



KIDS FIRST™

Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education & Care in South Australia Submission

MAY 2023



Kids First Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.



We celebrate and value diversity. Kids First Australia is proud to provide support to the community in the most inclusive manner.

KIDS FIRST AUSTRALIA

Leading change for Australian children.

Kids First Australia is a proudly independent child and family services provider and early years education specialist, at the heart of community care since 1896.

Our vision is for all children and young people to thrive in strong, resilient, and safe families and communities. We do this because we believe all kids deserve a bright future.

Informed by evidence, our sector leading programs are designed to strengthen family relationships, support healing and recovery from trauma and ensure children can thrive, now and into their future. Kids First occupies a unique space within the early years and community services landscape with our strong focus on developing, testing and delivering innovative evidence-based services.

In this submission we focus on the results and lessons from our Early Years Education Program (EYEP)TM, an intensive early childhood education and care model for children living with significant adversity, enrolled before the age of three, and how it mitigated the effects of toxic stress and trauma. The support, learning, skills and development from our EYEPTM have been adapted into a universal platform, our Early Years Education Program (EYEP)TM - Kindergarten Model (EYEPTM-KM) that all children can access, no matter their starting point in life. It is our strong belief that all children will benefit from taking the evidence-base for intensive intervention into universal settings.

We know that the early years are critical.

Children's experiences in their first years are a major determinant of their lifetime circumstances and well-being. Early life experiences have a fundamental influence on brain architecture, gene expression, and physiology.

The impact of the early years is especially pronounced for children who experience neglect, abuse and toxic stress. Prolonged exposure to physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse and traumatic experiences early in life have been established to cause profound long-term adverse effects on brain and physiological development (Tseng et al, 2018). Pre-birth neglect, including physical, emotional and mental health trauma experienced by the mother, has also been shown to cause profound negative impacts on the foetus that translate to adverse long-term impacts for the child.

Our research demonstrates the importance of holistic early years education and care.

For six years, Kids First designed and implemented a unique Early Years Education Program (EYEP)TM, at our West Heidelberg centre in Victoria. The EYEPTM successfully worked with children who experienced acute disadvantage to support their emotional, social and cognitive development.

The program provided high quality education and care for children who live with significant family stress and social challenges so that they could commence school developmentally equal to their peers, and with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for ongoing successful learning.

An independent randomised control trial, the first of its kind in Australia, was conducted alongside EYEPTM's delivery. This research showed that, when compared to their peers, children who participated in EYEPTM had made gains across their IQ, resilience and emotional development factors. Their families responded better to stress and experienced less of it.

EYEPTM was characterised by:

- individualised, holistic education and care, based on a relational pedagogy
- integrated tertiary level intervention
- sustained and intensive engagement
- multi-disciplinary professional knowledge, skills and expertise
- safe, welcoming spaces.

Our current phase of innovation: a universal Early Years Education Program – Kindergarten Model.

Kids First believes that all Australian children and families should have access to high-quality, holistic education and care, underpinned by a robust practice framework and evidence-based service models. We live and breathe this ethos in our own early years centres and have taken the powerful and practical components of the EYEPTM and created a new model that can be universally applied in kindergartens, filling a critical gap for the sector.

Our EYEPTM-Kindergarten Model is based on a strengths-based, trauma-informed, relational pedagogy approach. 'Relational pedagogy' refers to the intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with students to build and sustain positive relationships.

We have taken this approach because it is proven that the most salient environmental influences for infants and young children are their caregiving relationships and the degree of stress that they live with. All children need stable relationships, responsive caregivers and attention to their emotional wellbeing and social competence so that they can flourish.

Tseng, Y., B. Jordan, J. Borland, T. Clancy, N. Coombs, K. Cotter, A. Hill and A. Kennedy (2018), Changing the Life Trajectories of Australia's Most Vulnerable Children – Report no.2: The first twelve months in the Early Years Education Program: An initial assessment of the impact on children and their primary caregivers.

