

{Embrace}



Edition 4

Limiting the impact of gender stereotypes on children



Surprisingly simple ideas to promote a
sense of belonging

How the NDIS links with the Inclusion
Support Programme

{ VICTORIAN
INCLUSION
AGENCY }

One For All



What does it take to make a difference?

Everyone wants a sense of belonging. But can we really give that to others?

Inside this edition of *Embrace*, you'll meet three extraordinary educators who are championing diversity at their education and care services. Whether it be linking with a local Elder or getting children out into the garden, there's a consistent message that jumps off these pages, and that's *what we do together matters*.

Speaking of things that matter, flick to p. 6 to hear how gender stereotypes impact *all* children and find out some simple things you can do about it.

Also in this issue, we reveal how the NDIS links with the Inclusion Support Programme, and we share some practical strategies for welcoming and supporting children from refugee backgrounds.

Finally, Inclusion Professional Faye Sakaris opens up about how a childhood fear of disability put her on the path to a 30-year career advocating for children and families on the margins.

So! A little drum roll please for Issue #4. We couldn't be more excited to share it with you!

Karen Scobell and Jane McCahon
Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA) Program Managers
Community Child Care Association

The Inclusion Support Programme (ISP) is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. 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.

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The Victorian Inclusion Agency acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples of this nation and the Traditional Owners 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, present and emerging.

VIA Contributors

We would like to thank the following people for their contribution to this edition of *Embrace*:

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The year that was...

STATS

70+

Inclusion Professionals across Victoria



'We have learned where to seek assistance to support with implementing Indigenous culture at our service'

5,622 requests for inclusion support

14,426 face-to-face visits

800+ items available for loan from the Specialist Equipment Library

4,000+

Inclusion News subscribers



'The Strategic Inclusion Plan links really well with our Quality Improvement Plan, so we're able to look at how the work we do links with families and we're able to look at professionals outside our service who are able to help us with our strategies for working with the children.'



'We applied for funding through Innovative Solutions and we were able to provide a bilingual worker.'



INCLUSION EXPOS

540+
participants

60+
exhibitors

6 Inclusion
Expos
across
Victoria

'Sharing knowledge is what makes us better educators – thanks again!'

'Thank you for an inspiring night! As a very new person in the industry, this makes the world of difference to my growth.'

'This was a great workshop. Lots of new ideas for incorporating inclusive practice.'



Bring on 2019!



Limiting the impact of gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes impact *all* children – here's what you can do about it

#BecauseWhy

Even before a child is born, and then continuing throughout childhood, our world can expect certain things of children, because of their gender. These expectations are conveyed through gender stereotypes, which are generalisations, assumptions and judgements about a person's behaviour, appearance, personality, skills and interests, based on their gender. They can limit children and adults because they create powerful expectations and make assertions about what is 'expected.' They often intersect with other stereotypes rooted in race, ethnicity, class, ability, religion and age, in ways that reflect underlying power relations. Gender stereotypes are often so deeply entrenched in societies and internalised by individuals that they are frequently undetected or are perceived as 'natural,' beyond question.

Gender stereotypes can impact all children in the following ways:

- Children may not get as many opportunities to learn and practise skills that don't 'fit' the stereotype for their gender.
- Children may miss out on learning how to fully express all their emotions. For example, girls might be taught how to process sadness, but not anger, while boys might be taught how to restrain their anger, but not how to process sadness. Girls might be discouraged from yelling while boys might be discouraged from crying.
- Children may not have skills and talents recognised if they aren't what we expect from the stereotype.

The *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* (VEYLDF) states that 'inclusion is the active response by early childhood professionals to understand all children's and families' experiences and children's individual capabilities' (p. 12). The VEYLDF requires that all early childhood professionals are 'committed to equity and avoid practices that directly or indirectly contribute to gender inequality, prejudice and discrimination.'

Avoiding practices that directly or indirectly contribute to gender inequality requires organisations and individuals to understand how stereotypical expectations can limit children and to notice when gender stereotypes are affecting things like:

- What is shared with children,
- the skills and knowledge children have access to,
- the activities children are encouraged to participate in, and
- the way children are communicated with.

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So, how can educators notice inequality, and what can educators do about it?

Several resources have been produced in Victoria to support education and care services and families to challenge limiting gender stereotypes with children.

