Community Kinders Plus
Background Review: Service Vision & Philosophy
2017

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Executive Summary

This document provides a basis for forming future directions in the vision of service delivery and the organisational philosophy statement of Community Kinders Plus (CKP), providing service delivery to a number of Kindergartens within the City of Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

The current services operated by Community Kinders Plus are:

Baden Powell

Banyan Fields

Bayport

Bayview

Bentons Square

Bowerbird

Delacombe Park

Erinwood

Frankston

Hastings

Kananook

Karingal East

Karingal PLACE

Montague Park

Mornington Park

Mount Martha House

Riviera

Somers

Tyabb

Wallaroo

William Road

In the process of collecting information for this review it was important to consider the many voices that make up the community of CKP which included staffing (educators, leadership and administrative staff), board members, families and children. This represents an authentic process in which community consultation was the first and foremost priority to see

what we are doing well, what areas we need to improve on and what aspects of innovation we need to consider.

SECTION 1: Introduction and Purpose of the Review

An initial strategic direction and associated planning documents were developed in consultation with experts, educators, families and the community in order to determine the feasibility and likelihood of the benefit of an early years manager (formerly known as *cluster manager*) in the location of Frankston municipality. With support from the then Department and Education and Early Childhood Development (now known as the Department of Education and Training (Victoria)), and key stakeholders in the region, Community Kinders Plus was formed. In the process of formation and in the very early days it was important to set goals and objectives for the organisation to prosper and make a significant impact upon the lives of the children and families in the City of Frankston. It was agreed that the organisation would be place-based in order to service a smaller location well as it continued to grow. CKP began with nine kindergartens ready to sign up to be managed and in four years, the organisation now has 21 services with many more keen to become a part of their organisation. With such rapid growth and complexity of infrastructure, a further review and strategic plan was sought in order to acknowledge the achievements of CKP so far, consider how CKP is meeting the needs of the community and ways that it can improve in service delivery now and in the future. Therefore, the purpose of this review was to:

- Review the strategic goals that had been previously endorsed

- Evaluate the level of achievement of these goals to date

- Consolidate the Vision of CKP and its stakeholders

- Address organisational concerns at varying levels of infrastructure

- Provide a voice for families and children as key stakeholders

- Provide a voice for the board, educators and staff as key leaders in the community

- Strengthen community links, research and high-quality practice in early childhood settings

SECTION 2: Frankston and Peninsula Profile

The City of Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula Shire are located in the southern metropolitan region of Melbourne, Victoria with Mornington situated about 70 kilometres from the central business district (CBD) and Frankston located within 60 kilometres. The area is diverse both in natural surroundings and demographics with pockets of affluence as well as areas suffering significant disadvantage. The Peninsula is home to many provincial businesses such as wineries and fresh produce with Frankston containing substantial industry as a city within its own right. For the purpose of this report and in the interest of the scope of services possible to the involvement of Community Kinders Plus, the area of Frankston will include the official municipal area including the suburbs of Seaford, Carrum Downs, Sandhurst, Skye, Frankston North, Frankston, Frankston South, Langwarrin, and Langwarrin South. In addition, the Mornington Peninsula will also include the official municipal area and therefore will include all suburbs from Mount Eliza to Portsea, to Cape Schanck, to Flinders, to Hastings to Baxter and all therein. The following table provides a comparison of statistical data based upon the most recent collection. Frankston has been separated into two areas namely Frankston and Frankston North as they experience some differences in statistical and lifestyle information. Please note maps in Appendix A as recorded by the Australian Electoral Commission ©.

Statistics sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014. See references.

Frankston: (ABS, 2016a)

Frankston North: (ABS, 2016b)

Mornington:(ABS, 2016c)

Details	Frankston (all)	Frankston North	Mornington Peninsula
Population	135,243	19,596	153,800
Housing mean average	$370,000 (2013)	$295,000 (2013)	$510,644
Unemployment rate	5.7% (2011)	8.7%	4.5%
Main employment industries	Retail trade, construction, health care and social assistance	Manufacturing, construction, retail trade	Construction, retail trade, health care and social services
Income average	$43,315	$39,507	$40,032
Working Age population	66.9%	65%	59.2%
Employed Persons	62.9% (2011)	53.9%	56.4%
Aging population	14.4%	17.5%	22.9%
Average age	37.8 years	38.3 years	44.6 years
Percentage of children 0 – 14 years	18.8	17.5%	17.9%
Number of children 0 – 4 years	9179 (increased from 8766 in 2010)	1316	8641
Number of Births (2014)	1795	274	1492
Number of Deaths (2014)	868	184	1422
SEIFA index	996.7	812.3	1022.5
Speaks Language other than English	10.2% (2011)	10% (2011)	5% (2011)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	0.8% (2011)	1.3% (2011)	0.7% (2011)

Figure 1 Demographics of Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Regions

Early Years Programs in the Area

The early years services in Frankston and Mornington Peninsula areas range in variety, complexity and utilisation. This includes a range of parent-led, supported or school/community-based playgroups, funded community-based kindergarten programs, long day care, Out of School Hours Care, Family Day Care, occasional care, early intervention services with assisted activity groups and programs associated with the Best Start location in Frankston. In Frankston, there are approximately three services operating under a not-for-profit scheme whilst the remaining approximate 32 services are private for-profit. In addition, there are a number of private Family Day Care operators with educators in the region, although this is difficult to ascertain due to privacy privileges. At least one Family Day Care Service is registered with Frankston location as their prime place of business. Frankston City Council operates one not-for-profit long day care service that also incorporates a funded kindergarten program for eligible children to access and is located next to a school supporting seamless transitions.

AEDC Results

In 2015, the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) was taken to determine the state of Australia's children in relation to their developmental status and progress. This census incorporates an index that determines the level of vulnerability in children within specific localities. It is separated by state, municipality and suburb and can be used to guide planning for future service delivery ensuring they are directly responsive to the needs of the immediate community. The following AEDC results indicate the developmental profile of children in the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula regions.

Children who are Developmentally "On Track" in Frankston and Mornington Peninsula regions (AEDC, 2016a, 2016b).

Area	Physical, health & wellbeing (%)	Social Competence (%)	Emotional Maturity (%)	Language & Cognitive Skills (school-based)	Communication Skills & General Knowledge
Australia	77.3	75.2	76.4	84.6	76.3
Victoria	80.9	78.6	77.5	84.7	78.8
Frankston	79.3	75.7	73.7	82.8	79.5
Frankston North	60.3	65.8	68.5	61.6	67.1
Frankston South	82.5	79.1	76.3	85.8	80.6
Langwarrin/Langwarrin South	87.0	76.4	69.2	86.3	84.8
Carrum Downs	83.6	76.7	76.0	77.8	82.9
Seaford	73.2	76.8	76.2	83.9	78.0
Skye	84.6	78.7	74.9	89.9	82.4
Mornington	79.1	75.7	76.0	87.5	76.7
Mt Martha	87.1	85.2	87.1	89.8	84.0
Hastings	63.5	61.7	63.5	63.5	67.0
Tyabb/Moorooduc	76.7	75.4	77.7	84.3	75.9
Balnarring/Balnarring Beach/Somers	80.0	70.0	90.0	80.0	80.0
Rosebud	79.8	74.2	77.4	81.5	76.6
Rosebud West	67.2	75.9	77.6	81.0	63.8

Table 1. AEDC Results - Children developmentally 'on track'

Children who are Developmentally "At Risk" in Frankston and Mornington Peninsula regions (AEDC, 2016a, 2016b).

Area	Physical, health & wellbeing (%)	Social Competence (%)	Emotional Maturity (%)	Language & Cognitive Skills (school-based)	Communication Skills & General Knowledge
Australia	13.0	15.0	15.3	8.9	15.1
Victoria	11.2	14.1	14.5	8.9	13.6
Frankston	11.6	15.3	16.9	9.7	14.7
Frankston North	12.3	21.9	23.3	16.4	17.8
Frankston South	12.3	12.8	13.3	10.0	13.7
Langwarrin/Langwarrin South	8.7	15.8	20.4	8.4	13.4
Carrum Downs	8.4	15.6	14.2	11.3	12.7
Seaford	15.5	15.5	15.5	8.3	16.7
Skye	10.6	11.7	19.8	6.4	14.4
Mornington	12.5	16.6	16.6	6.8	17.9
Mt Martha	7.0	10.9	10.9	7.8	13.7
Hastings	15.7	14.8	15.7	19.1	20.0
Tyabb/Moorooduc	17.1	9.8	7.3	7.3	22.0
Balnarring/Balnarring Beach/Somers	3.3	20.0	3.3	10.0	10.0
Rosebud	16.1	17.7	17.7	12.1	19.4
Rosebud West	25.9	13.8	8.6	10.3	25.9

Table 2. AEDC Results - Children developmentally 'at risk'

Children who are Developmentally "Vulnerable" in in Frankston and Mornington Peninsula regions (AEDC, 2016a, 2016b).

Area	Physical, health & wellbeing (%)	Social Competence (%)	Emotional Maturity (%)	Language & Cognitive Skills (school-based)	Communication Skills and General Knowledge
Australia	9.7	9.9	8.4	6.5	8.5
Victoria	7.9	8.7	8.0	6.3	7.6
Frankston	9.1	9.0	9.3	7.4	5.7
Frankston North	27.4	12.3	8.2	21.9	15.1
Frankston South	5.2	8.1	10.4	4.3	5.7
Langwarrin/Langwarrin South	4.3	7.8	10.4	5.3	1.9
Carrum Downs	8.0	7.6	9.8	10.9	4.4
Seaford	11.3	7.7	8.3	7.7	5.4
Skye	4.8	9.6	5.3	3.7	3.2
Mornington	8.4	7.8	7.4	5.7	5.4
Mt Martha	5.9	3.9	2.0	2.3	2.3
Hastings	20.9	23.5	20.9	17.4	13.0
Tyabb/Moorooduc	2.4	2.4	7.3	7.3	0.0
Balnarring/Balnarring Beach/Somers	16.7	10.0	6.7	10.0	10.0
Rosebud	4.0	8.1	4.8	6.5	4.0
Rosebud West	6.9	10.3	13.8	8.6	10.3

Table 3. AEDC Results - Children developmentally 'vulnerable'

Responding to the historical and current demographic of the regions is crucial in planning for the future of our children and families. Currently AEDC results indicate that:

- Children in Frankston North are almost three times more vulnerable in their physical development, language skills and communication with almost half of the children experiencing vulnerability in one developmental area.

- Children in Frankston South are less vulnerable across many domains than the state and national average. In saying this, there has been an increase in risk of vulnerability in children's social and emotional development in the area.

- Children living in Mornington also experience some diversity in their developmental progress in that some children experience little or no vulnerability in their language development yet also have seen an increase of risk of vulnerability in their social and emotional development.

- Furthermore, twice the number of children living in Hastings (also on the Peninsula) experience vulnerability in all domains with one third of the population of Hastings' children experiencing vulnerability in two or more areas combined.
- Children living in Rosebud West experience considerable risk of becoming developmentally vulnerable.

The strategic directions of Community Kinders Plus must match this level of diversity within the region it supports and therefore the following goals and strategies have been devised to begin progressing towards improving these results. This means that different early years services will need to focus upon different aspects in their teaching. For example, educators and services in Frankston North, Seaford and Hastings should have strong programs in supporting children's physical development. Meanwhile services in Frankston South and Langwarrin/Langwarrin South should incorporate programs that build resilience and efficacy where children are experiencing vulnerability in their emotional development. Each service should analyse their suburban profile as well as the children currently attending in order to plan ahead for responsive service delivery.

