, toddlers, teenagers, aunts and uncles.

Goodstart Early Learning Child Care Centre, Noble Park

In our early learning centre, embracing cultural diversity is vital for fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for children and families from various backgrounds. We include diverse cultural perspectives, stories, languages and traditions into the curriculum and learning materials, helping children develop respect for different cultures and identities from a young age.

We acknowledge and support the use of multiple languages spoken by children and families in the centre. Our environments reflect cultural diversity through diverse books, toys, art materials and decorations, ensuring children feel represented and valued.

By prioritising cultural diversity in early learning centres, educators can help children develop a positive attitude towards difference, promote social inclusion and lay the foundation for a more equitable society.



This space promotes respect for First Nations people. It features a family of Aboriginal dolls in an outback setting, Bunjil (the eagle) created by children and an Acknowledgement of Country written by children.



This space promotes the inclusion of diverse ethnicities. It features Bangladeshi and Afghan dolls in traditional clothing, a child wearing hijab, the Bengali alphabet and Bengali books.



This space promotes respect for the traditional beliefs of Māori people and the cultural diversity of Africa. It includes a Māori storybook displayed alongside a poi (a traditional Māori tool used for performing arts and building strength and flexibility), which was handmade by a parent. An African storybook also sits nearby with Maasai dolls donated by a family.



Vietnamese and Chinese cultural books about the Moon Festival and Lunar New Year, with dolls dressed in traditional clothes and artefacts donated by families.



An Indian storybook about the Diwali festival and a Sri Lankan storybook about the Sinhalese alphabet. People in traditional clothes such as saree, dhoti, jewellery, and other artefacts donated by families.

Glen Eira Family Day Care, Caulfield

Swati's program

My family day care program in Glen Eira thrives on diversity and multiculturalism. Each child welcomed into the program experiences a safe, inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging and mutual respect.

We actively celebrate a variety of holidays and events such as Diwali, Lunar New Year, Easter, National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week. Through my program, children engage with diverse cultures, languages and traditions. Our learning environment is enriched with books, toys, images and equipment that reflect diversity and inclusion.

For example, during road safety activities, children have showed curiosity about disability-related topics. I have encouraged this curiosity by incorporating discussions about people living with disabilities into various aspects of the program. We watched the Paralympics together, discussing the athletes' achievements and contributions. I also ensure that dolls, books and images depicting people of all abilities are readily available to the children.



A storybook about Lunar New Year, traditional cooking items and serving dishes, and decorations used during Chinese celebrations.



A collection of items usually seen at Easter, like eggs, bunnies, and carrots.



Traditional Indian dolls, jewellery and a storybook about the Diwali festival.



A display of different native animals around Australia, First Nations storybooks and maps.



A display including traffic signs, a road map, a photo of Paralympic athletes and figurines with different mobility aids.

Janani's program

In my family day care program, children investigate the world of diverse homes and habitats through books. I provide a variety of materials like foam, sticks, wood, bricks, blocks and even a boat for the children to continue their exploration by constructing imaginative dwellings.

These hands-on experiences have expanded as the children research the diversity of children worldwide by looking at books brought in by educators and borrowed from the local library. They discuss qualities such as skin colour, eye shape, hair textures and spoken languages, fostering awareness and appreciation of global differences.

Using books, dolls and other play equipment, children learn about how other children are cared for and carried in different cultures. For example, learning about the traditional practice of Aboriginal children being cradled in possum skins has broadened their understanding of cultural diversity and caregiving practices across the world.



Feeling inspired?

Your Inclusion Professional can help you create inclusive environments that reflect the diversity and uniqueness of staff, families and children at your service. Give us a call on **1800 177 017** to find out more.

Diversify your reading with these LGBTQIA+ books



Being represented in stories, especially from childhood, can have a profound impact on a child's sense of learning, belonging and confidence. There are so many fantastic LGBTQIA+ children's books out there – but here are some of our favourites!

BY LARA SPEIRS, Inclusion Professional,
Community Child Care Association

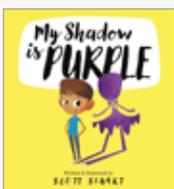


My shadow is pink by Scott Stuart

Themes: Gender identity; acceptance of diversity

Suggested reading age: 4+

Inspired by the author's child, this story features themes of self-discovery and the importance of unconditional love, encouraging children to embrace their true selves.

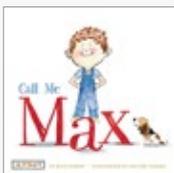


My shadow is purple by Scott Stuart

Themes: Non-binary genders; acceptance of diversity

Suggested reading age: 4+

This book is about self-acceptance and diversity through the story of a child discovering and embracing their unique identity and interests.