Our EYEPT™ Kindergarten Model

- Combines the innovative and transformational aspects of EYEPT™ and Kids First's practice expertise in school-readiness services
- Draws on sound pedagogical principles, supported by insights from the latest early years education research and literature
- Recognises the importance of giving children and families a voice, rather than making assumptions about them, their context and their behaviour
- Privileging children and family's self-determination is highly important in supporting their recovery from trauma – this means providing choice, options and information so they can make informed decisions
- Meets and exceeds the requirements of the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

The aims of the model are:

- Children have strong, authentic relationships with their classmates, families and educators, and a shared sense of belonging
- Children are active, engaged and capable learners, and are supported to enter primary school
- Families have strong protective factors so that they can moderate risk and adversity and promote healthy childhood development and wellbeing.

Murdoch Children's Research Institute's Centre for Community Child Health is evaluating the model over a three-year period (2021-2023). The purpose is two-fold: to provide evidence of a cost-effective, impactful, nationally scalable universal early years model underpinned by strengths based, trauma-informed, relational pedagogy and to inform our ongoing implementation and adaption of the model.

An initial year of formative evaluation which supports the clarification and articulation of the EYEPT™-Kindergarten Model, has been followed by a two year summative evaluation, measuring the impact of the model in a more quantitative manner.

The second-year evaluation report has shown high classroom quality with our kindergartens delivering the EYEPT™-Kindergarten Model scoring higher than Australian comparison data across Emotional support, Classroom organisation and Instructional support domains. These results are very promising.

Case study: Fatima's story

Kids First's Early Years team members receive extensive training to become a highly skilled workforce. This supports educators to bring a trauma-informed approach to their interactions with children and families. In addition, as an integrated early years education and family services agency, the Early Years team can support kindergarten families to access specialist resources in a joined-up and seamless way.

Fatima had been acting out in her three-year-old kindergarten sessions and was becoming distressed in group situations. Noticing her changed behaviour, her educator Kamal organised a meeting with Fatima's mother Saanvi.

Saanvi confided that her marriage had broken down due to family violence and that she had fled the family home, with Fatima, to reside with her mother, Fatima's grandmother. Saanvi also disclosed that her mother was being violent towards her, which Saanvi had experienced from her as a child.

With Saanvi's permission Kamal consulted her colleague within Kids First's Intake & Engagement Team, with the Intake member linking Saanvi to The Orange Door. The Orange Door worker sourced alternative accommodation for Saanvi so that she and Fatima were safe. This was actioned swiftly and without Saanvi needing to retell her story or be left to navigate a disparate service system.

Once safe, Saanvi was connected to a Kids First Family Therapist for dedicated sessions focused on positive interactions between mother and child.

Fatima is happier, is demonstrating an increased capacity to regulate her behaviours, and has started to engage in play and learning activities with other children.



Kids First Response to the Royal Commission Guiding Questions

First 1000 days of life

Purpose & aims

1. What is the core purpose of early childhood education and care for 0-3 year old children?

The core purpose of early childhood education and care for 0-3 year old children is to provide an environment where all children thrive in resilient, strong and safe families and communities. No child is left behind. No parent is left unable to find the support they need to care for their child in a loving, supported and safe environment.

This means for children:

- All children having equity of access to early childhood education and care, eliminating any barriers to access
- All children are able to develop a strong sense of identity in a safe space. Cultural self-determination is a vital principle, in order to enhance personal agency
- All children are connected with and contribute to their world through learning activities that encourage these behaviours
- All children and families' voices are actively heard and incorporated into the early years program
- All children are able to develop a strong sense of wellbeing
- All children are confident and involved learners and communicators
- Australian governments at all levels must work collaboratively to shape the bright futures that all young children deserve.

This means for parents:

- They develop a positive, respectful relationship with the kindergarten/early childhood centre
- They learn enhanced parenting skills through observing the modelling of a stable, caring relationship between teachers and students
- They participate in the development of programs suited to their children's unique needs and interests
- Tertiary services are available to support their specific needs to build protective factors so they can moderate risk and adversity and promote healthy childhood development and wellbeing
- Families have strong parenting capability so they can moderate risk and adversity and support healthy childhood development and wellbeing
- Families have increased pride in the achievements of their children, leading to enhanced caring relationships.