#BecauseWhy is a website designed to support parents to challenge limiting gender stereotypes with their children. Education and care services could share this with parents and consider using the tips to spark thinking and reflection in your service. For example, you could:

1. Notice what you encourage and support. What kind of topics and ideas do you support children to be interested in – science and nature, languages, dramatic play, visual art, music, technology, geography and history? Consider what the education and care environment is teaching children – what are they learning to be 'good at,' who are they learning to be? Are all children learning carefulness, thoughtfulness and calmness alongside agility and problem-solving?
2. Make stereotypes less meaningful. Where possible, try choosing some toys and creating environments that don't 'look' stereotypically gendered – this helps make gender less meaningful and allows children to focus on the activity, rather than what's 'for boys' or 'for girls.'
3. When children play with toys or engage in activities that don't necessarily sit within the stereotypes, check your reaction and be encouraging – make eye contact, smile, nod and get excited.
4. Notice what educators play with...and mix it up. Think about how and what you played with as a child – is it how you tend to play with children now? Encourage yourself and your colleagues to try new things.
5. Challenge stereotypes while you play and when you notice them in stories.

Visit www.ourwatch.org.au > What we do > **#BecauseWhy**

Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years, produced by Darebin City Council, suggests that educators can begin to notice how gender inequality and stereotypes are operating in their services by applying a gender lens: 'Using a gender lens when analysing, planning, and making decisions means carefully and deliberately examining all the implications of our work in terms of gender. Working with a gender lens can inform actions to address inequalities arising from the different roles of women and men, the unequal power relationships between them, and the consequences of these inequalities on their lives, health and wellbeing.'



This resource includes professional development, information about creating gender equitable spaces and providing gender equitable services, and considerations for practice, as well as videos, self-reflection tools and assessment tools.

Visit www.darebin.vic.gov.au > Darebin living > Community support > Health and wellbeing > Gender equity in the early years > Creating gender equity in the early years

No Limitations – Breaking down gender stereotypes in the early years, produced by Women's Health East, is about promoting gender equality and provides practical tools, tips and resources for educators – it includes ideas for practice, tips for engaging in conversations with children, children's books lists, information for families and more.

Visit whe.org.au > Resources > No limitations guide

Level Playground, produced by EDVOS, is a 'hub' website for parents, caregivers and educators, with resources about challenging gender stereotypes that are clustered under the categories of learn, play and read.

Visit www.levelplayground.org.au



About #BecauseWhy

#BecauseWhy is an Our Watch campaign for families who want children to learn, explore and develop all the skills they're interested in without the limitations that come with gender stereotypes. Follow @OurWatchAus on Facebook for videos, tips and to join the conversation.



More than just a veggie patch...

Surprisingly simple ideas are helping to build belonging at this Melbourne OSHC service

JULIE DEJONG
Coordinator, Vermont Primary School OSHC



VERMONT
PRIMARY
SCHOOL

Learning For Our Future

What does sustainability have to do with inclusion? We speak to Coordinator Julie DeJong about how going green has fostered belonging at her OSHC service in Melbourne's east.

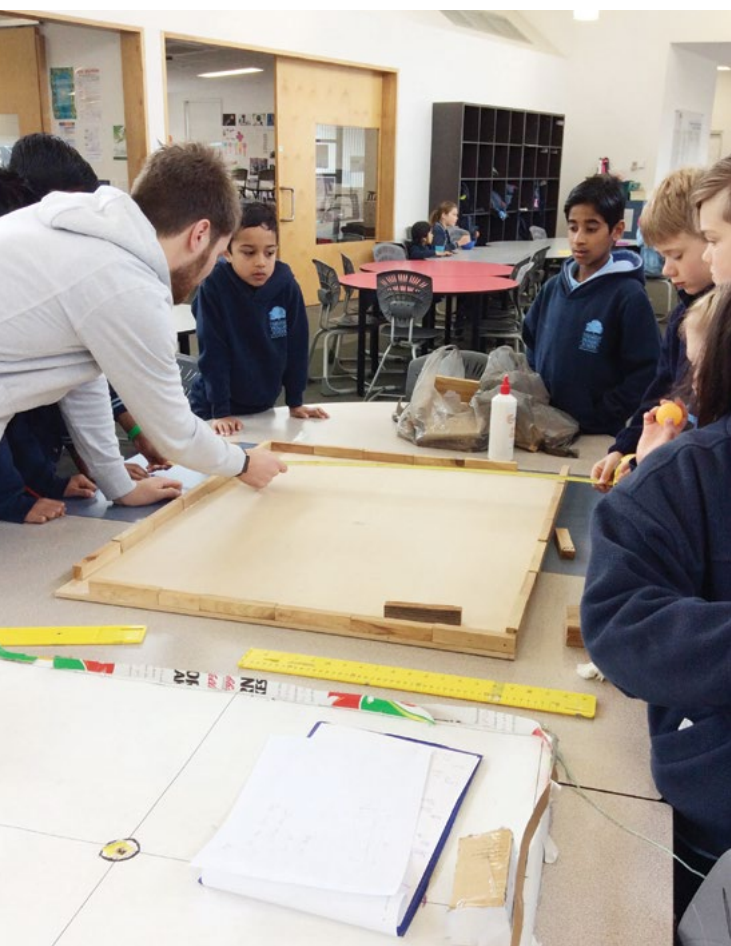
Can you tell us a little about your service?