SECTION 3: Literature Supporting the Review

This review is timely as services begin to revisit their infrastructure, service delivery, viability and vision within the new Early Years Management (EYM) scheme (formerly known as Kindergarten Cluster Management (KCM). This section includes details relating to the historical emergence of KCMs/EYMs, the policy shift that has enabled more community involvement and emerging trends relating to EYM in Victoria.

What is "Early Years Management"

Early Years Management (EYM) is the current Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system in place in Victoria. It was developed to expand on the success of the previous system of Kindergarten Cluster Management (KCM) which had been in place since 2003 (VDET, 2016b). As in the KCM system the EYM system sees management of multiple preschools and kindergartens by one organisation, at least three preschools or kindergartens in rural areas and at least five in metropolitan areas (ASR, 2010). Recognising that since they have begun most KCM organisations had developed to serve the wider ECEC needs of their communities, the EYM system intended to officially recognise and support this endeavor (VDET). KCM organisations may take the form of local councils, local not-for-profit organisations or external organisations which can manage multiple kindergartens and preschools in several local government areas (ASR, 2010). The duties of the cluster organisation would be the employment of staff, the licence for the service and the financial management of the service (DEECD, 2008).

Why Early Years Management (Cluster Management) Governance Structures are Used

The aim when developing cluster management was to strengthen the management and delivery of community based kindergarten and preschool programs and to provide an increase in professional development for staff (VDET, 2016b). Prior to the introduction of KCM most kindergartens and pre-schools were managed by parent run committees. A review of Kindergarten Cluster Management by the Department of Early Childhood and Education Development (DEECD) (2008) found that these committees were under considerable pressure. The committee members struggled with the dual role of being both an employer and service user and that children, staff and parents suffered because of this (DEECD). The introduction of KCM was successfully able to alleviate this pressure, giving parents and guardians more flexibility in the ways they could participate in their child's experience (DEECD). Additionally, staff benefited from a more professional and stable form of employment. KCM also allowed for an increase in staff networking and skill sharing and promoted greater integration of ECEC into the wider community.

Challenges and Benefits of Early Years Management Governance Structure

The benefits of a cluster management system have been well documented. With the shift from independent committees, parents have less administration and management responsibilities and have an increased flexibility in the ways that they chose to interact with kindergarten and pre-school programs. They are no longer faced with the pressure of being both an employer and a service user (DEECD, 2008). Staff experience increased stability and consistency of employment and have access to increased professional support. There is an improved management of staff entitlements and greater opportunity for networking and professional development (VDET, 2016a). Services themselves can become more sustainable and benefit from having a single and consistent point of contact. The cost of materials for the service is able to be reduced through the advantage of bulk purchasing (ASR, 2010).

Challenges to the successful operation of a cluster management system have also been observed. Effective functioning can be impeded due to a lack of funds, resources, and organisational structures (DEECD, 2008). There may also be service delivery issues related to a lack of experience in the early childhood sector by the managing organisations. Specific issues which have been highlighted included difficulty in managing change in the kindergarten environment, having a limited engagement with local planning processes, and struggling to balance consistency across various services in differing areas while remaining locally responsive (DEECD). In 2010 research into the feasibility of transitioning to a system of cluster management for the Mornington Peninsula Shire identified several other potential challenges. It was found that unless there was unanimous support from all stakeholders in a kindergarten or preschool, this includes parents, staff, local council, and community members, then the transition would be too difficult to succeed (ASR, 2010).

Trends in Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia

The transition to the Early Years Management policy is a pillar of the Andrews Labor Government's commitment to make Victoria the Education State. As has been previously mentioned the transition to an Early Years Management policy is intended to strengthen and expand on the success of the Kindergarten Cluster Management policy that was first introduced in Victoria in 2003 (VDET, 2016b). This was followed by a national commitment by all Australian state and territory governments to improve on the quality and consistency of all education and care services. Following this, in 2012 the National Quality Framework (NQF) was commenced to solidify this goal. Containing three aligned and complimentary learning frameworks, the NQF was developed to spearhead the national goal for improved learning and care for all children (VDET). Importantly, it was designed to provide a shared language for educators and to foster the development of an integrated system that prioritises the needs of individual children and caters to their specific interests and experiences. The introduction of the Early Years Management policy is intended to facilitate the goals of the NQF and to recognise the broader role that cluster management organisations have come to play in their communities since their initial introduction in the early 2000s.

As indicated in the Early Years Management Policy Framework Part One (2016) as of 2015 over 80% of Kindergarten Cluster Management organisations provided additional services on top of kindergarten management. More than 50% provided long day care and out of school hours' care, more than 30% provided funded occasional care, greater than 10% provided supported play group, greater than 20% provided early childhood intervention services and greater than 40% provided maternal and child health services (VDET, 2016b). The diversity of services provided recognised the varying needs of children and their families in the community, and highlights that many children and families may make concurrent use of more than one service (Tayler, 2016).

The latest Productivity Commission Inquiry Report into Childcare and Early Childhood learning has outlined the recommended future goals for Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs. In particular, the commission recommends that going forward there be an emphasis on recognising that no ECEC type will be appropriate or affordable for all families and that a diverse and flexible system is therefore necessary (AGPC, 2014). Additionally, this system should be closely linked with schools, social services and health services. The Early Years Management program has been developed to meet these goals while ensuring the continual professional development of educators.

Issues with Quality ECEC Currently in Australia

The most significant issue within ECEC in Australia is that despite significant funding many parents and guardians report that they are unable to find the form of ECEC at a location, price, quality and hours that they want (AGPC, 2014). A 2014 report conducted by the Australian Government Productivity Commission (AGPC) into ECEC in Australia by the Australian Productivity Commission has found that despite having approximately $7 billion dollars in funding per year, which covers two thirds of total ECEC costs, many parents and guardians cannot find affordable ECEC in a location that suits them (AGPC, 2014). This has had the consequent effect of preventing many parents from re-entering the workforce following maternity leave or additional time spent out of the work force. While there are over 20 Australian Government assistance programs available they are poorly targeted and difficult for parents and guardians to access (AGPC).

How Early Years Management can impact upon Quality ECEC

The Productivity Commission's 2014 report into ECEC in Australia argues that the benefits of quality ECEC are indisputable. Easier transitions into primary school and better results on standardised tests throughout primary school have been connected to positive participation in ECEC programs (AGPC, 2014). Research has also indicated that basic custodial care, without a focus on learning and nurturing the development of the child, can have long term detrimental effects and is moreover a wasted investment (Tayler, 2016). The National Quality Framework is intended to ensure that all children receive more than basic custodial care while engaging with ECEC programs. The use of an EYM system enables services to better meet the goals of the NQF through collaboration and communication between services, continual training and development of staff, and ensuring

consistency between services to avoid certain areas becoming disadvantaged or lagging behind the wider community. Collette Tayler has argued that it is necessary to allow services discretion in how they meet the standards of the NQF, this reflects the complex and multilayered nature of the varied forms of ECEC in Australia and the diverse and expanding roles of cluster managed kindergartens and preschools in their communities (Tayler). The EYM system is at its core intended to increase participation in ECEC by children with higher levels of vulnerability and disadvantage (VDET, 2016b). The greater connection to the community, particularly with local council and health services, that comes with utilising a cluster management system makes it easier to identify children who may be missing out on ECEC in their community (VDET). This is necessary because the latest E4Kids Project study has found that low socio-economic areas have less availability of ECEC services and that what is available is often of a lower quality. The use of the EYM program is intended to rectify this disparity.

SECTION 4: The Review

Methodology

This review explored the current perspectives of educators, families and children of the three and four year old kindergarten programs offered at services operating under the early years management organisation, Community Kinders Plus (CKP). In particular it focussed upon the content and pedagogical practices that were important when engaging with children and the values and beliefs participants held around preparation for school and life. Included in this section were the participants' definition and perception of 'quality education and care' which included the concepts they had in relation to community partnerships, wellbeing of children and their families and what was most important for them. Also investigated were the participants' ideas about what future services might complement or provide additional support to children and families currently enrolled in a CKP service and whether this would include extracurricular activities, stronger links with allied health services or child care.

To support the gathering of data in a rigorous and unbiased manner, I have used a mixed-methods approach, focusing mostly upon qualitative data and utilising some quantitative data. Whilst many researchers use mixed methods to validate the quantitative data, Flick, Garms-Homolová, Herrmann, Kuck, and Röhnsch (2012) argue that mixed methods are not merely to validate but also to extend and deepen knowledge gained from the research. Gray (2014) Gray (2014) further explains that mixed methods enable "researchers to generalize from a sample to a population and to gain a richer, contextual understanding of the phenomenon being researched" (loc. 5425). In this case mixed methods were used within the data sets as well to provide opportunities for statistical evidence to be complemented by deeper explanations as participants felt compelled to give. Qualitative data was gathered at all points of collection times and formats which means that neither method was influenced by the other, and instead collected in an open-ended manner.

Methods

Mixed-methods research requires rigorous approaches to data collection that are attained through means specifically relevant to the research. In this case it was important to gather contextual evidence from families and educators in multiple modes both in face-to-face contact, online and through third party collection. An important note in relation to the collection of information from children details that the researcher did not engage in interviews with them, however instead coordinated an approach where the trusted educator of the child engaged in conversation to collect the data. This meant that the reliability of the data could be compromised by the collection methods of the educator, however this was weighed against the possible limitations that may have occurred should the research (an unknown stranger to the child) collected this information. Whilst human ethical applications were not made, the organisation was diligent in gaining parental approval for the child's voice to be captured within the review and engage in informal discussions with their trusted

educator to collect this data. This also included gaining permission from the child where it was explained to them what information would be collected, how it would be used and why.

The following engagement strategies were utilised to attract participation:

- Educators were emailed and reminded to complete the online survey.
- Families were emailed and communicated through tiqbiz relating to the different ways they could contribute
- Educators also displayed posters at their services and handed out brochures which detailed this information
- Many reminders were sent out to engage the community, including reminders relating to the forum night

Data was gathered from a variety of methods including the following:

- An online survey hosted by surveymonkey that was available for completion by participants from 20 May – 20 June 2016,
- An online collaborative forum hosted by wordpress and moderated by SNC Educational Innovations open for public consult from 20 May – 20 June 2016 although remained open until August due to non-attendance at the community forum,
- A public open forum held at the Ebdale Community Centre, 20 Ebdale Street, Frankston Victoria on 13 July at 7pm 2016,
- Written submissions from the general public,
- Individual interviews with volunteer participants from the Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula district, held confidentially by SNC Educational Innovations and were represented by 2 members of the CKP board, and
- Dialogue and or pictorial representations (pictures, drawings, paintings, artworks etc) from children.