II. What are the secondary, but still important, purposes of ECEC for 0-3 year old children?

- To facilitate the increased workforce and educational participation of the carers of children through access to childhood education and care that is safe, reliable and convenient and supports the needs of parents who are working and studying
- To strengthen the protective factors for families so they can moderate risk and adversity and support healthy childhood development
- To foster and maintain strong partnerships between families and local government and other agencies that provide integrated wrap around support to vulnerable families
- To develop the skills of ECEC workers so they can not only provide exceptional developmental support to the children in their care, but also raise the status of the profession in society and advocate on behalf of their industry in the broader community.

III. What is, or should be, the role of ECEC in redressing disadvantage (if any)?

When considering the child's individualised early years learning journey, solid foundational experiences in early learning offer young children the possibility to explore their own interests, growing their capabilities and develop cognitive skills. Deficiencies in cognitive and social skills before the age of five are likely to persist into later life and become the basis of problems such as low education attainment, unemployment, teenage pregnancy and involvement in crime. Therefore, a child who experiences strong foundations in kindergarten and/or an early years program is more likely to experience increased wellbeing across a broad array of indicators as adults, such as social, physical and mental health, educational attainment and employment.

ECEC therefore has a critical role in redressing disadvantage. Our experience has shown that high quality universal service delivery is the most effective way to make sure disadvantaged children are not singled out or left behind.

Kids First Early Years Education Program (EYEPTM) was designed to (and was proven in its evaluation findings to successfully) support children with highly complex support needs, and their families' emotional, social and cognitive development. The program not only focused on providing a high-quality education and care program for children, it also addressed the trauma experienced by these children in their formative years and wrapped a suite of early intervention and therapeutic family support services around their families to alleviate family stress, and ensure children commenced school developmentally equal to their peers. This program was the subject of an Australian-first randomised control trial (RCT) undertaken by the University of Melbourne and a qualitative study by Charles Sturt University. The success of this model is documented in the research reports available on our website.

However, this program was only for highly vulnerable 0-3 year olds and it inadvertently stigmatised the very children it was supporting by excluding them from engaging within the mainstream/universal education and care setting. It was clear to us through our family support data and our role as co-ordinator of a regional child and family services alliance that few vulnerable families access ECEC. But they did access kindergarten. We knew that within this highly targeted model lay the building blocks for a universal early years model that could deliver positive outcomes for all Australian children and their families, no matter their start in life. Therefore, we took the best practice learnings from this program and trialled it within our universal kindergarten programs. Our EYEPTM – Kindergarten model was the result.



IV. What supports do parents and caregivers need from ECEC service providers in the first 1000 days of a child's life (including during pregnancy)?

We know from our research that the most salient environmental influence for infants and young children is their caregiving relationships.

Interpersonal interactions are the primary source of experiences (positive and negative) that shape the developing brain and therefore influence development and learning.

Women who are highly vulnerable during their pregnancy due to their own trauma are likely to be most in need of support and skills to parent successfully. These may be women who have lacked appropriate attachment and nurturing, safe relationships during their own formative years and now have no healthy role models on which to build their skills.

Integrating services for families within an ECEC centre provides opportunities to connect with women as early as possible in pregnancy to support good pre-natal practices, such as eating well, getting sufficient sleep and attending all recommended health check appointments. Specialist support can be provided for mental and physical health or substance misuse issues. Connecting at this time with pregnant women with disabilities or specific cultural needs may also result in better, less stressful birthing outcomes.

As part of the Kids First Early Years Education Program – Kindergarten Model, maternal & child health and allied health services are located within the centres, providing an accessible and place-based service for families and a strong referral point for ECEC educators to refer families. In addition, Kids First offers parenting programs and facilitated play groups that are designed to build social connections, strengthen parents' confidence and capacity and identify any families that need further help.

The process of development and maintaining strong positive attachment relationships is ongoing throughout the first 1000 days, and beyond. At every milestone there can be new challenges that require the assistance of specialists. Educators need to be trained in attachment theory so they can recognise and respond sensitively to trauma through behavioural guidance techniques and modelling self-regulation. Furthermore, educators need ready access to colleagues who practice in infant mental health for advice and support.

V. What services could be co-located or integrated for families of children 0-3 years of age within ECEC settings (including during pregnancy)?