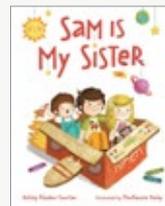


Call me Max by Kyle Lukoff

Themes: Transgender child (assigned female at birth); social transitioning

Suggested reading age: 5+

Call me Max is about a transgender boy who bravely comes out to everyone at school, with help from his supportive teacher and friends.

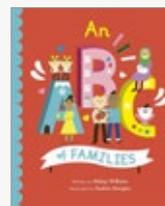


Sam is my sister by Ashley Rhodes-Courter

Themes: Transgender child (assigned male at birth); sibling support; social transitioning

Suggested reading age: 4+

This story is about a transgender girl named Sam, and her sister who writes about how they support each other and deal with challenges together.



An ABC of families by Paulina Morgan

Themes: Diverse family types

Suggested reading age: 4+

An ABC of families teaches children about different types of families using the alphabet, showing that families can be diverse and unique in many ways.



Enough love? by Maggie Hatchings

Themes: Same-sex relationship (male); parent coming out; divorce

Suggested reading age: 3+

Enough love is about a child who learns that love can be abundant and unconditional, no matter the circumstances or challenges faced.



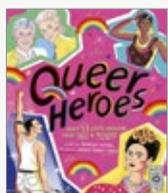
The girl with two dads

by Mel Elliot

Themes: Same-sex parent relationship (male)

Suggested reading age: 3+

This book is about a girl who lives happily with her two dads, showing that families come in different forms and are filled with love and care.



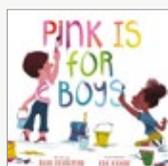
Queer heroes

by Arabelle Sicardi

Themes: Queer history; positive LGBTQIA+ role models

Suggested reading age: 4+

Queer heroes celebrates the lives of trailblazing LGBTQIA+ icons throughout history, with inspiring stories of bravery and resilience.



Pink is for boys

by Robb Pearlman

Themes: Gender bias

Suggested reading age: 4+

This book shows how colours like pink and blue can be enjoyed by everyone, encouraging children to like what they like without worrying about stereotypes.



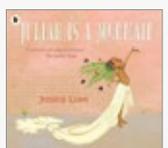
Love makes a family

by Sophie Beer

Themes: Diverse family types

Suggested reading age: 1+

This story by Sophie Beer shows that families can be made up of different people who love each other very much, no matter how they are connected.



Julian is a mermaid

by Sophie Love

Themes: Same-sex parent relationship (male)

Suggested reading age: 3+

Julian is a mermaid is about a boy who loves mermaids and dreams of being one. He embarks on a journey of self-discovery and acceptance with the support of his abuela (grandmother).



Julian at a wedding

by Jessica Love

Themes: Gender norms/bias; questioning gender identity

Suggested reading age: 3+

This story follows Julian as he attends a wedding with his abuela (grandmother), where he embraces his unique self-expression and learns about the power of love and celebration.



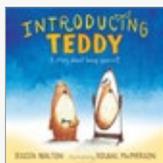
It feels good to be yourself

by Theresa Thorn

Themes: Gender identity; transgender child; non-binary child

Suggested reading age: 4+

It feels good to be yourself tells the story of Ruthie, who learns about different gender identities through the experiences of her friends and family.



Introducing teddy

by Jessica Walton

Themes: Gender identity, acceptance and friendship

Suggested reading age: 3+

This story is about Thomas, a teddy who shares with his friends that inside, he feels more like Tilly, a female teddy.



Enid and her two mums

by Jessica Skogstad

Themes: Same-sex parent relationship (female)

Suggested reading age: 2+

Enid and her two mums is about a girl who happily lives with her two mothers, celebrating their love and their family bond.



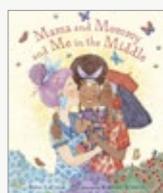
We are allies!

by Taimani Emerald

Themes: Introduction to allyship

Suggested reading age: 2+

This book teaches children how to support and stand up for each other through kindness and understanding among friends and classmates.