The participants in the review included a range of stakeholders integral to the usage and delivery of early years services. This included families/parents, children, educators, management staff and board members. Numbers specific to the data collection are as follows:

1. Online survey participation: families *(n – 24),* educators *(n – 80)*
2. Online collaborative wordpress form *(n – 0)*
3. Open public form attendance *(n – 0)*
4. Written submissions from the public *(n – 0)*
5. Individual interviews with families *(n – 0)*
6. Individual interviews with board members *(n – 2)*
7. Dialogue with children and/or pictorial imagery or artworks *(n - 110)*
8. Online survey participation: Board members only (n - 8)

Method of Analysis

Thematic analysis was used as a method to code and formulate constructs from the data. The purpose of using this type of method was to ensure that meaning from the findings could be applied most appropriately to the recommendations in strategically planning for services and practices that best suited the community. Finding common threads of perception and/or concern, particularly from the viewpoints of the participants supported the rationale behind what improvements need to be made, practice of excellence that is to remain and values to be considered in future service delivery. Using a thematic analysis across the data sets also provided opportunities to track any themes that re-emerged which was then granted with heavier weighting as they had been reiterated through various data sets.

Findings & Discussion

The following details the findings from all data sets collected throughout the review. It has been coded and cross-referenced through Nvivo, ensuring that any statistical information from qualitative methods has not been doubly used. Where points have been raised repeatedly however, heavier weighting has been granted as the emphasis placed upon these aspects demonstrate their significant impact upon the lives of the participants (for example, learning through play, supporting children's interests, increasing developmental knowledge etc).

The themes that emerged from the findings revolve around key aspects that the participants of the study felt were important to discuss and emphasise. These have been separated into four overall categories to ensure that there is a clear understanding of both positive and negative aspects which include the following:

1. What <u>services</u> are <u>families currently using</u> and would like to use in the <u>future</u> that would be operated or facilitated by CKP?
2. What <u>content and pedagogical approaches</u> should be taken in relation to supporting children's learning and development should be considered and incorporated into the daily programs at kindergartens operated by CKP?
3. What is the <u>knowledge and skill capacity</u> as well as <u>professional attitude</u> of the current educator staffing at CKP?
4. What do the children of CKP kindergartens think about childhood and what do they think is important for early childhood environments?

Notes in the Findings

One kindergarten was not represented by the participants however it is not determined if this is because they did not participate in the study, or they chose not to disclose which kindergarten they were from. This kindergarten, however did have representation from parent input.

Eight kindergartens were not represented by the participants, however as only one participant chose to skip this answer it is likely that there were not actually representatives from these settings who participated.

PART 1: Service Utilisation by Current Families

Findings

Choice of Service Type

Most families had one child currently attending a service operated by CKP with 73% of families not requiring or using other services such as long day care or family day care at the same time. A very small proportion of families had two children attending a service.

In relation to consideration of the usage of other services should CKP offer it, approximately 35% of families indicated that they would use before/after/vacation care services with an equal amount unsure if they would or would not. Similar results emerged in relation to service selection so at this stage there is a large proportion of families either in favour of having additional services added to the current service delivery, or they are undecided at this time. See graph below.

If a service offered before, after and vacation care would this influence your preference during the enrolment process?
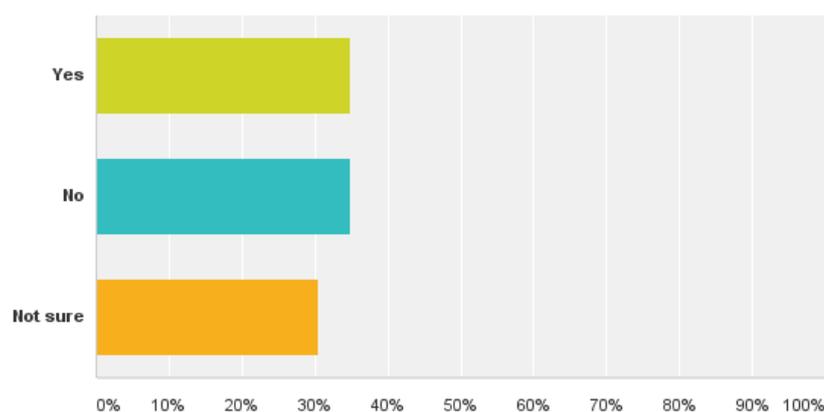
Utilisation of Sessional Kindergarten

Families indicated that sessional kindergarten provided an environment for their child to grow and develop with a strong focus upon developing numeracy and literacy skills as well as preparation for school. A very small proportion of families indicated that they did not know why they sent their children to kindergarten which indicates a possible need for family education in relation to the benefits

early childhood education bring to the current and future lives of young children. Interesting arguments also were brought forward regarding session times and levels of convenience or inconvenience as to how they had been structured. For example;

> Hours should be reviewed & aligned with local schools to allow parents easier kinder drop & pickups eg. Early or late start. Difficult fitting kinder around school drop off.
>
> (Parent Participant)

Support and Links through Sessional Kindergarten

A significant aspect of support and guidance that parent sought was relating to transition to school which appeared to be of highest priority to families. A further significant concern that parents had where they felt the service could be of help was in regards to supporting their child with positive behaviour guidance, understanding child development in the early years as well as providing links with allied health services such as speech therapy and psychology services.

Comments from the board were mixed in relation to service type and delivery with some wanting to consolidate the management of current services whilst others were keen to explore how other service type might attract more clientele and build financial growth to the organisation.

Discussion & Recommendations

Service Utilisation

From the results above we can ascertain that families are beginning to become interested in the possible service delivery that CKP could provide for them, now and in the future. Aligning with the literature, we can see that perhaps the families are choosing services in CKP because they currently do not need or cannot afford long day care services. The strongest reasoning for using a CKP service is to support their child in transitioning to school and build resilience and capability in their pro-social behaviours rather than finding a location for their child whilst they attend work. In saying this, longer sessions within the current structure of 15 hours do allow families the opportunity to return to part-time work or engage the child in two services such as sessional kindergarten plus long day care or family day care. Families make considerable savings when they do not have to have their child in full time care and therefore choose to continue using sessional kindergarten where they also feel their child benefits in terms of school readiness.

Additional and Possible Future Services (Recommendations)

In light of future trends of the Australian population and referring back to the discussion of literature, it is evident that change in service delivery may need planning for. Approximately half of Australia's children in the ages of early childhood attend long day care which means that parents in the future may not have the opportunity to choose sessional kindergarten as their first option due to the lack of hours of availability. Community Kinders Plus may need to consider that a substantial part of their market is not utilising sessional kindergarten due to the working needs of the family with more and more families entering the workforce each year now that there is access to universal services (i.e.

funded kindergarten programs) in long day care services. Despite this trend, child care fees appear to be increasing which places financial pressure upon families as well as tax-payers who are contributing to the funding of services through forms of child care benefit and the child care rebate.

Families also suggested that additional services should be available to support families such as language programs, playgroups and extra-curricular activities such as sports.

1. For Community Kinders Plus to consider piloting a before/after/vacation care program at two sites most likely to have demand for this service.

2. For Community Kinders Plus to consider restructuring some of their sessions to ensure that families are given options to return to work and therefore able to access longer days for their children.

3. For Community Kinders Plus to consider other programs that may enhance the learning for children and also connect communities, such as playgroups, music, language or sports groups that could be a 'user-pays' service. Surveys could ascertain demand for these services that could also be available to the wider community and therefore build community access.

PART 2: Content and Pedagogical Approaches

Findings

There are many aspects to consider in relation to content and pedagogical approaches to children's learning and development in the early years. The questions for this section focused upon determining what both educators and families felt about children's learning, how they learn, what sort of environments should be provide for them, how children should be taught and content to be considered for the curriculum. Key themes that emerged related to these topics with some families and educators differing in some respects and agreeing upon others.

How do children learn best and what should educators focus on?

The first graph relates to what educator participants believe are the best way that children learn. They were also provided with an option to provide a qualitative answer that was unrestricted in length. This has been added to give further insight into the approach to how children should learn.

88% of educators responded that children learn best through a combination of play and structured learning that includes intentional teaching. This strongly indicates that various styles of learning occur in early childhood and therefore teaching approaches should be varied to respond to these styles. Families also believed that play was important for children in early years settings but also commented that children should also be exposed to a curriculum that encourages building general knowledge and skills necessary for literacy and numeracy learning.

Educator comments:

> "Child centred environment with a focus on weaving children's interests with intentional teaching."

> "Role modelling skills and behaviour."

> "Social aspect as well as lots of different situations to negotiate. Learning and listening to other adults. Wide range if (sic) activities and lots of outdoor messy play. Creative outlet with lots of paint and bits n pieces to invent things. Lots of time for fun creative play."

Families' comments:

> "To learn through play"

"And to socialise with other children and feel supported in their learning and development before school"

"And also Preparation for school literacy, numeracy, and science even if its about wild life and enviroment studys..(sic) a little of every thing is good even 10 to 15 mins of each..."

What should children learn?

In terms of priority, families felt that the top three important aspects to be incorporated into early childhood programs are:

1. Helping children to learn how to read and write **(20%)**
2. Social development and skills in getting along with others **(14.29%)**
3. Emotional development and a strong self-concept and identity **(11.76%)**

Of least importance (top three) were:

1. Knowledge acquisition (knowledge about the world around them including animals kingdoms, people and culture, how things work, historical events, scientific concepts such as weather, space, etc) **(26.32%)**
2. Helping children to learn how to read and write **(15%)**
3. Knowledge and ability to live a healthy lifestyle (e.g. nutrition, health, physical activity & fitness) **(10%)**

It is interesting to note that helping children to learn to read and write featured in both the top three and bottom three which demonstrates a possible disconnect between families in relation to their common values and perhaps understanding of early childhood learning and development and pedagogy.

Educators and families were both asked to indicate the particular curriculum areas that should be of most importance to children. For the benefits of this study, the focus in the following answer relates to children in the funded four-year-old program. The top five priorities for educators were:

1. A Perceptual Motor Program (PMP)
2. Learning a language other than English
3. Literacy
4. Science, Technology and Sustainable Environments
5. Arts – Drama.

The top five priorities for families were:

1. Numeracy
2. Arts – Drama (of equal importance to numeracy)
3. Physical Education (including sports and fitness)
4. Literacy (which was equalled with Science, Technology and the Environment, and The Visual Arts)
5. Rest and relaxation education for wellbeing (e.g. mindfulness meditation, yoga or interpretive dance, etc).

Of least importance to educators were the following:

1. Community Awareness and Safety
2. Arts – Dance

whilst the least important to families were:

1. Arts – music
2. Arts – dance which also equalled with pre-literacy skills that did not involve teaching children to learn how to read and write (potentially indicating that they preferred their children had moved beyond pre-literacy skills and were indeed learning to read and write).

These results indicate that there is some discrepancy as to what educators and families believe to be important for children's content learning and therefore curriculum areas need to be carefully chosen to align with community values, whilst also some additional research of literature needs to be undertaken to ascertain how certain curriculum content benefits children's learning and life skills.

Some respondents had further comments to make about this question which indicated their values and thoughts about the learning that should occur in early childhood settings. Some educators felt that all areas should be considered for both age groups however with different levels of complexity. For example,

> "I believe every area can be applied to both age groups. But on a different age appropriate level
> and starting with easy at start of the year then gradually getting harder through to the end of the
> year , it is exciting to implement these areas in all learning areas , eralivant (sic) to the program
> that is being focused on at the time."
>
> (Educator Participant)

Families' further comments indicated that some preferred for children to learn through play and that children's interests were taken into consideration. For example,

> "Kindergarten should be about play. Children should be able to choose from a variety of
> activities that attract them."
> (Family participant)

> "All of the above should be touched on in early learning, but introduced through play, not
> structured learning."
> (Family participant)

This indicates that whilst families appear to focus strongly upon literacy and numeracy learning for their children, that the manner in which it should be taught is through play-based intentional teaching. Of interest is a unified priority of developing children's physical skills, yet 'Dance' which can also facilitate physical skills was considered of lowest importance by both educators and families.