The following services have been introduced across Kids First centres. They have proved to be highly significant in the success of our programs, contributing to some of our centres to be rated as "Exceeding" national standards:

- Maternal and child health and immunisations
- Allied health services including speech pathology, nurse practitioner, physiotherapy
- Pre -school mental health consults
- Access to Early Learning (AEL)
- Early Help coaches and support
- Integrated Family Support services (including parenting coaching and support, referral pathways into other services)
- Evidence based Parenting programs, such as Tuning into Kids, Circles of Security, Triple P
- Mothers in Mind (MiM) our mother and child play-based group program aimed at helping mothers whose personal trauma has made parenting difficult (resourcing them to be the mothers they want to be). This includes play groups that work with parents to understand the developmental needs of their child and build their skills and experiences through attachment and play
- Informal opportunities for parents to connect and reduce isolation, such as a coffee club or parenting group
- Supported playgroups.

Anecdotal evidence shows that the programs' focus on improved parenting skills and confidence has empowered families experiencing violence, social-isolation, inter-generational disadvantage, mental health, trauma and disability with improved connectedness.



Quality

VI. What does high-quality ECEC service provision for children 0-3 years deliver? What are the markers of optimal program delivery?

In addition to the National Quality Standards, high-quality provision of ECEC services delivers[^]:

- Children and families having a shared sense of belonging
- Children having strong, authentic relationships with their classmates, care givers and educators
- Children who are active, engaged, and capable learners, and are supported to enter primary school
- A safe universal learning environment for children experiencing different levels of vulnerability and/or trauma
- Families having strong protective factors so that they can moderate risk and adversity and support healthy childhood development and wellbeing
- Higher than benchmark staff retention
- A commitment to continuous quality improvement and delivery of contemporary services based on assessment of the needs of families accessing services. This involves a partnership approach, with families being encouraged to participate actively in the development, delivery and monitoring of their child's education.

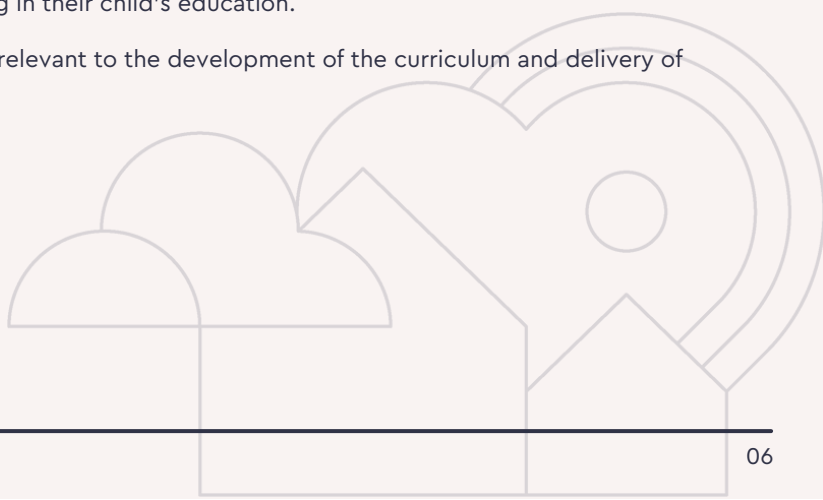
Some of the markers of optimal program delivery (as evidenced in our practice) include:

- Holistic wrap-around support provided to the families of the children to overcome stress and engage as equal partners with Kids First in their child's learning
- Strong partnerships with local government and other local services to provide integrated wrap-around support
- Ongoing training and professional development for educators including training in relational pedagogy, trauma-informed practice and attachment theory
- Embedding of Early Help Family Coaches within the core staffing of early years centres to provide integrated support to families
- Educators working with children to incorporate the voice of children into the program
- Seeking feedback on the curriculum and ensuring it is relevant to the families and their cultures
- Co-participation strategy to allow children, families and community members to meaningfully shape the early years space and environment
- Families attending with their child as part of the orientation process, to support building a trusted relationship with the primary educator
- At least half yearly parent teacher meetings, providing parents the opportunity to review their child's progress and set goals for the next 6 months
- Multiple channels for families to stay up to date with their child's learning progress, including online learning platforms to provide the latest information and resources and email newsletter updates
- Multiple opportunities for families to provide feedback, including participant reference groups, regular surveys, event feedback and complaints
- Regular reporting back to families on feedback provided and action taken
- Parent/family workshops for families to learn from experts and share their experience with others. This includes universal family information sessions based on current challenges families are facing, for example 'Tuning into kids', 'Circle of security' and 'Triple P'
- Parent Advisory Groups for each centre comprising parent representatives and supported by the Lead Teacher of the centre.