We're a school-based service and are licensed for 100 children per session. We have 15 awesome educators that are all fully qualified or studying. Our educators only work at Vermont Primary School – this gives the children continuity in their day and creates a family-friendly atmosphere. We access Inclusion Support from the Victorian Inclusion Agency and can have up to nine children with additional and high-support needs on any given day. Some of the children with additional needs come from other schools for vacation care simply because they feel that they can belong at Vermont.

How do you approach program planning?

Our main focus is engaging the children as much as possible in making decisions about their program. We also look at what the educators can offer through their hobbies and experiences. We have an A-frame permanently in our junior room for the children to put their ideas on, as well as a suggestion box for the children and their families.

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During our Recycle Week, some of the older boys wanted to make a games table out of a large box dropped off by one of the parents. They worked on it all week and played with it for several more. When it became worn out, they decided that they wanted to make a sturdier games table. So with a bit of help, and off-cuts of timber from one of their grandparents, the children have been working on this in the mornings before school.

We also get our ideas from just listening. For example, one mother would always say 'make good choices' to her son as she was dropping him off. I asked him why, and he told me it was because he made 'dumb choices' sometimes. I thought about this and wondered about how our service as a whole could work together on 'making good choices.' We came up with a long-term project in the form of a large scrabble-style board with words that the children created from the phrase 'making good choices.'

Can you talk about how you've embedded sustainability in your program?

We pride ourselves on the use of recycled and upcycled goods. For our outside space, we collected truck tyres and old sleepers from the assistant principal's parents' farm to build a wall and asked Bunnings for some old pallets to make couches. We re-used bricks from the school entrance upgrade to create a border for a 'fairy

garden.' Old wheelbarrows have been transformed into flower beds and old bicycle wheels have been used for climbing plants.

Our scarecrows are made from recycled bits and pieces and were put together by parents and children at one of our regular working bees. Our OSHC families and educators always want to help out – they keep an eye out for our chickens on the weekends too!

What does the outdoor space add to your service?

Our garden is very important to our children and families. The children go there every day to water the plants, pick produce and collect eggs from our chickens – Marshmallow, Sooty and Milkshake (yes, the children named them!).

Our children, families and educators actively research what to grow, when to plant and what to cook.

We include the children in the day-to-day care of the garden. They are allowed to make a mistake – everyone drops an egg some time in their life!





We use our garden produce in afternoon tea and vacation care food preparation. We also sell produce to the school community who are very supportive of our endeavours. This helps to pay for things like chicken feed.

Last year we had a visit from ABC gardening guru Costa Georgiadis. He was so passionate about his work – the children were in awe. Costa was exceptional with our children with additional needs, giving them a lot of time and explaining things to them in a way they could understand.

Do you access support from your local community?

We have a great relationship with Maree, our local community support lady from Bunnings. Maree comes to after school care and vacation care a few times a year. Bunnings supplies everything to us free of charge and Maree loves to show the children craft ideas as well as what and when to plant.

For some of our children with additional needs, these sensory experiences are calming but exciting at the same time. They love to smell and feel the plants. Touching the root systems, leaves and flowers and getting their hands dirty when they are replanting is special to see.

Some children with additional needs have trouble expressing themselves, but when they are in the garden or with the chickens, they are more engaging and vocal.

Support from your local Bunnings is easy to apply for and it's free and extremely helpful.

Cooking is a highlight of your program – can you tell us a little about that?

We love to cook at OSHC and vacation care. We have made pasta sauce with our tomatoes and herbs from our garden as well as cakes and biscuits to sell back to the school community. Suggestions are put into a book so educators and the children can reflect on ways recipes can be adjusted to accommodate dietary requirements and diverse cultural backgrounds.

We also sell our own eggs, seedlings and veggies at our 'mini market.' The money raised goes back into our needs for the garden and feeding our chickens.



Sustainability is important for us in the kitchen – boxes, jars, cartons and yoghurt containers are used for art, while food scraps go to the chickens and the garden compost.

Earlier this year, your service presented at our sell-out Inclusion Expo in Doncaster. What was that experience like?

Well, I was very nervous but very honoured to be invited to speak. I sat down with the children and educators and told them what I was doing. We talked about what our OSHC does to make a difference to our school and community. Our Inclusion Professional, Marsha Mushonga, also spent time with me, talking about our program and ways we include all children. The children and educators helped me collect the photos and what I was going to say, hence when I said that we have '15 awesome educators': that came from the children. It was personally a positive reflection of where our OSHC is heading in the future and what we feel we are doing well now.