What Pedagogical approaches should be used?
Teachers and educators were given a choice of well-known global pedagogical approaches that they felt best described their teaching practices and resonated with their own professional philosophy.

Respondents could also select 'other' to include discussion of other pedagogical approaches that were not listed. The three most preferred pedagogical approaches were *The Reggio Emilia Approach* **62.5%,** *Nature Kindergarten (Scandinavian Approaches)* **43.75%,** and *The Montessori Method* **21.88%.** Respondents included also that their approach to teaching was not formed from one theory or pedagogical understanding, but took on the view that many approaches contributed to high levels of learning and teaching.

Organisation of Learning Environments

Teachers and educators were also asked of their thoughts in relation to the type of learning environments that should be provided for children which ranged from selection of materials to visually appealing settings. Overwhelmingly a large proportion of respondents agreed that natural materials should be included throughout the environment which resonates strongly with their pedagogical approaches to favouring nature kindergartens. The concept of environment was also evident through many of their answers arguing for rich and inviting environments where children are inspired to engage and learn. This also resonates strongly with their preference to incorporate the Reggio Emilia Approach where the learning environment is considered the third teacher. Of equal importance to teachers and educators was that the environment was to be developmentally appropriate, responsive to children and provide a good balance of learning experiences. Of less importance was the need for high levels of technology, literacy and numeracy stimulating visuals (such as letters and numbers on display) or for the environment to be filled with artwork and colour. Instead, respondents felt that it was important to provide uncluttered and visually pleasing environments that were challenging but not over stimulating.

> A combination of the above but not too much that its over-whelming. You want to display children's work but not to (sic) much so it gets lost. Each year the environment will vary depending on the children and families.
> (Educator Participant)

Children's Capacity

Of interest, there were certain comments made both by teachers/educators and families in relation to children's capacity and what should be taught at varying age groups. For example, some teacher and educators made assumptions about what the typical three-year-old child could do as opposed to the four-year-old child could do which therefore impacted about how they saw their learning and capacity. Families on the other hand saw their children's capacity as open-ended where concepts such as reading and writing could be introduced at a younger age and extended upon as the child learnt.

> "I think all of the above but at varying levels. I teach the 3-4's at the level they are capable of understanding. They will not understand what I teach the 4-5's if I approach it the same way. Their thinking processes are not there yet. It would be like setting them up to fail :(Every child needs to feel they can achieve things."
> (Educator Participant)

> Language and numbers would be great to get them ready for school. I do this at home
> and I feel even 10 mins at kinda (sic) would be great.
> (Parent Participant)

Curriculum Content

Participants demonstrated some discrepancies between what they felt should be included in the curriculum content for children, however many agreed that the key learning areas should be diverse and include content that was responsive to children's interests. Some participants also commented that the experiences provided should also match the development of children which indicates that educators/teachers need to have a good knowledge in the unique developmental trajectory of each child.

> Some experiences may not be available at all times due to children's readiness and
> developmentally appropriate needs of all children.
>
> (Educator Participant)

Parent respondents took the opportunity to voice their concerns about the programs lacking adequate literacy and numeracy content and that preparation for school needed to be strengthened. Parents did not indicate the nature in which these things were to be taught (such as rote learning, worksheets), however advocated strongly for a play-based curriculum where children also engaged frequently with nature and the outdoors. They also indicated that important information such as local emergency support services and vocational information should be included. Some educators/teachers agreed that vocations such as park ranger and supports such as emergency services should be intentionally taught.

> More emphasis on reading and writing eg. Reading Eggs Program/Letterland
> Program
> (Parent Participant)
>
> I would like to see more of an emphasis on school preparation for numeracy and
> literacy.
> (Parent Participant)
>
> Big advocate for nature based play and benefits of outdoors
> (Parent Participant)
>
> I love that it is all about play. Please keep it that way.
> (Parent Participant)
>
> Meeting and exposure to different professionals, police, dentist, park ranger.
> (Parent Participant)

Some educator/teachers however disagreed and felt that kindergarten was not a place to teach children reading and writing but to expose them to language rich environments.

> All the above should be tought (sic) in a developmentally appropriate way and level.
> I.E Literacy should not mean readers, but reading to and with the children, rhyming,
> singing, role modelling writing and reading things around the room etc etc.
> (Educator Participant)

Relationships with Children

The most important aspect for families in relation to the interactions held between teachers/educators and children were that they made children feel safe and supported in their emotional wellbeing and also that the child felt loved and valued.   This aligned with the questions that were asked of educators/teachers relating to children's rights.   Many respondents agreed that the wellbeing environment should provide children with spaces and interactions where they feel happy and secure as well as stimulate curiosity.   Furthermore, comments supported children's ability to develop their emotional wellbeing, embrace their interests and develop their self-regulation which included using relationships with educators/teachers as a key component of this.

> Resilience, sharing, patience, confidence, self awareness, respect for diversity, exploration,
> sustainability, behavioural, Social
> (Educator Participant)
>
> An environment that enhances the children's interest and curiosity.
> (Educator Participant)
>
> A safe and secure environment, where children and educators develop respectful, reciprocal
> and responsive relationships, give children the confidence to try new experiences.
> (Educator Participant)
>
> That we have an obligation to provide a safe environment for each child in our care. That as
> educators we need to be doing everything we can to enhance every child's health and wellbeing
> in our early childhood settings. Things we can do include giving the children the opportunity to
> spend time outdoors in all weathers and promoting healthy eating through encouraging families
> to send healthy options with their child to kinder.
> (Educator Participant)

Communication between Services and Families

In terms of providing advice, guidance and support, families felt that the early years services should include information, understanding and links that will support children's transition to school. This was held in the highest regard with links to allied health specialists (psychologist, speech therapy, etc) of secondary importance.   Of least importance to families were links to the Maternal Child Health Services (which may be due to families already using this services from their child's birth), and links to welfare services or advice relating to routines (sleep, eating, etc).

Parents also indicated that more communication between teacher/educators and families should be a priority to ensure that parents are continually up to date on their child's progress.   This was important

for ensuring that parents could enhance their child's learning at home that was complementary to the learning at the service.

> Involving the families in the children's learning and educational programs would be great, so that families may know and extend conversations with their children at home about what they have been learning at kinder.
> (Parent Participant)
>
> I recommend that parents are advised in initial interviews with educators about the methods of communication and opportunities to be involved with the kinder sessions. It would also be great to have a parent /educator detailed debrief occasionally throughout the year.
> (Parent Participant)

Teacher/Educators on the other hand felt that discussions at drop off and pick up were enough with the added feature of the transition learning and development statements at the end of the year. Some comments however indicated that communication was reliant upon the needs and responses of the families with English as an Additional Language being a barrier at times to being able to communicate effectively with families. Educators/teachers aimed at providing communication in the best way they felt parents preferred it.

> I think communication with families needs to be flexible and responsive to the needs of each family.
> (Educator Participant)
>
> We have a diverse group of families. Some do not have access to computers, some like emails and Tiqbiz, some are illiterate and several have little English. We speak informally and formally to parents, use newsletters, Tiqbiz, photographs and phone calls depending on the circumstances of the family. There is always an open invitation to parent to speak with us following any session.
> (Educator Participant)

Discussion & Recommendations

The findings indicate that there are strong similarities in philosophical and pedagogical approaches and values across educators/teachers and families. This is particularly noticed within the preferred learning environments and teaching styles being responsive, developmentally appropriate and play-based with a focus upon respectful and responsive relationships. Of interest, the pedagogical approaches to include natural elements and access to the outdoors was particularly valued by respondents from both groups. Families and teacher/educators agreed that the wellbeing of their children was of highest importance which aligns with some of the needs of the community in relation to the AEDC results being that many children needed further support in their emotional maturity, wellbeing and social competence particularly in areas such as Frankston North, Hastings and Rosebud West.

Differences, however, arose with the following aspects:

- Families felt that more updates (better communication) on their child's development was important in their preparedness for school and also to assist families in understanding their

progress so that they could support and extend their learning at home. A large percentage of the teachers/educators however felt that communication was best done verbally at drop-off and pick-up which limited the depth of conversation regarding a child's development. Some parents seemed to want more than this.

- Families felt that curriculum focus should include intentionally teaching children to read and write through play-based approaches whereas educators/teachers preferred to teach more pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills that exposed children to concepts rather than explicit teaching.
- Teachers/educators felt that the curriculum content should be responsive to children's interests and developmentally appropriate, whereas some families wanted their children to learn of explicit topics such as emergency services and vocations.
- Teachers/educators felt that some children were not ready to learn some challenging concepts and felt that age strongly depicted children's capacity, however families were already teaching these at home (i.e. counting, letters, etc).

The following recommendations are suggested in terms of Content and Pedagogical Approaches for CKP services.

4. **For CKP to incorporate an eclectic approach to pedagogical approaches that includes aspects of traditional and contemporary child development theories, learning approaches and environments. A particular focus should be paid towards incorporating aspects of the Reggio Emilia Approach in terms of the image of the child, children's rights and wellbeing and democracy; Nature Preschool that incorporates building strong connections between children and the natural environment and The Montessori Method whereby children are exposed to developmentally appropriate and enriching learning environments.**

5. **For CKP to improve their systematic approaches to communication with families in relation to providing information on their child's development and learning and how families and services can work together to support the child's school readiness.**

6. **For CKP to engage in educator/teacher reflective practice in relation to children's capacity, including their ability to strengthen vision and see the child as capable and competent.**

7. **For CKP to incorporate play-based intentional teaching more rigorously across the services that supports children's emerging ability in literacy and numeracy.**

PART 3: Professional Workforce Knowledge and Capacity

Findings

The following findings explore some detail in relation to the current staff employed by CKP as an educator or in the management team. The questions asked of these participants were specifically related to their current level of understanding of their role and the early childhood profession as well as their beliefs and viewpoints about how children should learn in early childhood settings (discussed in previous sub-sections). The information gives an indication of level of qualification, role and capacity in order to plan for future support for the CKP workforce ensuring that it is meaningful and responsive. Of the teachers/educators that participated in this section of the survey, 40% had a three or four year Bachelor degree in early childhood whilst, 58.75% had either a Diploma (two-year-trained) or Certificate three in early childhood. Only one respondent had a Master's degree. This indicates that the minority of the CKP workforce hold a Bachelor degree in early childhood with the majority holding either a Certificate Three or Diploma in early childhood training as such.

Interestingly a large proportion of the staff (71.35%) were confident in their role with 17.50% being very confident. A small proportion were either neutral (5.00%) or somewhat confident (6.25%) which indicates that all participants had at least some degree of confidence in their work with children and families.

Confidence in the Role and Understanding of Legislation

Further to confidence in working with children, respondents had similar levels of confidence in understanding child development, yet slightly lower levels in understanding the requirements of the Education and Care Services National legislation with three respondents indicating that they had no understanding of this. Understanding of the National Quality Standards also brought with it various results ranging from some understanding (9.68%) to a high level of understanding (20.97%) with the majority of respondents indicating they had a satisfactory understanding of the NQS (66.13%). In terms of how well educators felt they understood each area it was evident that there was a very high understanding of Quality Area 5; Relationships with Children (45.16%), yet educators felt they did not have a very good understanding of Quality Area 7; Leadership and Service Management with only 8% stating they had a high understanding of this area. In saying this, almost 60% felt they had a good understanding of this quality area.