Early Help Family Coaches work in partnership with the broader universal and secondary service systems to integrate necessary supports and services into the centre to facilitate engagement with families. Family Coaches identify families with emerging needs early to reduce the need for intensive family and statutory services downstream. This support is particularly helpful for families at critical transition points such as the birth of a new baby, children beginning kindergarten or transitioning to school. In addition, the Family Coach also provides consultation and support to the educators and teachers to build their capability and skills to support families in improving their parenting skills and actively engaging in their child's education.

Parent Advisory Groups provide input on all matters relevant to the development of the curriculum and delivery of the service from a parent/community perspective.

[^] Monash University Centre of Health Research and Evaluation, 2018



VII. (How) does quality differ for different cohorts of children?

Mechanisms for ensuring all children have equity of access

Kids First strongly believes in the importance of a high-quality early education programs for all children and is committed to achieving this in all our sites. The duration of the program, the fee structure and other related matters are based on our assessment of the community and the needs and visions of our partners (for example local government).

Affordability and access

Kids First has considerable experience in working with families with Health Care Cards, on a pensioner concession, Bridging Visa-F, Department of Veterans Affairs card etc., and in working with the families to help them access appropriate subsidies from the Department. Discussions are held with families at the time of initial contact to assess their support needs.

No family or child is excluded from accessing our early years' program due to affordability of fees.

Governments can reduce developmental vulnerability and address barriers to accessing ECEC through:

- Removing the Activity Test to allow all children to become eligible for 36 hours of subsidised ECEC per week
- Fully funding the cost of ECEC through a flexible mechanism for children who are most vulnerable. For example, amending the ACCS to ensure services have at least 13 weeks to apply and gain ongoing fee exemptions. The ACCS Child Wellbeing subsidy amount is currently available for only 6 weeks and requires additional applications to get an exemption on top of the paperwork already needed to make an ACCS application
- Expanding the Child Wellbeing Subsidy to be at minimum up to 13 weeks will reduce administrative burdens and support services to support vulnerable children. Additionally, fully funding ECEC for families with a Health Care Card would simplify application processes and ensure families don't have to relay the same story multiple times and thus remove a barrier to access
- Creating a subsidy system that is easy to navigate and fund Early Help Coaches who can support families to enrol in ECEC
- Providing greater flexibility in hours of support funded by the Inclusion Support Program to match patterns of children's attendance
- Co-funding the rollout of two years of free preschool following the Victorian model. It is evident that the more ECEC that a child receives the more likely they are to be school ready. The federal government should invest into co-funding pre-school with the state governments for at least two days a week for two years before a child starts school.



VIII. Where is innovation happening in programming and service delivery? What does that look like?

The EYEP™ - Kindergarten Model is innovative in taking the best of the results from our pilot and adapting it for universal service delivery. There is nothing like this approach in the context of Australian early learning. We believe there is an unmet need to prepare children for formal education, and to recognise the critical role their families can play to support them. We believe that all Australian children and families should have access to high-quality, education and care, underpinned by an evidence-based service model. Our EYEP™-KM model addresses this gap:

Australian-first evaluation

- Kids First invested in an independent randomised control trial, the first of its kind in Australia and funded by the Australian Research Council. This was conducted by the University of Melbourne and Murdoch Children's Research Centre alongside EYEP™'s delivery. This evaluation enabled the development of the universal service model that is being rolled out to a number of early childhood education centres around Victoria.