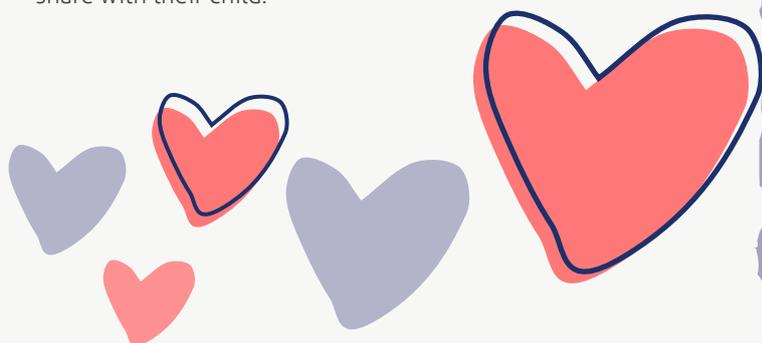
Mama and mommy and me in the middle

by Zoe Lacour

Themes: Separation anxiety; same-sex parent relationship (female)

Suggested reading age: 3+

This story is about a family with two mums, celebrating their everyday adventures and the special bond they share with their child.





Embracing diversity: Inclusive practice for children with high support needs

Earlier this year, a child who has significant support needs enrolled at Box Hill North Montessori Academy. We sat down with Kellie Anne Harris, the centre manager at the time, to learn about how she and the educators leapt into action with a flexible approach to inclusion despite having not come across the condition before.



Box Hill North Montessori Academy is a 108-place long day care service located in one of Melbourne's fastest-growing suburbs. Montessori programs aim to help children become independent learners. But what does this look like when a child has high support needs?

Early communication and collaboration

Oliver*, who has high support needs, wasn't the first child from his family to enrol at the service, so educators already knew his family when he started. While this paved the way for a positive inclusion journey, it was still the educators' first exposure to the inclusion challenges presented.

Present from birth, Oliver's genetic condition can often result in developmental delays and physical complications. In Oliver's case, his high support needs include feeding, communication, sleeping and mobility.

'It's actually something I hadn't come across before,' says Kellie Anne. 'We had to spend a lot of time researching and putting together risk management plans and communication plans to ensure that we knew exactly how he needed to be supported.'

In addition, Kellie Anne organised a care team meeting with all of the child's allied health professionals. These included his physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist and feeding therapist.

'We got everyone together on a Zoom call – [it] was quite lucky to get them all at the same time. I understood that I had a duty of care to [Oliver] and wanted to know how to [include him] in the best way possible. So that's how we started his enrolment.'

Oliver's allied health professionals have attended every week since he started. This creates a collaborative learning environment where staff at the service can learn new skills. 'The educators sit with them to develop knowledge and skills while learning how to communicate and support his needs,' Kellie Anne explains.

Engaging with an Inclusion Professional

Educators collaborated with their Inclusion Professional, Dee, on how to best include Oliver. Firstly, Dee facilitated the implementation of an Immediate Time Limited funding plan. Through this funding plan, a service can apply for support once for an individual child, for up to a 12-week period and for a maximum of 150 hours.

Dee explained to the service that they could use the allocated hours over 100 days to support Oliver and the educators. 'This was amazing because it was something I didn't actually know we could do. So that meant we were able to get an additional educator as soon as possible,' says Kellie Anne.

It also meant that Oliver had enough educator support to be meaningfully included in the learning environment. This, in turn, helped Oliver's family return to work with the extra hours and support Oliver was able to receive through the funding plan.

One big challenge for the educators was finding the right equipment for Oliver's mobility needs. Dee suggested they use the VIA's Specialist Equipment Library (SEL) to get equipment that would help with sitting, eating and sleeping. Oliver's physiotherapist then ordered the equipment Oliver would need in different settings.

'It's been so lovely that everybody has the same goal and the same purpose.'

'They want him to be supported and included in every aspect. Everyone has different opinions of how that should be done, but they all work together. It's been a really nice collaboration between families, allied health professionals and educators', Kellie Anne explains.



Accessing resources and materials

Through the SEL, educators accessed similar equipment to what Oliver uses at home (gained through his NDIS funding) to support his development. Resources like a play pack allowed Oliver to engage with peers at their level and also provided versatility for indoor and outdoor use.

Initially, Oliver was in a stroller that was at quite a high level. This was a barrier because he was up high while the other children were quite low. Kellie Anne says, 'He [couldn't] see his peers, he [couldn't] play with them and he [couldn't] pick up the toys or communicate in his way. So the play pack has allowed him to do that because now he can get down to floor level, which is really lovely to see.'

In addition to the resources accessed through the SEL, Oliver also uses a personal piece of equipment which supports his mobility and core strength, allowing him to hold himself up for longer periods. As a result, he can now sit with children at meal times, story time and group times.

**This name is used as a pseudonym throughout the article to respect the privacy of the child.*

Inclusion can be diverse!