Perceptions About Parents and Families

Effective relationships with families is crucial in supporting children to develop to their full potential which why this aspect was investigated in relation to perspective-taking. The EYLF and the NQS strongly promote respect for the parent's expertise, however statistics tell us that many children live in poverty or suffer neglect or abuse. It is this concept that can sometimes be a barrier to building effective, capacity-building relationships which is why the questions were asked. In the next graph, participants had to rate how strongly they agreed with the following statements that related to their relationships with families. Educators/teachers agreed that respect was of crucial importance in regards to developing relationships with parents however not all strongly agreed that it should be given at all times. Some comments below detail ideas behind this response.

> You should always respect the views of the parents even if you don't agree with them. In a perfect word (sic) parents would respect what you say to them but this isn't always the case. Respect is a two way street and only comes from forming reciprocal relationships with parents.
> (Educator Participant)

> I belive (sic) that respect for me as a teacher should be earned, not automatically given, just because I have a degree. I may not always agree with descisions (sic) that parents make, but I always respect their right to make those decisions as long as the children's rights are not being compomised.
> (Educator Participant)

Working Authentically with Families

As mentioned previously, teachers/educators felt that the best method of communication with families was through verbal means at drop off and pick up times (90%) with the second best way through tiqbiz (60%). Interesting to note that comments were made in relation to written communication specifically for families who were unable to read or write English, including families with English as an additional language. This is interesting to note as often electronic written/text form is an effective way for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to engage now that there are applications (apps) (such as google translate) that can instantly translate text in other languages. Google translate is also able to connect with the camera of an iPhone where you can take a picture or hover over a paragraph in one language and translate it to another. Text form of communication may therefore become a crucial element to communication in future, particularly for CALD families and therefore educators may need to develop a stronger awareness of how these apps may be used. Other apps also include translating verbal to text and vice versa which could mean that CKP may need to make use of apps that can 'speak' the text from newsletters, notices, etc and educate families and educators in how to use these apps.

Cultural Competence and Proficiency

It was clear from the statements from educators as well as combined percentage (47.6%) that many educators did not feel proficient in their understanding and inclusion of culture within their practice. It must also be recorded that 15 participants skipped this question which indicates they either did not understand the question, did not want to answer the question or did not know how to answer the question with a final possibility they felt the question irrelevant to them.

A significant comment that was made related to their current knowledge which incorporated some level of sound understanding in cultural proficiency but identified that it was a need for further development in relating to knowledge and ways both curriculum and practice could address this.

> "I think it is important for the cultural proficiency to support the development of the holistic child as we live in a multicultual country (sic). If we all had a greater understanding and respect for each other, i wonder if we would have some of the issues we have today... Again I feel it is a area i need to work on."
> (Educator Participant)

Additional answers were provided in this question that highlighted some of the ideas participants found were important, such as:

> "I feel like it is something I would like to improve on as it's difficult to do in an authentic manner."
> Educator Participant

> "I welcome family involvement in sharing cultural experiences, however I would like to improve on setting up play experiences that are more multicultural."
> Educator Participant

> "I try my best but often feel out of my league."
> Educator Participant

> "I'm not sure that I would do it authentically. I would give it my best, and research and involve the families as much as I can, and have done in the past, but not sure if I hit the mark or not."
> Educator Participant

Leadership and Management

The results in relation to educators understanding of Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Management aligns well with what the literature says about the early childhood sector in general which indicates that early childhood leadership is something that is new and emerging where leaders have had very little robust training in this field. This is discussed further in the next section. Teachers/educators responded indicating that Quality Area 7 of the NQS was an area that they felt less knowledgeable and confident in, however they did have some ideas and expectation about what leadership should bring to them. Of highest importance was that leadership and management should bring a positive culture to the organisation where the workforce felt supported and also to recognise the strengths and skills in their members and what they bring to the organisation.

> Management to be mindful and knowledgable (sic) of the skills and strengths of individual staff members and what they bring with them to the position!
> (Educator Participant)

Some further concerns were raised in the level of movement of staff across the services as this seemed to instigate a feeling of insecurity and sense of place or belonging as well as the increase in paperwork that was required of teachers/educators where they felt this was impacting upon their teaching opportunities.

> I disagree with moving staff regularly to other services. I feel that it is important for vulnerable communities to have some consistency. It takes a long time to develop relationships within a community.
>
> (Educator Participant)

> As we as professionals seek to understand children and families so should management seek to understand needs of their workforce. Being "directed" to make changes, with paperwork and documentation coming "first", without acknowledging the programme - a fleeting visit does NOT do the teaching justice. Excellent paperwork, does not always equal excellent teaching...
> (Educator Participant)

The Board's perspective on leadership also indicates that whilst many aspects of the leadership structure is sound, further review of the roles needs to be conducted to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in their application of work (and value for money). They demonstrated concern where leadership roles may need further consideration to merge or consolidate roles or work through ways that the overall workforce could be regularly supported and managed at the many site locations.

Despite some of these comments there equally initiated responses of positivity to the current leadership of the organisation and how it goes about supporting staff to perform at their best.

> I would like to hope that CKP continues all the great initiatives they have already begun. This includes in a supportive sense to the staff that work for them (eg. counselling, pedagogical support and PD).
>
> I am lucky that I work within a great team that works really well together which I think is very important.
>
> Thanks to CKP for providing staff conference, very motivating
>
> I think having a supportive management team is also very important. The assistance provided in difficult situations is very much appreciated.
> Knowing support from management and colleagues is available at any time is valuable in my practices
>
> I love working for CKP.
> (Various educators' comments)

Discussions and Recommendations

The findings indicate that CKP has a strong workforce that demonstrates capacity in their role and a willingness to be reflective. This means that CKP has a solid foundation of service that is at most times predictable, knowledgeable, supportive and driven. A demonstrated commitment to action in the work of children's rights, their safety, wellbeing and education was strong. Honesty and integrity were also evident in the workforce with participants wanting to know more about becoming more culturally competent, understanding theory better and building upon knowledge of legislative and quality practice.

Leadership and workforce capacity form crucial aspects to a successful business and governance model which in turn impacts upon the children and families utilising the services. CKP is commended for the strength and rigor they have engaged in since their formation only a few years ago. There

have been considerable changes in leadership, including Board members over this time which can impact upon maintaining the momentum in moving forward. In saying this, crucial roles that have been sustained in their leadership are the Chief Executive Officer, the President of the Board and the Operations Manager who have worked tirelessly to promote a positive organisational culture, strengthen business operations and enhance rigor in pedagogical practice and partnerships. It is also acknowledged that pedagogical strength comes with devoted leadership which has continued to grow over the past few years and now with a Pedagogical Team Manager. Supporting these roles, however there needs to be efficient and fiscal planning that endeavours to offer programs of excellence whilst maintaining robust leadership and management.

Of concern for the workforce was the portability of their positions which for some potentially raised opportunity for career progression, whilst others felt that it impacted upon building authentic relationships with families and community. Furthermore, as CKP is a relatively new organisation now managing services that have existed for many decades without the infrastructure or paperwork accountabilities, it may be still a period of transition for new services to understand the complexity of liability under the new legislative frameworks including industrial awards, fairwork, child safe standards and workplace occupational health and safety.

In light of the above discussions the following recommendations are presented:

8. **For CKP to strengthen their workforce through training and coaching in the areas of cultural intelligence (competency), authentic partnerships with families (particularly families struggling in parenting), workforce wellbeing and quality education and care practices under the NQS.**
9. **For CKP to design accountability strategies and systematic approaches to documentation that does not adversely impact upon the teaching and programming opportunities for the workforce, but instead enhances them.**
10. **For CKP to be instrumental in guiding its workforce to understand the context of the community they are working with including statistical data form SEIFA and AEDC so that teachers/educators are working towards broader goals for the community as well as individual goals for children.**

PART 4: Children's Voice

During data collection, the ideas and thoughts from children were sought. This included asking them about what they liked most about being at kindergarten including their favourite spaces and things they also didn't like so much. The survey also asked children what they found tricky, things that they had learnt to do and also things they further wanted to learn how to do or develop knowledge in. Finally, children were asked questions about childhood and what they liked about it as well as their perceptions of adults.

The Great Things About Kindergarten

Many of the children responded with comments that were related directly to what they were doing or learning about at the time. This included friends they liked to play with or learning to make friends, particular learning spaces and topics. For example, one child indicated that their favourite activity was playing with the blocks and the train set, whilst other children listed more generic activities such as pasting, reading books, eating with friends and playing.

Many children indicated that their favourite place at kindergarten was the outside space which included equipment such as monkey bars, cubby houses, swings and the sandpit with some children wishing for monkey bars if their service didn't have them, a slide, musical instruments such as drums or a piano and there were even more imaginative ideas such as a riding club with a horse and saddle. Others preferred the dramatic play area such as pretending to go to school or looking after babies.

Not So Great Things About Kindergarten

Some children were very specific about the things they didn't like at kindergarten or experiences they avoided. Some children found that kindergarten was difficult when they were being annoyed by other people, when children were hurting or fighting with them even when they had told them to stop or when they had to participate in activities they didn't like such as drawing or making the exact same thing that other people were making. Other children had very precise reasons for not enjoying some activities such as gardening because it made them feel 'sweaty' or going to the toilet in the open bathroom. One child felt that the only learning they did was at home.

New Skills

Some of the children indicated that they had learnt new skills at kindergarten which included completing harder jigsaw puzzles, listening to teachers or sitting still. Some children stated that new

skill for them was learning to exercise and drawing with some children indicating that they found drawing difficult as well as learning new songs and dances for the Christmas concert.

Others indicated that they wanted to learn their letters and other people's names or develop their cooking skills, learn to hide or create specific construction pieces known as bionicles. A number of children indicated that they found yoga difficult although it was a new skill that they felt they had achieved

Childhood

Some children indicated that the best part about being a child was that they were small and could fit into little places like getting under the table, could spend a lot of time running around outside and also of significantly high value was playing. Furthermore, some children had some unique answers where they enjoyed bus rides and kids' discos, spinning around and doing handstands. Many children enjoyed being a part of their parent's life and some wished for their mothers or fathers to be at kindergarten with them. Some children indicated that the thing they loved about being a child was that they were able to go to kindergarten. Children's answers in enjoying childhood indicated a strong freedom away from what they considered 'work' but at the same time wanted the knowledge and skills of adults too.

Friendship

Friendships were important for children where they became happy with friends who allowed them to play whatever they wanted and were free to make choices independently or together. However, they found it difficult when friends didn't listen to what they had to say and continued to hurt them even when told to stop. They also found some friends to be somewhat thoughtless such as stepping on their lunchbox when they were trying to eat their lunch. Of interest and of typicality at this age, some children demonstrated concern when others changed their minds about friendships and stated that they didn't want to play with them anymore, snatched items off them, called them names such as 'an idiot,' or told them to go away. Other aspects of frustration where when children were told that they didn't want to play with them but they were still chased and harassed for play. Significant aspects of friendship learning that children stated they learnt at kindergarten was how to share, to not be selfish and to instead care about others, how to make friends and what verbal phrases you could use and to be giving. Furthermore, children had some solid understandings of what it was to be a friend such as someone who is really nice and friendly to you, who make you smile and play together well and feeling loved and showing kindness. Friends, children considered, also do not hit. Of importance to note, there were some children who struggled to answer was what kindergarten had taught them about friendship or how to be a friend and some children demonstrated gender biases towards toys, materials and friendships for instance once male child stated "I don't want to play doll's house. It's for a girl."