To give a child a voice is to give them a feeling that they matter.

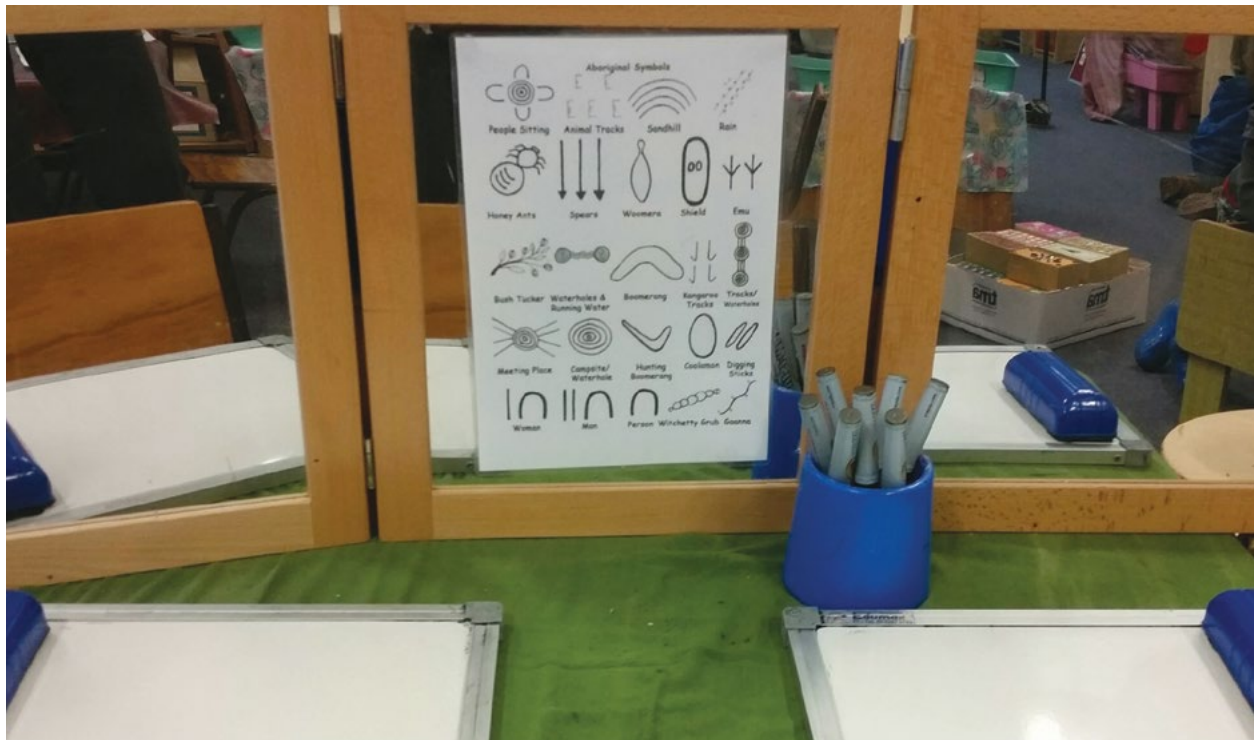
Where to from here?

Last year we were given an Exceeding rating in recognition of all our hard work. We are an OSHC family and will continue to celebrate who we are and where we come from!



About Vermont Primary School OSHC

This school-based service in Melbourne's eastern suburbs offers before school, after school and vacation care. It recognises the importance and value of play in middle childhood and includes a wide variety of activities that are designed to enhance each child's social, physical, emotional, recreational, intellectual and creative development needs, regardless of gender or ability.



Good yarn

Yea and District Children's Centre reveals why it was inspired to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the program



This story begins back in mid-2017 when – through the enrolment process – a new child and family to the service identified as Aboriginal. Inclusion Professional Jane Toop speaks to Centre Director Leanne Jonson and Kindergarten Teacher Pam Usher about what happened next.

Where did your journey begin? What inspired your service to explore connections to Aboriginal culture?

Upon the enrolment of a new child within our service and the family identifying as Aboriginal, we began further investigations into the exploration of the Indigenous culture within our community and the lands that our centre is placed upon. In 2016, a team of educators from our service travelled to Darwin for a professional development conference. This experience inspired us to embrace Indigenous culture, prompting interest among the greater educator team.

Our aim is to ensure that we provide an experience with an Indigenous focus every day within the children's program.

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At first, this was daunting but we gained permission from the Indigenous presenters at the professional learning event. This has given our educators the confidence to go ahead and provide experiences for the children, gather further natural resources and provide visual signs of Indigenous culture within our room environments.