Collaboration, flexibility and willingness to learn have helped educators support Oliver's needs. However, Kellie Anne explains that whether a child has additional needs or high support needs, the main goal is to understand each child's personality and to ensure they feel comfortable and included in their own way.

Kellie Anne says that Oliver is 'vocal about where he does and doesn't want to be, and that's something that has really helped. It's about getting to know that child's personality and their needs and their wants. Sometimes inclusion can look different.'



Have you heard about the Specialist Equipment Library (SEL)? It's free!

Through the SEL, you can loan equipment that allows children with disabilities or additional needs to participate in your daily program and activities. Contact your Inclusion Professional for more information on **1800 177 017**.



Networks for Victorian children's services

Our networks are a place for early childhood, outside school hours care and occasional care educators, teachers and leaders to share ideas and resources.

It's completely free to join!

To find out where your closest network is, check out our website:

viac.com.au/connect/networks



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10 low- and no-cost activities and resources for sensory play

Sensory play is a fun and beneficial way to support the development of children's emerging gross and fine motor skills, as well as their social and emotional skills. Educators can support children who have emotional regulation difficulties by allowing them to explore and ignite their senses through sensory play.

Here are some low- and no-cost ideas to help children regulate their emotions and senses:

1

Water play:

Water is one of the most simple and accessible ingredients to use for sensory play. Try freezing it, melting it, adding colour, bubbles or scents to it for different textures and smells.



3

Fidget toys:



Educators can provide children with access to fidget toys to aid their concentration and emotional regulation. There are lots of different types of fidget toys now available on the market.

2



Sand play: Playing with sand can be a calming sensory experience for children who are anxious or nervous. Try setting children up with objects in a sand tray and asking what they are doing as they play. This can help children explore and express their thoughts and feelings.

4

Noise-cancelling headphones



Noise-cancelling headphones can help children who become overwhelmed by noise to manage their emotional regulation. If possible, have more than one pair accessible within your environment so several children can access them at once.

Helpful links:

- Crunchy foods: patches.com.au/embracing-the-crunch-how-crunchy-lunchbox-snacks-can-benefit-your-child
- Sand play: raisingchildren.net.au/guides/activity-guides/sensory-play/sand-tray-play-activity-children-disability-autism
- Further information on sensory play: oac.edu.au/news-views/sensory-play
- Sensory swinging: sourcekids.com.au/ways-a-sensory-swing-can-help-your-child

5

Homemade play dough:

An all-time favourite! Increase the sensory experience of play dough by including real herbs such as lavender or rosemary.



6

Crunchy foods such as carrots and apples:



In addition to the nutritional benefits, crunchy foods can boost sensory stimulation, sharpen focus and enhance emotional regulation.

8

Sensory bottles:

Sensory bottles can support mindfulness and self-regulation.

Make your own using water, oil or liquid soap, food colouring and sand. Secure the lid well, tip it upside down, and see the sand fall slowly to the bottom.



7

Slime, putty or goop:

Slime is a fun, tactile play experience which helps children build hand and finger strength. Get creative and make it from scratch! It can be made using simple ingredients such as cornflour and water.



9

Swinging, rocking and spinning:



These repetitive movements support children's vestibular stimulation (which influences emotion) and can aid in sensory regulation. For example, the back-and-forth motion of swinging can help regulate children's sensory input and soothe their nerves.

10



Heavy work: Heavy work consists of movement that involves the larger muscles of the body. Heavy work activities have many benefits for children, such as increasing attention, focus and calm. Activities could include wall push-ups or chair push-ups, holding a weighted stuffed animal, a game of tug of war, doing yoga or going on animal walks.

Some children may have a sensory sensitivity or need. Every child who has a sensory sensitivity is different and their needs may change over time. It's always best to work alongside families and allied health professionals to support the individual needs of all children.

Did you know...

Sensory play aligns with the five common senses, along with additional senses related to balance and proprioception (the perception or awareness of the position and movement of the body).

What does inclusion mean to you?



Inclusion can mean many things – safety to be who you are, representation, diversity, equal rights, a sense of belonging and more. Inclusion is important for adults and children alike!

What does inclusion mean to you? Print this poster and encourage all staff write their answer, then display it within your service as a reminder of your ‘why’.



Looking for some support to build inclusive practices at your service? Your Inclusion Professional can help! Visit www.viac.com.au/contact-us or call 1800 177 017.





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/forms/subscribe-inclusion-news**

Hurry, 4,000+ educators have already subscribed!





INSIDE
free sensory
play activities
resource!

*Talk to us today about the ways we can help you identify
and address barriers and support the inclusion of all children.*

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