Adult Role Models

Children indicated some of the things that adults did were helpful and kind such as helping other children, but also there were things they did that annoyed them such as making funny faces or when adults didn't play with the children. Many children liked the fact that adults cooked them food, but didn't like it when they yelled at them, were angry, didn't listen to them or even when the adult changed the channel from their favourite TV program. For some children, even adults talking was too much and another child indicated that adults in general made them nervous. Children also didn't like it when adults wouldn't' take them to places that they wanted to go or turn down the television so that they could sleep. On child was very specific in her contempt for adults where they could take care of children and animals but would not let her have a pet. However, many children considered adults (or adulthood) with admiration and saw it as a time of more freedom of choice, such as giving them lollies or ice-cream after dinner, having a beer whenever they wanted to, or that they can simply know and do many complex things by choice such as drilling a hole and 'building stuff', however it was acknowledged that adults don't get to play as much as children. Some children were even literal in the sense that when they grew up they would be bigger or would be able to play on the 'big-kids' playground.

Growing Up

As expected, children had a wide variety of ideas of what they wanted to do or be when they were grown up with some wanting to be a police officer, a boxer at the Olympics, a rubbish truck driver, a soccer player, a kindergarten teacher or hairdresser, Others had more lifestyle goals as an adult such as looking after babies and getting them ready for school, washing the sink, drive a car or motorbike, go shopping, buying a house and getting more money, getting a job at KFC or even just climbing more competently because they are no longer a 'kid.'

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings as previously described indicate some key aspects to the way children play, engage and spend time with each other. Their key concern was being able to spend time in their favourite places which meant that they were able to articulate exactly what their favourite place or activity was. They were also able to articulate well the things that didn't make them happy or were obstacles to productive play or doing things that they wanted which were generally other children imposing on their play and choices through aggression and adults making decisions for them. This indicates that children value choice but also understand that adults have more power to make choices which is something they hope for as they grow. The part of being able to have freedom of choice as an adult also means that we have to engage in learning and experiences that are enabling and build skills in children to make educated and informed choices. This comes back to effective pedagogy and understanding of the particular children that educators/teachers are teaching.

Of interest, children also tended to add stereotypes to others including gender roles which indicates further work needs to be done in this area in relation to anti-biased curriculum decision-making. Children also saw that part of being an adult meant responsibility that came with earning money, but

that money also meant having more financial freedoms to do the things that you wanted. This is an interesting insight that children have at a young age which indicates that children's thinking is becoming far more complex and slightly merged with adult ways of thinking. Financial literacy is something that is important for ongoing economic growth and whilst it is something that we move away from in terms of burdening children, they ar already interested through their play with money and emerging interests in numeracy and consumerism.

Of significance, children loved to be outside and engaged in active play (although not particularly gardening!) where they could expand their gross motor skills and capability for strong physical competence. They saw this as important and also indicated on the AEDC as something that is some young children are struggling with in their development.

Recommendations resulting from the voice of children include:

11. **For CKP teachers and educators to incorporate the voice of the child in democratic decision-making that is a result of informed, educational discussions where fairness, safety, wellbeing, equity and health is at the forefront of importance. This also includes their voice in relation to their learning environments such as indoor settings and playgrounds where the aspirations and wishes of the child are honoured.**

12. **For outdoor play and engagement with nature to be of high importance to educational settings and routines where children are supported to build their physical development including core muscle strength, gross motor and fine motor skills as well as sensory integration.**

13. **For educational programs to incorporate the concepts of 'friendship' as a fundamental topic in explicit teaching and learning where children do not necessarily learn this only in an 'incidental' way, but that kindness, compassion, empathy and friendship is taught purposefully and authentically.**

14. **For educational programs to incorporate aspirational value for children in growing up where they learn about vocations, hobbies and recreational experiences they may develop lifelong interests in.**

SECTION 5: Australian Legislative and Funding Policies

This section incorporates general statements used in reporting to describe the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector in Australia and incorporates some specific information relating to Community Kinders Plus (CKP). Some information, however is generic and may be used across reports.

Children's Services have undergone considerable change in the past decade resulting from both global influence as well as policy changes influenced by the ideologies of changing federal and state governments.

Legislation

The National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework (NQF) results from global and national research that culminated in 2009 when the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) met and endorsed the *National Early Childhood Development Strategy* focussing on a commitment to:

- "Improving learning outcomes for children and decreasing inequality
- Improving holistic development outcomes such as health, cognitive and social development
- Providing support to families of today and their diverse needs, improving health, wellbeing and productivity, and
- Improving children's transition to school," (DEEWR, 2009, p. 4)

The strategy recognised that the above four criteria aim to improve the outcomes for Australian citizens and level of productivity, leading towards happier and healthier lives. As such, it was required to review current legislation and plan towards a new system of monitoring and compliance of services that also included assessing quality. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) was established as a national governing body to oversee the implementation of the NQF with an aim to drive continuous improvement in Australian education and care services.

ACECQA comprises of a board, an executive group and staff employed in various departments to achieve the work that ACECQA is legislated to do. Please see the diagram below.

Figure 2. ACECQA Organisational Structure
(Copyright to ACECQA)

The NQF embeds all aspects of compliance and quality into one and incorporates four key aspects to providing quality education and care for children:

1. The National Law and National Regulations,
2. The National Quality Standard,
3. The Assessment and Quality Rating Process, and
4. The National Learning Frameworks.

National Quality Standard (NQS)

The Standard

The NQS was introduced to services in 2012 alongside the new national legislation in which it is embedded. The NQS sets out minimum standards of quality that must be offered to children and services must complete regular self-assessments to ensure that they are continually driving quality in all aspects of their education and care for children (ACECQA, 2013). The NQS is divided into 7 quality areas each containing standards and elements that detail specific levels of quality according to that area. They are as follows:

Quality Area 1: Educational Program and Practice – this area details the crucial components to the curriculum decision-making process in providing high quality education and care programs for children. This area requires services to consider why they do what they do in regards to education and care curriculum and how they can ensure that their programs are responsive, reflective, respectful and relevant to children's learning and development.

Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety – This area requires services to consider how they ensure the health and safety of children is of paramount importance. This section looks at how services ensure children are protected at all times and that their health needs are consistently met.

Quality Area 3: Physical environment – This area requires services to ensure that the premises, furniture, fittings equipment and materials they provide for children offer quality opportunities of

exploration and learning opportunity whilst also developing skills. This area encourages consideration for how the service also physically caters for the child's needs for comfort, independence and learning as well as environmental sustainability measures.

Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements – This section not only includes regulatory requirements of staffing ratios, including qualified staff and early childhood teachers, but also requires services to consider looking beyond staff ratios, as it also assesses how staff work together as a team and model respectful behaviour and ethical practice. It encourages a genuine unity where staff empower each other and affirm strengths whilst also supporting struggles leading to resolution. It requires services not just to provide minimum staff ratios, but to arrange staff to maximise the effectiveness of the service according to their knowledge, skills and attributes.

Quality Area 5: Relationships with children - This area highlights the significance and strong importance of the relationship between the educator and the child. It further discusses how children's dignity and rights are maintained and how children can be supported to develop positive and respectful relationships with each other, managing emotions and behaviour and developing a sense of fairness and equality.

Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities - This area respects and acknowledges that families are children's first teachers and possibly their life-long teachers. It further outlines the importance of family engagement with the service and how parenting can be supported. Furthermore, it highlights how a child is raised by a village and the importance of the social supports available to families including early intervention and transitions.

Quality Area 7: Leadership and service management - This quality area sets out the expectations of governance and administration procedures of the service to ensure that policies and procedures are within legislative requirements and that processes are in place to ensure the service maintains smooth and effective operations and strong leadership.

Self-Assessment Process

Services approved under the national legislation are required to complete a self-assessment of their level of quality and how they feel they are faring against the National Quality Standard and the *Education and Care Services National Regulations*. This document is known as a *Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)* and it is a legal obligation to be conducted, reviewed and made readily available to families and authorised officers upon request. Included in this self-assessment are specific details as required by the legislation which includes detailing the strengths of the service in terms of quality practice, areas required for improvement and the service's statement of philosophy. Other items recommended to be included are aims and objectives for the service in relation to quality improvement, what strategies will be implemented to achieve this improvement and how it will be measured for success. Timelines and progress notes provide services the opportunity to continually review their self-assessment to see how they are tracking in their journey of improvement. Reviewing the QIP is also a legislative requirement and must be completed annually.

The Assessment and Quality Rating Process (A&R)

The Process

The Assessment and Quality Rating Process was introduced by regulatory authorities across Australia to begin measuring and assessing the quality of practice provided in approved in-scope education and care services. This process involved an authorised officer or two spending enough time observing practice, discussing concepts with staff and sighting documentation to form evidence that would be used in validating their rating (Jackson, 2015). The process begins with services being notified of their Assessment and Rating Cycle beginning where they are required to submit their QIP to their local regulatory authority[1] within a prescribed date. Services are then usually contacted to make final arrangements for the visit which is then conducted on specified dates and times according to the size and operation of the service. During the visit, authorised officers complete detailed notes in what is known as the *NQS Assessment and Rating Instrument* which also provides some guidance to authorised officers as to the varying levels of quality they may observe (Jackson, 2015). The detailed notes derive from observations of practice in relation to the employees of the service, discussions they have with them and also documentation they sight on the day. Once the observation days have been completed, the authorised officer compiles a report which details the quality ratings they believe the service is operating at with evidence supporting the justifications of these ratings. Services have several opportunities to appeal a rating if they do not believe it is fair and just to their service which may also request undergoing the full process again and be re-rated within a specified time frame (ACECQA, 2012). Once the rating has been finalised it is published upon the ACECQA website with centres attracting child care benefit also having their rating published on the my.child website.

Quality Rating Levels

The publication of the quality rating levels has the potential to deeply impact upon a service's operating ability as this is visible to current and prospective families wishing to utilise the service. It is therefore paramount that services strongly engage with the self-assessment process to have a greater understanding of the impact they have on children and families. The Regulatory Authority has the power to rate at four different levels which are as follows:

Significant Improvement Required – this indicates the service is operating at such a poor level that they may have compliance directions placed upon them and/or conditions placed upon their approval. Services such as these would generally have higher compliance monitoring and may also be at risk of closure due to their poor performance[2].

Working Towards – this rating level implies that whilst the service may not be currently meeting the National Quality Standard, it is evident that there is no immediate risk to children in terms of their

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[1] The Regulatory Authority in Victoria is the Department of Education and Training.
[2] Conditions may also be placed against the provider approval if the regulatory authority considers that their service management and leadership is not sufficient for the services they operate.

safety, health and wellbeing and that the service has put in place measures for improvement in order to meet national quality standards in future.

Meeting – this indicates that the service is meeting all quality standards and elements under the NQS and is demonstrating that they provide a quality service for children.