How did you connect with your local Aboriginal community? What process or conversations did you have?

Through our day-to-day conversations with our new family, we discovered one family relation was actually an Aboriginal Elder, Aunty Lee Healy. We spoke to the child's mother who gave us a business card for Aunty Lee and encouraged us to contact her directly. We contacted Aunty Lee and arranged for a suitable time for her to visit our service and share the many different aspects of Aboriginal culture with the children. At the time, our service was in the process of developing an art show to raise funds for critically endangered animals through Healesville Sanctuary. In discussions with Aunty Lee, we decided to incorporate an Indigenous focus to the art show. Aunty Lee designed one piece of artwork for the centre children to complete.

Tell us about the art show experience for your service – where did this lead?

Aunty Lee visited the centre to talk to the children about Aboriginal art. She spent time with them, looking at Aboriginal artwork, discussing styles, colours used and the meanings behind the images. Aunty Lee completed an artwork for the children and worked alongside the educators to guide the children in painting in this style. Our children completed three pieces of art, which were auctioned to the parents within our service community. The artworks were donated back to the centre and these now hang proudly in our foyer, welcoming our connections to our children and community.

The funds raised from the art show were donated to Healesville Sanctuary to support critically endangered animals. An excursion was organised for the children and educator team to personally deliver the funds to the Healesville Sanctuary staff. This process made it more meaningful to all children. A portion of the funds raised was utilised to purchase Indigenous resources to support the children's programs and further embed Indigenous culture within the whole service on a daily basis.



Aunty Lee has again visited our service to share storytelling of her possum skin rug as well as numerous tapping sticks, woven bowls and artworks. We have a set of Indigenous animal cards in our programs, where each child has chosen an animal to represent through their own artwork. These are valued in the children's learning journals alongside all aspects of the individual child's learning opportunities.

What conversations have you had with families and your local community during this journey?

Families were very excited about Aunty Lee's visit, which involved the whole service, from our babies through to our kindergarten children. Families embraced the opportunity for their children and our service to embed Indigenous culture within all aspects of the children's programs. They are pleased that the history and culture are real, live and still represented within our community.

What practices are now embedded in your service and children's programs?

We acknowledge the Taungurung community and their land each day. We say with our children: 'We would like to acknowledge the Taungurung people, the traditional owners of the land on which we learn and play and pay our respects to their Elders both past and present.'

We have purchased many resources that support our day-to-day program. We have an Indigenous artwork matching game, soft felt finger puppets, children's storybooks and visual signs to explore the meanings behind the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and Aboriginal symbols. These resources are freely available for the children to explore on a daily basis, increasing their understanding and knowledge of Indigenous culture. Our educators utilise the natural resources available around us, such as paperbark from local trees and ochre, to provide opportunities to discuss with the children how people before us could communicate with one another.

We are now very aware of celebrations and significant events, such as Sorry Day, and have the confidence to embed these within our programs.

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Your Strategic Inclusion Plan as well as reflective conversations with your Inclusion Professional, Jane Toop, have also been important. How have these opportunities for reflection been of benefit?

The reflective conversations open up areas of thinking to support our whole program, triggering supports and ideas from our own thoughts and knowledge to continually build upon our practices. The Strategic Inclusion Plan is a tool that supports our management to empower educator teams to grow and acknowledge the strengths within our teams and extend on inclusive practices. It helps us to dig deeper – without this tool, your service review may be shallow. It allows us to expand the area we are looking at and prompts us to reflect on our current service practices and develop further best practice opportunities to support our educators, families and children.

Do you have any tips for services looking to make meaningful connections with their local Aboriginal communities? What advice or lessons do you have to share?

Initially, our main concerns were that we were unsure how to begin and what was appropriate. The advice we would give other services is that by attending professional development workshops and through

ongoing discussions with our families, we gained the confidence to utilise our resources and begin meaningful experiences for the children. From the professional development training, the Indigenous community provided permission for our service to use what they were teaching us.



About Yea and District Children's Centre

Nestled in the rural township of Yea, within the Murrindindi Shire, this centre offers a four-year-old kinder program, a three-year-old kinder program and a multi-aged long day care program for children aged six weeks to six years old. To learn more about this service, which has an Exceeding rating in all seven Quality Areas, visit www.yeadcc.com.au





How to support refugee children and families in your service

Accessing education and care in a new country can be daunting, especially for refugees with a language barrier and emotional trauma. Here are some practical strategies to help you welcome, support and connect with these vulnerable families.