Ongoing evaluation partnership in implementation

- The roll out of the EYEP™ - Kindergarten Model in Kids First's centres is being evaluated in real time in a partnership with Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), which is conducting a continuous monitoring of implementation to provide evidence of a cost-effective, impactful, scalable model and to inform the ongoing implementation and adaptation of the mode and support ongoing adaptation of the EYEP™ -KM. Biannually, data is being collected and analysed to identify areas for improvement. Responses to these areas are being tested at organisational and service-level. Findings are being considered at both service level and across services. Scalability across services is therefore an objective of the evaluation, including up to national level.

Action learning is central

- This evaluation features a strong action learning component which is integral to continuous improvement in development of the model. By creating a partnership approach, the MCRI works to identify strengths of the model and implementation and ways to overcome barriers to the best possible program delivery. This evaluation, which is taking place over three and a half years, involves both formative and summative elements running alongside each other to further the refinement of the model.

Child and family involvement in decision making

- The Kids First EYEP™-KM program includes a strong focus on family involvement. For example, social events help parents feel connected to the centre, other families and the children at the centre. They feel involved in their child's education by seeing children in their learning environment, and having a chance to discuss things with educators. The Parent Advisory Group helps parents feel included in planning.

Wrap around service delivery

- The Kids First model gives equal footing to education and care. Both elements create the best conditions for children to be capable learners. Care includes targeted support services that are effectively 'wrapped around' families. The wraparound model brings services to families within the early learning environment, rather than creating unnecessary barriers to their participation. Families can access a combination of on-site services, such as maternal and child health nurses, mental health specialists or a dietitian. Where they are not co-located, space is available on site for appointments.

Shared workshops

- 'Tuning into kids' and Triple P- Positive Parenting Program are held on site and families are encouraged to attend, at no cost.

The wraparound model

- Brings services to families within the early learning environment, rather than creating unnecessary barriers to their participation.

Attuned to Trauma

- To be trauma informed requires all activities and ways of working to respond to the effects of trauma that children and their families may have experienced, and which may be visible or invisible. Research shows that trauma including grief, abuse, parental addiction or family stress, can undermine children's ability to learn, form relationships and function capably. Educators are trained in attachment theory and recognising and responding sensitively to trauma through behavioural guidance techniques and modelling self-regulation. Educators have ready access to colleagues who practice in infant mental health.

VIII. Where is innovation happening in programming and service delivery? What does that look like? continued...

Trauma sensitive environments benefit all children

- Those whose experience of trauma is known or unknown, and children who share a learning environment with children affected by trauma.

High expectations and high support for educators

- The workforce of teachers and educators are purposefully selected to ensure that teams are grounded in the service elements and pedagogical principles we practice. All staff at all levels receive intensive training in pedagogical principles.

Supporting educators

- Unlike other early years services, educators are given coaching and mentoring through fortnightly supervision. This is an opportunity to engage in reflective practice and develop strategies to best support each child.

Deep relationships from day one

- The model is underpinned by a relational pedagogy that creates an environment where children can develop relationships with their caregivers who are supported to foster secure attachments with children. It recognises the importance of staff modelling healthy relationships to children, showing warmth, curiosity and acceptance of each child's experience and point of view, as well as responsiveness to their emotions.
- Prior to attending the kindergarten, orientation events introduce the child and family to the primary educator.

Parental involvement

- Half yearly parent-teacher meetings provide opportunities to review children's progress and set goals.

Strengths-based approach

- The curriculum takes a strengths-based approach to the promotion of mental health and resilience in children and their families. That is, it seeks to promote secure and safe relationships and respond effectively to family challenges as they arise.



IX. How can ECEC service providers include parents and caregivers in education and information to support wellbeing and attachment in early years?

Self-determination is a vital principle in order to enhance personal agency. The Kids First EYEP™- KM recognises the importance of giving children and families a voice, rather than making assumptions about them, their context and their behaviour. Privileging children and family's self-determination is highly important in supporting their recovery from trauma – this means providing choice and options and information so they can make informed decisions.

The principles and practice of self-determination are highly important in our work with First Australians. Kids First is committed to initiatives that evidence our deep commitment to working with Aboriginal Elders and Community in a spirit of healing and mutual respect where we are equal partners with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping new solution to enduring issues.

When families are engaged it is vital to sustain their engagement. If they feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to the services offered, they may be less likely to stop attending. When services provide high quality interactions and sustain the involvement of parents, their children also participate in the services with the goal of improving learning, development and wellbeing.