Exceeding – a service that receives a rating of exceeding means that in many ways they are operating at level that is above the National Quality Standard. In order to receive this rating, the service must have received a rating of exceeding in at least 4 standards with two of these standards being in quality areas 1, 5, 6 or 7.

A Rating of Excellence - An additional level of rating may be granted to a service that is known as a rating of **Excellence.** In order to receive an *Excellent rating*, services must apply directly to ACECQA and pay the designated fee (fee to be removed as of 2018). It is ACECQA who will assess this application which is initially a paper-based application, followed by visits and discussions at the discretion of the authorised officer from ACECQA. Currently there are 49 services operating at an Excellent level in Australia out of 121 applications (ACECQA, 2016). So far, the following services operated by CKP have been assessed and rated against the National Quality Standards.

CKP Service	QA1	QA2	QA3	QA4	QA5	QA6	QA7	**Overall**
Baden Powell Preschool	M	M	E	E	M	E	M	**M**
Banyan Fields Child & Family Centre	E	M	E	E	E	E	E	**E**
Bayport Preschool	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	**E**
Bayview Preschool	M	M	M	M	M	E	E	**M**
Benton's Square Kindergarten	M	M	E	E	E	M	E	**E**
Bowerbird Ppreschool	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	**E**
Delacombe Park Preschool	M	M	M	M	M	E	M	**M**
Erinwood Preschool	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	**E**
Frankston Preschool	M	M	E	M	E	E	E	**E**
Hastings Kindergarten	M	M	M	M	E	E	M	**M**
Kananook Preschool	M	E	E	E	E	E	M	**E**
Karingal East Preschool	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	**E**
Karingal PLACE Kindergarten	M	M	M	M	M	M	E	**M**
Montague Park Preschool	E	M	M	E	E	E	M	**E**

Mornington Park Preschool	E	M	M	E	E	E	E	**E**
Riviera	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	**M**
Somers Preschool[3]	M	M	E	M	E	M	M	**M**
Tyabb Kindergarten[4]	E	M	E	E	E	E	M	**E**
William Road Preschool	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	**E**
Wallaroo Community Centre	M	M	M	M	M	E	M	**M**
Mount Martha House	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

This means that out of 20 kindergartens in scope of the National Quality Framework and subject to the assessment and rating process, 12 kindergartens under the operation of CKP have received a rating of exceeding with five of these receiving a rating of exceeding in every quality area. No services to date have received a working towards rating.

National Learning Frameworks

The final aspect of the National Quality Framework is the requirement for services to use an approved National Learning Framework that guides the curriculum decision-making conducted in the service. This requirement is not only embedded specifically in the Law Act and Regulations, but also within the National Quality Standard itself. The approved learning frameworks required to be used by services include two nationally approved frameworks being, *My Time, Our Place; Framework for School Age Care in Australia* and *Belonging, Being and Becoming; The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. A further jurisdiction specific framework approved for Victoria specifically is the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.*

Child Safe Standards

From 1 January 2016, all early childhood services must also ensure that their policies and practices adhere to Child Safe Standards in order "to help protect children from all forms of abuse" (DHS, 2016, para. 1). The list of services included in this minimum requirement includes both services operating under National or State legislation relating to children's services or education and care services. The following standards are already in place as an expectation for all services to deliver:

Child Safe Standards (DHS, 2016)

In complying with the child safe standards, an entity to which the standards apply must include the following principles as part of each standard:

- promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children
- promoting the cultural safety of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- promoting the safety of children with a disability.

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[3] Due to be updated by the end of 2017 due to latest A&R visit.

[4] Due to be updated by the end of 2017 due to latest A&R visit.

To create and maintain a child safe organisation, an entity to which the standards apply must have:

- ✓ **Standard 1:** Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements
- ✓ **Standard 2:** A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety
- ✓ **Standard 3:** A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
- ✓ **Standard 4:** Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
- ✓ **Standard 5:** Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- ✓ **Standard 6:** Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
- ✓ **Standard 7:** Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

Funding and Implications of Staffing and Service Delivery

Jobs for Families Packages

The current Federal government aims to align the *Jobs for Families Package* more closely with legislative requirements under the law but also includes variances to child care such as the *Nanny Pilot Program* and continuation of 'In-Home' Care options. The promotion is that the current situation of child care must be more flexible to meet the needs of families which includes shift workers and families that work on weekends.

Jobs for Family Packages

The *Jobs for Families Package* highlights the following:

- *Child Care Benefit* and *Child Care Rebate* will be rolled into one and will be known as the *Child Care Subsidy* (this means that the Child Care Rebate will now be means tested as currently it is not)

- A *Child Care Safety Net* will be provided to improve access to child care including *Additional Child Care Subsidy, Community Child Care Fund* and *Inclusion Support Programme* (began operation 1 July 2016).

  - o **Additional Child Care Subsidy** – "for children at risk of serious abuse or neglect, families experiencing temporary financial hardship, grandparents on income support who are the primary carer of their grandchildren, parents transitioning to work from income support, low income families who do not meet the activity test," (Federal Department of Education and Training, 3 May 2016).

  - o **Community Child Care Fund (CCCF)** – "child care services (including former Budget Based Funded services) will be able to apply for supplementary funding through a competitive grants programme to: reduce the barriers in accessing child care, in particular for disadvantaged or vulnerable families and communities provide sustainability support for child care services experiencing viability issues provide capital support to increase the supply of child care places in areas of high unmet

demand. As part of the CCCF, commencing in July 2016, $20 million over 2 years will provide for the integration of child care, maternal and child health, and family support services in a number of Indigenous communities experiencing disadvantage, as recommended by Andrew Forrest in his review of *Indigenous jobs and training – Creating Parity"* (Federal Department of Education and Training, 3 May 2016).

o **Inclusion Support Programme (already commenced)** – The Inclusion Support Programme assists mainstream services to improve their capacity and capability to provide inclusive practices and address barriers to participation for children with additional needs, particularly children with disability. The programme includes: practical inclusion advice and support for services access to specialist equipment additional funding to the service to assist inclusion of children with additional needs.

- Continued availability of the Nanny Child Care Scheme
- Long day care services will have the restriction of hours (per week and weeks per year) removed which means that the only requirement will now be that they operate for at least 48 weeks per year.
- Services Providers will need to provide families with a fortnightly statement of their fees.
- Families will be subject to an activity test which means they must meet the following criteria in order to receive subsidy for hours used in care:

> "A broad range of activities will meet the activity test requirements, including paid work, being self-employed, doing unpaid work in a family business, looking for work, volunteering or studying. There will be exemptions to the activity test for parents who legitimately cannot meet the activity requirements"
>
> (Federal Department of Education and Training, 3 May 2016).

For some parents who do not meet the activity test, they may be able to access 24 hours care per week only. This is some discussion currently that families who are not engaged in any employment will only receive 24 hours per fortnight, which could leave some of our most vulnerable children at risk as they will no longer have priority of access to early childhood services, particularly long day care. This may have implications for kindergarten services to better access early start funding in order to start children as in their services as young as possible, increasing their opportunity to experience high quality programs from an earlier age that preschool (year before formal schooling) age.

Current National Funding: CCB & CCR

Under the current system utilised by many long day care, family day care and out of school care providers, funding is subsidised through various child care subsidies. Some subsidies are currently means tested and therefore based upon the household income of the child's family, whilst others are not. Additional subsidies are also available in special circumstances and can be accessed by the service in a variety of ways. The following subsidies are currently available for families, however will change as the Jobs for Families Packages begin to roll out across the Nation.

Child Care Benefit (CCB) – financial assistance that helps with costs/fees for approved and registered care such as long, family or occasional day care, outside school hour care, vacation care, pre-school and kindergarten. The amount of benefit that a family receives is dependent upon the family circumstances and income and the government will pay up to capped amounts per hour. The current funding amounts are listed in table 8.

Child Care Rebate (CCR) – additional financial assistance for families who meet the Work, Training and Study test. This amount is not currently means tested, however in order to be eligible, parents need to meet requirements of work such as being employed, seeking employment or setting up their own business, or other circumstances such as disability or where a parent is in prison.

Special Child Care Benefit – additional assistance for children who are at risk of serious abuse or neglect, or families experiencing exceptional short term financial hardship where their ability to pay their fees has been significantly reduced.

Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care Fee Assistance – assistance for families who are studying or training in approved courses under the *Helping Young Parents or Supporting Jobless Families initiatives.*

Changing Nature of Australian Policy

The current situation for education and care services and associated funding remains unstable. There are possibilities that services that sit outside the National legislation may eventually be required to sit within it which will change the manner in which they operate, enforced by law and funding guidelines. This also may have some impact upon services who are already sitting within the NQF which could either be positive or negative. Whilst some of this may be speculation, what is clear at this stage is the following:

- Additional Hours for kindergarten funding (i.e. Universal Access of 15 hours per child per week) is only guaranteed until the end of 2018, and may have a significant impact upon access to kindergarten programs due to affordability.
- Pending parliamentary approval, Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate structures will change to the *Jobs for Families Package* which will remove Family Tax Benefit A & B and provide specific programs aimed at increasing spaces for long day care. This is currently being debated in Parliament and may have a significant impact upon the financial capacity for families to pay high fees for kindergarten program.
- The National Quality Standards and assessment and rating process against these standards are also currently under review with changes set to be implemented in 2018.
- Occasional Care funding is only guaranteed until the end of 2018 under the current guidelines and State funding support is subject to Federal funding, (therefore may not be an option as an additional service for CKP for wrap-around-care.)

The push for change is evident in the current climate as the National Child Care Reform continues its debate. What is certain is that the National Quality Framework aims for all early years services to be operating at levels of quality it determines are acceptable and that child care and kindergarten services should also be affordable and flexible for families to encourage families to contribute more to building the economy through working and infrastructure. It should be CKPs vision to make a significant difference to the lives of children and families in the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula municipalities strengthening its population to be seen as resilient, empathic, prosperous and community driven. CKPs strategic direction should align with current trends as well as establishing core values that represent the community needs and trending utilisation of early years services. This means that services in future may need to diversify in hours, times, funding availability and structure.

SECTION 6: Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations

Each service should analyse their suburban profile according to the AEDC results as well as comprehensive observations of the children currently attending in order to plan ahead for responsive service delivery. This should also include a stronger understanding of their community context in relation to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) results.

CKPs strategic direction should align with current trends as well as establishing core values that represent the community needs and trending utilisation of early years services. This means that services in future may need to diversify in hours, times, funding availability and structure. This could mean that CKP may need to consider options of occasional wrap-around care if funding continues or to operate a sessional kindergarten within a long day care model attracting child care subsidies under current and future schemes.

Consider that funding changes relating to working activity statements may have implications for kindergarten services to better access early start funding in order to start eligible children in their services as young as possible, increasing their opportunity to experience high quality programs from an earlier age that preschool (year before formal schooling) age.

