

Early Years Services – QA6.1 Access and Inclusion

TRIM Reference: D15/16286 Due for Review: 3 April 2025
Responsible Officer: Coordinator Early Years

Purpose

Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services acknowledge the need for inclusive programs and services based on children's rights and social justice principles. The right to fair and equal treatment regardless of age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, languages spoken, cultural background, disability, additional needs or any other circumstances. We recognise differences as well as similarities in people and respect this; not just in the delivery of Services, but in promoting respect for all people in the wider community. There is a commitment to practical participation of children with additional needs.

To ensure equality of access to Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services without discrimination, as set out by government legislation and defined within the scope of the Priority of Access Guidelines, (as outlined in the *Early Years Enrolment Policy*); and to ensure that affiliated support agencies and services are utilised to provide maximum support for families and children with additional needs.

To support the vision of the Marrung Aboriginal Education plan (2016 – 2026) and work towards the outcomes by embedding the priority areas and actions.

To promote gender equality in our services and in our community through doing gender and equality impact assessments on policy, programs and services.

Policy Principles

Evidence of link to National Quality Standards: 1.1.5, 3.1, 6.1, 6.3
Victorian Children's Services Regulations 2020
Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016 - 2026
Disability Standards for Education 2005
Disability Discrimination Act 1992
Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (VIC)
[Gender Equality Act 2020](#) (the Act)
Victorian Child Safe Standards 2022

Scope

This policy applies to Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services staff, volunteers, students, children and their families accessing the Services.

Policy

- Guided by the aforementioned principles in relation to cultural competence, Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services will be culturally inclusive in the provision of services. Children develop understanding and acceptance of people by learning about and experiencing the everyday cultures and lifestyles of a variety of groups in society.
- Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services waiting list, enrolment, booking and orientation practices reflect inclusion and equity of access.
- Children in Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services have access to a range of activities according to individual need and are not denied access for reasons of culture, gender or ability.

- The Services reflect the experiences, knowledge and skills of all participants i.e. families, children, staff and educators.
- Staff and educators work in partnership with families to address issues when they arise and plan for positive outcomes. The shared responsibility for the child's welfare is based on mutual respect and aims to enhance the individual child's development. Records about the child, including relevant medical history, special requirements (e.g. culture, religion, food requirements) are critical in planning for the child's needs whilst in the service. Families will be provided with opportunity to share and contribute to service decisions.
- Professional Development: Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services will ensure that staff and educators are provided with the required professional development and resources to enable them to provide community inclusive practice.

Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years staff, educators, volunteers and students will:

- Promote the Early Years Services to community groups as an inclusive service.
- Actively support and implement a range of strategies to value human rights, to counter stereotyping, institutional and personal racism across all cultures and nationalities.
- Build awareness of gender stereotyping and encouraging respectful relationships in young people by providing a variety of resources and materials, which give balance of gender roles, attitudes and expectations.
- Develop communication strategies with families to ensure cultural and linguistic differences do not restrict access to the services.
- Support staff/educators of CALD backgrounds in valuing the diversity, which they bring to the program.
- Ensure that discussions are held about cultural practice with families seeking to use their service.
- Undertake discussion with families (and record) the cultural and / or religious events that the family celebrate and how they are celebrated; celebrations and other education sessions the family would prefer their child not be involved in, and how the family would like the service to handle this. This discussion (and record of) is also to include any cultural / religious dietary requirements in relation to food preparation and food consumption.
- Support staff and educators in developing programs and experiences which reflect the diversity of all cultures, and abilities.
- Ensure all children have opportunities to celebrate; value and learn from, and about, Australian culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including diversity of histories, cultures, languages, achievements and issues, past and present, as supported by the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016 -2026.
- Provide / be provided with information regarding resource agencies.
- Monitor education and care regularly to ensure that children learn about cultures other than their own without receiving stereotypical information.
- Build awareness of the abilities and contributions of people with disability and encourage to support inclusive attitudes which are welcoming and respectful of children and families with disability
- Ensure all children with disabilities are able to participate and contribute equally with all children.
- Ensure our services and information are accessible, flexible, and responsive to the needs of people with disability, their families and carers.
- Ensure the physical environment is accessible for people of all abilities.
- Ensure that discussions are held with families of children with disability about any additional supports or adjustments required seeking to use their service.
- For children with disability and additional learning needs, reasonable adjustments will be made where required.

Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect¹

Inclusion involves taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure that all children's experiences are recognised and valued. The intent is also to ensure that all children have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference.

¹ Victorian Early Years Learning Framework

Engaging with 'Vulnerable' Clients²

Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services

All children and families rely on community support – relatives, friends, neighbours and informal networks. They also rely on services such as maternal and child health, education and care services and medical services. Some children and families need additional services such as, drug and alcohol services, family violence support, or a parenting skills service, that are specifically provided for the most vulnerable in our community. Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services provide access to their services for all families with children in the municipality who are seeking relevant services; including the most vulnerable children and families in the community. Where Early Years Services are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child, all efforts are made to link the family into the required supports. A range of Early Years Services policies apply.

Access to Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services based on where families live and work

Where all legislative requirements are met, priority of access will be given to families who reside, or the parent/guardian works within, the Surf Coast Shire Council geographic area. Families wishing to access the Surf Coast Shire Council Early Years Services will be required to provide evidence that the family resides in; or a parent/guardian works within, the Surf Coast Shire Council geographic area.

Language Services – LanguageLoop

DEhave a contract with LanguageLoop (formerly VITS) to provide interpreting services. All interpreters are qualified and accredited, where National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accreditation is available.

For LanguageLoop bookings and details visit

<https://www.vic.gov.au/use-interpreter-early-childhood-education-services>

Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI)

Meli provide ECEI services to families with children under the age of 7, with concerns for the child's development, or if the child may have a disability, or if the child has a diagnosis of developmental delay or disability.

Further information can be found at <https://www.bcyf.org.au/early-years-services/early-childhood-early-intervention-services-ndia/>

Definitions

Cultural Competence:

Cultural competence, a practice in the Early Years Learning Framework³, is a complex concept that informs all aspects of the operation of an early childhood setting. It is defined as:

"A set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals that enable them to work together effectively in cross-cultural settings".

(Tong and Cross in VACCA 2008, quoted on p. 23, in the Educators' Guide to the EYLF, p. 21)

All seven Quality Areas in the National Quality Standard (NQS) require cultural competence, particularly those aspects of practice that relate directly to interactions, communication and relationships with children, families and colleagues.

Culturally competent practice include:

- being aware of your own culture and world views and how they influence your practice.
- respecting and valuing different ways of knowing, seeing and living.
- honouring differences.
- appreciating families heritage and culture, continually learning about different cultural practices and world views.
- supporting and encouraging children's developing cultural competence.
- learning to communicate in effective and respectful ways with people from diverse cultural backgrounds⁴.

² Providing Support to Vulnerable Children & Families – an information sharing guide for registered community service in Victoria, DHS, Vic, 2007

³ National Quality Standard Professional Development Newsletter no.42, 2012

⁴ (Adapted from EYLF, p. 16)

The term 'culture' encompasses not only ethnicity, but also other dimensions of identity and the ways we live our lives:

What is culture? Culture can be defined as 'what we create beyond our biology'. Not given to us, but made by us (Williams, in MacNaughton, 2003, p. 14). Using this definition, culture incorporates the scope of human diversity and ways of being, such as gender, ethnicity, class, religions, ability, age, and sexuality.⁵

Celebrations and Religious Events⁶

Each person has their own culture which they bring with them to the early years services setting. What one person may value or believe in may be very different to the next person, even if both are from the same cultural and linguistic background. For example; Christmas will have different meanings for different people, depending on their values, experiences and beliefs.

Social model of disability

According to [People with Disability Australia](#), the social model of disability suggests disability does not result from a person's impairment, but from an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. "The social model seeks to change society in order to accommodate people living with impairment; it does not seek to change persons with impairment to accommodate society. It supports the view that people with disability have a right to be fully participating citizens on an equal basis with others."

Access and Inclusion

Access is about removing barriers to participation by ensuring information, services and facilities are accessible to people with disability. (e.g. changing places more about access)

Inclusion is about making sure community attitudes are welcoming, respectful, and non-discriminatory to allow people with disability to engage equally in community activities and roles.

Access and inclusion for all children is "a human right (Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons 1975) a legal entitlement to all (*Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992*) and a core pillar of educational policy (Disability Standards for Education 2005)" (AITSL 2020)

UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

The United Nations [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD) 2006 aims to promote full enjoyment of all human rights by people with disability, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. Australia signed the convention in 2007 and ratified it in 2008.