Planning for programs at each of our centres is based on a partnership approach with the families, with our staff encouraging families to participate actively in the development, delivery, and monitoring of their child's education. We use multiple channels for families to stay up to date with their child's learning progress, including online learning platform Story Park to provide the latest information and resources, and email newsletter updates. There is a Parent Advisory Groups (PAG) for each centre comprising parent representatives and supported by the Lead Teacher of the centre to provide input on all matters relevant to the development of the curriculum and delivery of the service from a parent/community perspective. Educators working with children will also adopt appropriate strategies to incorporate the voice of children into the program.

Kids First believes that programming should be child focused and inclusive, with educators guided by the National Quality Framework and the relevant learning frameworks, as we know that when children can influence what and how they learn, they are more likely to participate and learning opportunities are enhanced.

Kids First's goal is empowering children and families' voices and creating active engagement by ensuring participation of all children, with a particular focus on ensuring children from vulnerable backgrounds and their families are appropriately supported to participate in their critical early years. Based on the principles of proportionate universalism, the Kids First EYEP model has an in-built capability to be scaled up for children and families requiring additional support in a seamless manner.



Participation

X. What are the current barriers for families in accessing early education and care support in the first 1000 days of a child's life?

Barriers to participation include:

- Financial – the cost of ECEC can be prohibitive to families with very limited resources, particularly as the cost of living increases and jobs remain difficult to find. While supports are available, not all families may be eligible, or they may not know how to access government support programs
- Geographic – there are gaps in the provision of ECEC, particularly in regional and rural Australia. Some service providers have been unable to maintain services due to increased costs and government regulations or because of the difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified staff
- Housing stability – the chronic shortage of affordable housing – especially in regional and rural areas – contributes to the difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff. It is also a factor for families, who may not be able to stay in one area due to housing insecurity
- History of trauma and concomitant lack of parenting skills – past and current negative experiences can result in mothers with a lack of confidence to engage with early childhood programs
- Lack of understanding of the impact of early childhood education on successful later life – allied to the above point, mothers who have no past positive experiences may not value the connection between early positive attachments and confidence in learning and a fulfilling later life
- Being outside the pre-natal health support system – pre-natal checks are an important opportunity to engage with vulnerable women and connect them with the supports they need to flourish as mothers.



Workforce

XI. What are the most important competencies for people who are delivering high quality early childhood education and care?

Competencies required by Kids First (see innovation in the sector, question IX above) include strong understanding of and ability to apply:

- Attachment theory
- Trauma-informed practice
- Interpersonal skills that foster and maintain positive relationships with partners including families, local government, support services and the general community
- Affinity with children 0-3 years old
- Continuous improvement practices
- Feedback mechanisms to receive and provide information (feedback loop).

Kids First purposeful recruitment of educators, with a minimum qualification of a Bachelor in Education and Care, enables our programs to reach the "exceeds" level of assessment.

Kids First support educators with ongoing professional development opportunities and mentoring to build on existing skills and extend capacity to secure best outcomes for children.

Creating a supportive culture for reflective practice and continuous improvement enables educators to better meet the needs of local families with the support of peers and other support services if required.

We believe in employing a dedicated pool of casually employed educators who work throughout the year, above the required ratio, to foster connections and relationships with children across all Kids First kindergartens. Kids First commitment to a stable and predictable relief (casual) workforce provides a 'speedy' response in the allocation of temporary staff, for planned and unplanned leave, with minimal disruption to the daily provision of care.



Other areas of inquiry

XII. What opportunities are there to innovate, redesign and codesign ECEC service models with communities to improve opportunities for families and children experiencing disadvantage?

The Kids First EYEP™- KM recognises the importance of giving children and families a voice, rather than making assumptions about them, their context and their behaviour. Privileging children and family's self- determination is highly important in supporting their recovery from trauma – this means providing choice and options and information so they can make informed decisions.

See answer to question XI above.





KIDS FIRST

Contact us

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Stay up to date

 Kids First Australia

 @Kidsfirstmedia

 Kids First Australia

 @Kidsfirstaus