Anticipated Vision of Change
- Engagement of community voice (for those who are difficult to reach)
- Raising of the Voice of the Child (our advocacy for their voice to be heard)
- Addressing educator's knowledge of and application in relation to child development (traditional and contemporary) as well as legislative requirements and quality practices in educational programming and practice
- Addressing contemporary ideas (e.g. Gender fluidity in children, cultural proficiency, emotional availability, mental health, etc)

- Research Based Projects – as an embedded part of practice (aligning with understanding the suburban profile and how to plan in a responsive manner)
- Embedded elements of Rights –
    - United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
    - United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
    - United Nations Convention of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Impact of this Vision

It is anticipated that with change there will be:

- A significant improvement in AEDC results in children.
- Educators working and thinking at a higher level and developing stronger reflexivity.
- Participatory relationships between educators and families.
- A stronger embedded understanding and delivery of *Family-Centred Practice.*
- An attitudinal change towards being a 'community of learners' where there is an exchange of 'funds of knowledge.'
- Strengthened communities to work together for the 'hard to reach' families and children.
- A strong sense of accountability.
- Better holistic outcomes for children (including life-long improvements in social relationships, productivity, active citizenship, empathy and acknowledgement).

Delivery of the Vision
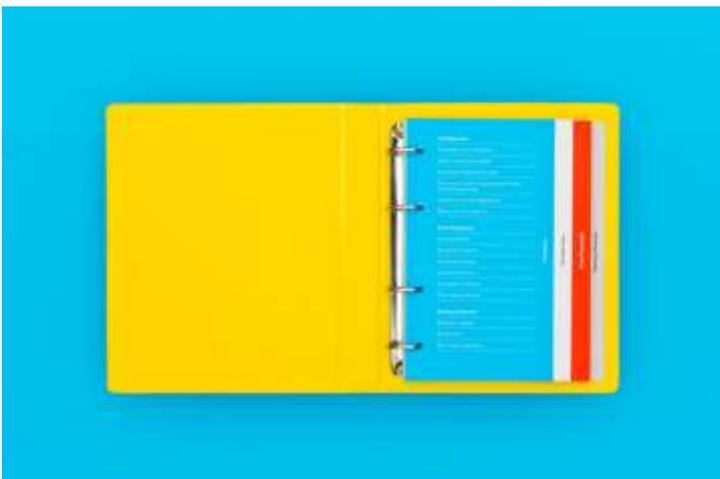
In delivering this vision CKP should develop a manual that incorporates the organisational Core Values, priorities and strategic direction, a robust Philosophical statement and curriculum initiatives as well as corresponding workforce management and appraisal processes.

Community Kinders Plus Service Vision Manual

- Organisational Core Values and Strategic Planning

- Organisational Philosophy of Education and Care and Curriculum Framework

- Educator Assessment and Enhancement Program

Realisation of the Vision and Measurable Outcomes

- In providing a visionary document for the organisation, it is imperative to have tools to measure outcomes and the success of the vision. This helps us to know if and how the vision is being truly realised.

- The tools will be user friendly and at an appropriate level of complexity that can also be used for ongoing service review and quality improvement for each service. Reporting should be evident on a service, leadership and management level.

- Combined with future statistical evidence such as AEDC, ABS and other research partners, the organisation will be able to identify areas where their vision is not realised, is realised, is or is not appropriate or meaningful to the changing nature of social contexts

Summary of Recommendations

1. For Community Kinders Plus to consider piloting a before/after/vacation care program at two sites most likely to have demand for this service.

2. For Community Kinders Plus to consider restructuring some of their sessions to ensure that families are given options to return to work and therefore able to access longer days for their children.

3. For Community Kinders Plus to consider other programs that may enhance the learning for children and also connect communities, such as playgroups, music, language or sports groups that could be a 'user-pays' service. Surveys could ascertain demand for these services that could also be available to the wider community and therefore build community access.

4. For CKP to incorporate an eclectic approach to pedagogical approaches that includes aspects of traditional and contemporary child development theories, learning approaches and environments. A particular focus should be paid towards incorporating aspects of the Reggio Emilia Approach in terms of the image of the child, children's rights and wellbeing and democracy; Nature Preschool that incorporates building strong connections between children and the natural environment and The Montessori Method whereby children are exposed to developmentally appropriate and enriching learning environments.

5. For CKP to improve its systematic approaches to communication with families in relation to providing information on their child's development and learning and how families and services can work together to support the child's school readiness.

6. For CKP to engage in educator/teacher reflective practice in relation to children's capacity, including their ability to strengthen vision and see the child as capable and competent.

7. For CKP to incorporate play-based intentional teaching more rigorously across the services that supports children's emerging ability in literacy and numeracy.

8. For CKP to strengthen its workforce through training and coaching in the areas of cultural intelligence (competency), authentic partnerships with families (particularly families struggling in parenting), workforce wellbeing and quality education and care practices under the NQS.

9. For CKP to design accountability strategies and systematic approaches to documentation that does not adversely impact upon the teaching and programming opportunities for the workforce, but instead enhances them.

10. For CKP to be instrumental in guiding its workforce to understand the context of the community they are working with including statistical data form SEIFA and AEDC so that

teachers/educators are working towards broader goals for the community as well as individual goals for children.

11. For CKP teachers and educators to incorporate the voice of the child in democratic decision-making that is a result of informed, educational discussions where fairness, safety, wellbeing, equity and health is at the forefront of importance. This also includes their voice in relation to their learning environments such as indoor settings and playgrounds where the aspirations and wishes of the child are honoured.

12. For outdoor play and engagement with nature to be of high importance to educational settings and routines where children are supported to build their physical development including core muscle strength, gross motor and fine motor skills as well as sensory integration.

13. For educational programs to incorporate the concepts of 'friendship' as a fundamental topic in explicit teaching and learning where children do not necessarily learn this only in an 'incidental' way, but that kindness, compassion, empathy and friendship is taught purposefully and authentically.

14. For educational programs to incorporate aspirational value for children in growing up where they learn about vocations, hobbies and recreational experiences they may develop lifelong interests in.
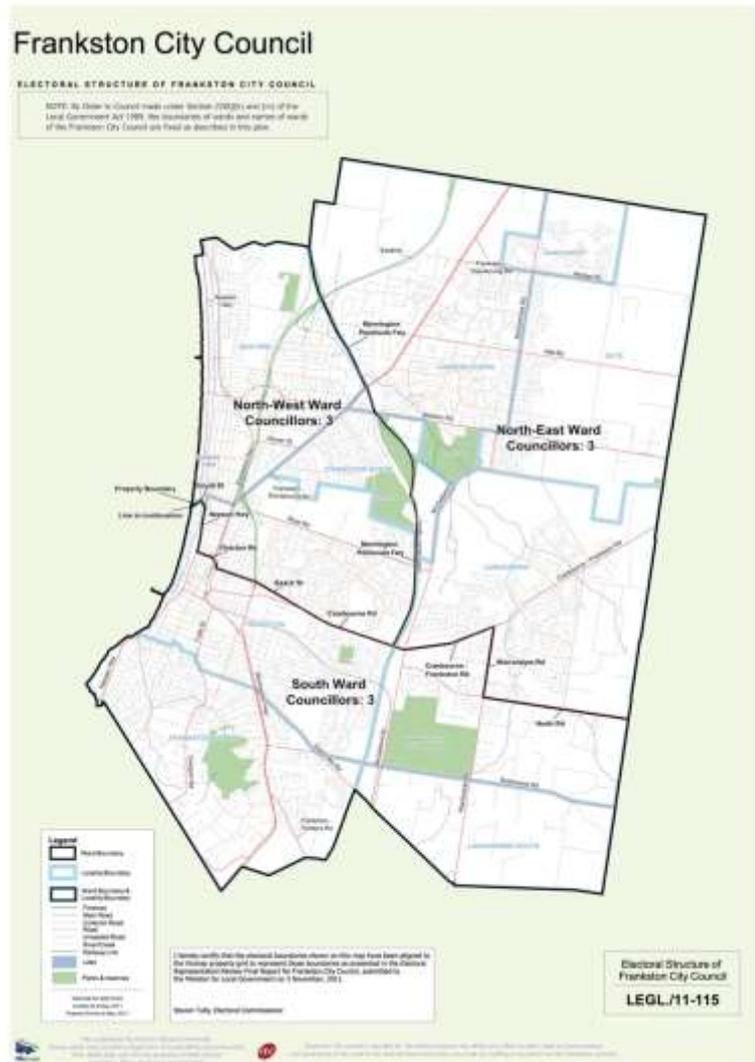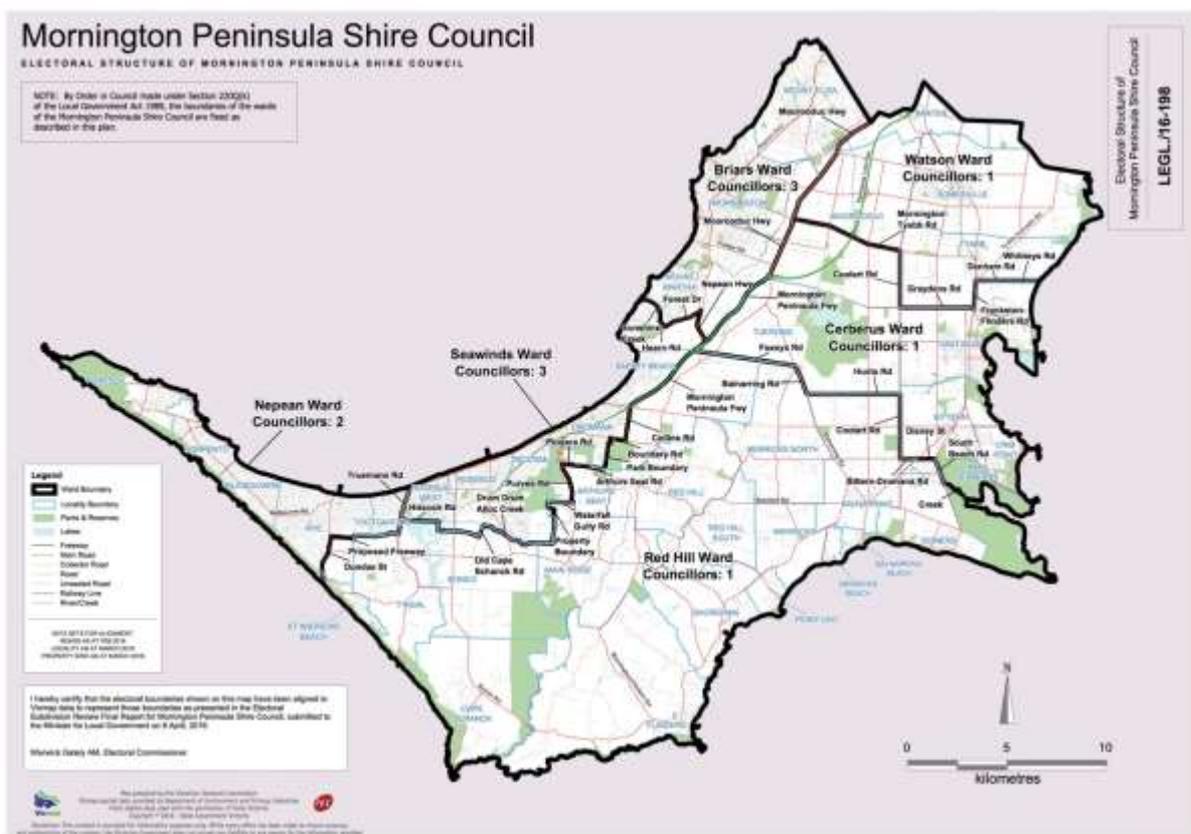
Appendices

Appendix A

Municipal Maps

Frankston Municipal Area

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Frankston City Council — Electoral Structure of Frankston City Council

Mornington Peninsula Municipal Area

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