Foundation
House

Goals

Restore safety, enhance control, reduce fear and anxiety

Strategies

Strategies for working with infants and children

- Warm welcomes and farewells
- Stay calm to help others to regulate their emotions
- Create or maintain a structured routine – display visual reminders of routines and minimise changes in the room
- Allow a little extra time
- Fully support all changes and transitions (even the minor ones within the day)
- Talk to children about their emotions – labelling, reassuring that they're 'safe,' sympathising/acknowledging
- Give choices – empower children and support the choices they make, reinforce with visual cues
- As much as possible, explain, give choices and always ask permission of child (and parent) before acting
- Cultural competence:
 - Have photos, objects, toys and practices that reflect families' backgrounds and children's interests
 - Learn and use some simple words in the language of the child

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Strategies for working with families

- Smile!
- Sit and listen – be available
- Provide information in home language or simple language; get the assistance of bilingual staff and/or interpreters where needed
- Support families to complete forms and understand processes
- Be family-centred and respect cultural practices
- Minimise staff changes to build up trust
- Establish shared goals with the family
- Coach and ask the parent to do/lift/explain to the child rather than doing it yourself
- Respectfully repeat information in a variety of ways, patiently over time; prepare families for change using simple language
- Understand that families may not understand health screenings
- Learn/be interested in their culture – ask for help in understanding the differences
- Cultural competence:
 - Be curious about and respect health and parenting practices
 - Have photos and objects that are familiar to families
 - Know about celebrations and festivals, with some acknowledgement at the service
 - Ask about language and enthusiastically support bilingual practices with children
 - Learn and pronounce names, greetings, recipes, etc.

Goals

Restore attachment and connections to others, offer emotional support and care

Strategies

- Take every opportunity to strengthen the attachment between children and carers
- Acknowledge families' expertise (e.g., being bilingual, being able to teach professionals about culture, giving directions for home visit, etc.)
- Develop trusting relationships and partnerships with families
- Explore what was meaningful in their home country – child-rearing, cultural practices, relationships, education/work
- Start where people 'are at' and build upon that (e.g., ask about traditional baby practices, acknowledging that wisdom then respectfully suggesting what might be new)
- Be mindful of different education and literacy levels using culturally appropriate visuals (knowing some people may be highly educated although their English may not yet be good)
- Ensure referrals to other services/programs are highly supported and careful
- Build on the opinions/advice/wisdom of family members who are overseas (possibly very involved and influential)
- Provide experiences for families (such as excursions, groups and info sessions with interpreters) and seek their input
- Introduce families to other families whenever possible (with permission), suggesting some things they have in common
- Link newly arrived families with local Refugee Health Nurse as well as maternal and child health

Goals

Restore meaning and purpose to life, and a sense of future

Strategies

- As a professional, read widely (about the communities, trauma-informed practices, new research, world events)
- Celebrate diversity – celebrations, cultural/religious beliefs, festivities (that reflect the diversity of your community)
- Invite families' input into programs – share interests, culture, experiences, music, literature (and not only food!)
- Support and mentor families so they can take on volunteer roles
- Offer appropriate free resources such as books, educational toys and equipment
- Use photos to demonstrate learning and to identify children and parents
- Constantly remind yourself that all families are doing the best they can with the 'resources' they have

Goals

Restore dignity and value, reduce excessive guilt

Strategies

- Introduce families to other services to broaden their networks and interests e.g., library, community hubs, neighbourhood houses, recreation activities
- Be very accessible at times that suit families
- Have calm, quiet areas in the service, understanding that too much printed material might be overwhelming for anyone with low literacy
- Identify the strengths you see in each family and reflect this back to them
- Ask for help from other professionals and from families
- Be curious about how 'family' is understood, perhaps expecting a non-individualistic worldview
- Ask about the aspirations of everyone in the family
- Continue asking about how everyone in the family is going
- Reflect upon and check all your assumptions.



About Foundation House

Foundation House provides services to advance the health, wellbeing and human rights of people of refugee backgrounds in Victoria who have experienced torture or other traumatic events in their country of origin or while fleeing those countries. To learn more, visit www.foundationhouse.org.au



Q&A with Faye Sakaris

Inclusion Professional
Faye Sakaris is a
passionate advocate for
children and families
on the margins



Tell us about your role...

I'm an Inclusion Professional at Community Child Care Association where I predominantly support services in the City of Darebin.

What is your background and how did you come to be an Inclusion Professional?

I've worked in children's services for over 30 years. My qualifications are in early childhood as well as in community development. I've always loved being around children and working with them. I've worked with children in a variety of different settings including long day care, vacation care and out of home care where I supported children from vulnerable backgrounds. I have a passion for social justice and equality for all, especially people on the margins. This role fits my values and is very close to my heart and passions. I started in the role of Children's Services Resource Development Officer in the '90s (this position was similar to the Inclusion Professional role) and have continued ever since!