1. The general principles of the CRPD are: Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;
2. Non-discrimination;
3. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
4. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
5. Equality of opportunity;
6. Accessibility;
7. Equality between men and women;
8. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

Article 7 relates specifically to children with disabilities and states:

1. States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.
2. In all actions concerning children with disabilities, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
3. States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right.

⁵ (DEEWR, 2010, p. 22).

⁶ *Exploring Celebrations in Children's Services, Community Child Care Victoria 2011*

Best Practice Principles in Early Childhood Intervention (ECIA)

Family-Centred and Strengths-Based Practice: is a set of values, skills, behaviours and knowledge that recognises the central role of families in children's lives. Family-centred practice is a way of thinking and acting that ensures that professionals and families work in partnership and that family life, and family priorities and choices, drive what happens in planning and intervention. Family-centred practice builds on family strengths and assists families to develop their own networks of resources – both informal and formal.

Inclusive and Participatory Practice: recognises that every child regardless of their needs has the right to participate fully in their family and community life and to have the same choices, opportunities and experiences as other children. All children need to feel accepted and to have a real sense of belonging. Children with disability and/or developmental delay may require additional support to enable them to participate meaningfully in their families, community and early childhood settings

Gender Equity

The [Gender Equality Act 2020](#) (the Act) was introduced in March 2020 following recommendations by the Royal Commission into Family Violence that the promotion of gender equality was required in order to reduce levels of family violence and all forms of violence against women.

The Act promotes gender equality by requiring the Victorian public sector to make meaningful progress towards gender equality in the workplace and in the community.

Surf Coast Shire Council is a defined entity under the Act and as a result has legal obligations to promote gender equality in our workplace and in the community through doing gender and equity impact assessments on policy, programs and services.

Gender and equity impact assessments (GEIA) help Surf Coast Shire Council deliver fair and equitable policies, programs and services that contribute to gender equality on the Surf Coast.

Related Procedure

Nil.

References

Related Surf Coast Shire Council and Early Years Services Policies

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|-----------|---|
| SCS-017 | Community Engagement Policy |
| SCS-049 | Community Development Policy |
| D15/32932 | Early Years Nutrition and Healthy Eating Policy |
| D15/16297 | Early Years Enrolment Policy |
| D15/16306 | Early Years Orientation of Children & their Families Policy |

Related Surf Coast Shire Council and Early Years Services Work Instructions and Forms

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|------------|---|
| D23/117625 | Kindergarten – Allied Health Referral Pathways – Flow Chart |
| D19/97184 | Inclusive Resource Catalogue – Kindergarten Programs |

Other References

Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics 2009
Understanding Inclusion, PSC National Alliance
Victorian Government Aboriginal Inclusion Framework 2010
Rainbow Tick Standards - Gay & Lesbian Health Victoria, 2013
Boschetti C, Stonehouse, A. (2006), *A Piece of Cake: Inclusive Practices in Early Childhood Settings*, Yooralla, Victoria.
Exploring Celebrations in Children's Services Self-Guided Learning Package, Community Child Care Victoria 2011
Education and Care Services National Law 2010
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
ACECQA National; Quality Framework Resource Kit
Childcare Service Handbook (Department of Education)
Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia 2009

My Time, Our Place.

Victorian Children’s Services Regulations 2020

Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan 2016 – 2026

SCS Access and Inclusion Plan 2014-2024

SCS Communications and Community Engagement Strategy

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, Department of Education and Training. 2016,

UN CRPD: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

Social model: <https://pwd.org.au/resources/disability-info/social-model-of-disability/>

Best Practice Principles in Early Childhood Intervention (ECIA)

<https://www.eciavic.org.au/documents/item/1419>

AITSL Inclusive education for children with disability <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/spotlight/inclusive-education-teaching-students-with-disability>

Document History

| Version | Document History | Approved by – Date |
|---------|------------------|--|
| 1 | Approved | General Manager Culture and Community – 1 April 2014 |
| 2 | Amendment/Review | Manager Aged and Family – 1 June 2015 |
| 3 | Amendment/Review | Manager Aged and Family – 11 August 2017 |
| 4 | Amendment/Review | Manager Community Strengthening - 9 August 2019 |
| 5 | Amendment/Review | Manager Community Strengthening – 16 June 2021 |
| 6 | Amendment/Review | Manager Community Strengthening – 3 October 2023 |