How has your upbringing influenced your career?

My upbringing has had a huge influence on my career. Having experienced inequality – particularly being female in the family – has given me a strong passion for gender equity and equal rights for all, especially women and girls. The strong gendered roles in my upbringing, the strict ways of behaving and codes of conduct led me to actively rebelling against these beliefs.

Disability was not seen favourably in my upbringing, resulting in me being fearful as a child whenever I saw anyone with a disability. This has shaped me to become an advocate for people on the margins, to ensure equal rights for all.

Having parents from a culturally and linguistically diverse background has given me a passion and lifelong love of learning about other cultures and different ways of 'being' in the world.

Can you describe a typical day?

I don't have a typical day – they always vary! Some days I have 2–3 visits in the one day offering different types of support to services. I provide program support to educators – this involves spending time in their room, observing the environment and helping them to reflect on their practices, as well as encouraging them for the positive work they are doing. I'm often in meetings with staff teams, helping them develop a Strategic Inclusion Plan to assist with inclusion, and supporting them to follow best practices. This also involves challenging educators to think differently about their practices and beliefs.

At times, I assist coordinators with the Inclusion Support Portal, helping them to submit Inclusion Development Fund applications.

What are some of the greatest lessons you've learned?

To persist when faced with difficulties and challenges, and being pleasantly surprised with the outcomes! To look for the positives in a negative situation.

What do you love most about what you do?

Seeing children with additional needs being supported and included in services that are welcoming – just seeing them be able to participate in the program with their peers. Being there as educators develop greater confidence in working with children with additional needs and challenging behaviours, and knowing I have played a part in this, gives me immense satisfaction!

I'm constantly learning – this makes my job interesting, satisfying and gives me joy! I love seeing and hearing about all the positive work that many educators and services are doing – their commitment is commendable!





Quick guide: NDIS vs ISP

Not sure how the NDIS
links with the Inclusion
Support Programme?
Here's everything you
need to know...

NARELLE McNAUGHTON
Inclusion Professional,
Community Child Care Association



The **National Disability Insurance Scheme** (NDIS) is a new system to fund people with a disability or children with a developmental delay or disability to access disability supports. The NDIA is the National Disability Insurance Agency. They work with eligible families to access NDIS support.

For families of children aged zero to six, the NDIS has developed the **Early Childhood Early Intervention** (ECEI) approach to acknowledge that young children have different needs to adults. NDIS provides ECEI support through ECEI partners who, together with families, work out what support a child and family may require. The ECEI partner will either support a family to progress through NDIS to access disability funding or will refer to community supports.

The NDIS is both for children who have received funding previously or have never received funding before.





The NDIS is very different from the **Inclusion Support Programme (ISP)**. The NDIS enables families to access support to meet their child's **individual** learning and development goals, while the Inclusion Support Programme aims to support **all** children enrolled in education and care settings (such as long day care, family day care and outside school hours care) to meaningfully and actively participate in the program.

Inclusion Professionals at the Victorian Inclusion Agency (VIA) work collaboratively with staff in education and care services to support them to reflect on their inclusive practices.

Inclusion Professionals can also work with services as they travel the journey of learning about NDIS and develop new relationships with ECEI partners and other support providers such as community health services.

Inclusion Professionals engage with education and care services that support families with a range of diverse and complex needs, often guiding them to navigate the changing landscape of support services surrounding education and care.

Inclusion Professionals will work with services to:

- ✓ Identify who the ECEI partner or Local Area Coordinator is in their area, when the NDIS is rolling out, and how to refer families
- ✓ Assist in clarifying when to refer families of children with a range of needs to NDIS or other community support services
- ✓ Link services to tools to support families to access NDIS
- ✓ Develop relationships with local support providers and use them as a resource
- ✓ Explain and clarify the differences between NDIS and the ISP, and clarify the differing roles and responsibilities
- ✓ Clarify the difference between Inclusion Development Fund and Innovative Solutions funding, which are **service supports under the ISP**, and NDIS funding, which **supports individual children** to achieve individual goals in a range of settings
- ✓ Reflect on barriers to inclusion and develop strategies to address these in the service
- ✓ Discuss how education and care services can work in partnership with specialist support services while meeting the needs of all children and educators.

Useful links

For information about NDIS eligibility requirements, visit www.ndis.gov.au > People with disability > Accessing the NDIS

To find your local NDIA provider, go to www.education.vic.gov.au > Early childhood > Children with additional needs > Intervention services > ECIS regional services



Koorie kids with special needs

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Koorie children with
disability face severe
disadvantage – this is
how you can help





Koorie children with disability and their families are amongst the most severely disadvantaged and disempowered members of the Victorian community.

Part of the work that the Early Years Unit at the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) does is to improve access and equity in education for Koorie children with disability – and to support their families and community members to engage in culturally responsive programs, services and assistance. We know that services that recognise and accommodate Aboriginal values are more likely to be successful, resulting in improved outcomes for Koorie children with disability and their families.

In 2017, the *Australian Government Plan to Improve Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with Disability* (the Plan) was released, with the intention of driving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, their families and carers. It will do this by addressing the cultural barriers and disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people with disability. The Plan identifies five key priority areas for action. One of these is education, with the aim of achieving 'an inclusive, high-quality education system that is responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with disability.'

In the area of disability, Koorie children who are deaf and hearing impaired are particularly vulnerable.

Ear diseases and hearing loss among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been estimated at as much as ten times the rate among other Australians.

Although Indigenous deaf sign languages are some of the oldest in the world, they are vastly different from Auslan or Signed English, which can leave Koories who are deaf feeling isolated.

Aboriginal sign languages are very different from Auslan because they are more culturally bound. The signs are less obvious and less iconic, and their origins are cultural and ceremonial, addressing for example taboos on speaking, facilitating hunting or communicating women's and men's business. Therefore, Aboriginal sign languages are perceived very differently by someone using Auslan, because they can't easily capture what is being said.

These higher rates of hearing loss and differences between sign languages have knock-on effects in early years education and beyond. Koorie children who are deaf and hearing impaired face serious issues with mental health, trauma and fair access to mainstream services – affecting attendance, participation, comprehension and, consequently, overall educational experience and outcomes.

Therefore, it is vital that there is an increase in the awareness of educators and carers to recognise possible hearing problems in Koorie children.

Currently, under Community Service Obligations (CSO) with Australian Hearing, free hearing services are available for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

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Services offered include hearing tests and fitting of hearing aids; support for education services where many children have hearing problems; hearing health meetings with community members; and hearing health training for healthcare workers.

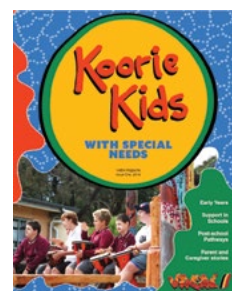
A holistic approach to learning can be achieved through strengthening coordination of health, education and disability planning, and support for Koorie communities and families. This includes supporting Koorie families to develop a comprehensive plan to take to their children's teachers – as well as to relevant professionals within the health and community sectors. Such planning encourages teachers to implement a tailored approach that will contribute to ensuring the needs of individual Koorie children are met. A tailored approach should provide information, raise awareness and educate families on disability and support services more broadly. It should also incorporate the modification of teaching practices and curriculum (e.g., involving the direct teaching of listening skills, providing visual cues to support language and including Koorie resources).

An example of a Koorie resource that educators can use with Koorie children who communicate through sign language is *Auslan & Yorta Yorta Language*. This book was written by Auntie Merle Miller who is a Yorta Yorta woman, mother, grandmother, sister, auntie, cousin, friend and community member. Auntie Merle has worked as a teacher, child care educator, community development officer, emotional and spiritual wellbeing support worker, and, more recently, as a writer. She wrote *Auslan & Yorta Yorta Language* specifically to educate community members that no matter what your language is, whether it be signed or spoken, you can still learn cultural language. However, its uses extend to the classroom.

Other resources include the *Koorie Kids with Special Needs* radio program, which aired on 1503 AM 3KND. This show is about talking to parents and caregivers of Koorie children who have special needs, as well as to people working in the field of disability, about the range of programs that are available for Koorie children and their families. Although *Koorie Kids with Special Needs* is not running this year, previous shows can be accessed via 3KND's podcast link on their website (www.3knd.org.au > News & events > Podcast).

VAEI has also produced a *Koorie Kids with Special Needs* magazine, focusing completely on the support available for Koorie children and young people with a disability and/or special needs. It is a magazine for families, community members, educators and anyone else who is interested in finding out more about programs, services, and assistance available. The first edition of this magazine was published in 2015 and can be accessed via VAEI's website (www.vaei.org.au > Support > Resources for schools and families > Resources for parents and carers > Koorie kids with special needs).

VAEI is very appreciative of all the Koorie parents and disability support professionals who regularly and generously share their knowledge. We endeavour to promote the great work that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations are doing to support Koorie kids with special needs because we know that being a parent and/or educator of a Koorie child with special needs adds some extra challenges. However, with the right assistance, Koorie children can thrive and achieve the best education outcomes possible.





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Community Child Care Association, KU Children's Services and Yooralla are working toward the vision that all Victorian children can meaningfully and actively participate in an education and care service of their family's choice in their community

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