



## The Whole Child Framework

It has been known in the early childhood sector for many years that families who currently experience adverse life circumstances or who have experienced developmental trauma struggle to engage or remain consistently engaged with early childhood education (AIHW 2020). Trauma changes the way people understand their world, the people in it, and how and where they belong. They develop distorted rules about relationships that are built on mistrust, terror, and betrayal (Australian Childhood Foundation 2018). This applies particularly to Indigenous Australians who have experienced generations of forced family separation, discrimination and being driven towards assimilation or exclusion.

For Indigenous Australian children trauma experiences impact their ability to effectively engage with early learning services. However, the reasons for non-engagement or difficulty with remaining engaged go much deeper than trauma or adverse life circumstances, although these are certainly relevant considerations (SNAICC, 2019).

Families with multiple and complex needs, including Indigenous Australian families, struggle to engage or remain engaged with early learning services with barriers including limited access to transport, financial disadvantage, fear of being judged, feeling excluded from decision making about their child (educator expert approach), and inconvenient structure and routines such as drop off and pick up times. (AIFS, 2010; SNAICC, 2019). SNAICC suggests that Indigenous Australian families' engagement and participation in early childhood services also hinges on relationships, including family grouping, cultural activities, the presence or absence of Indigenous Australian staff, and accessibility of additional support services.

To ensure children who are members of families with multiple and complex needs can access appropriate formal learning and development opportunities, including early intervention, these barriers need to be adequately addressed.

Evidence suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable when starting school if they have not accessed an early childhood education program (SNAICC 2018). The same can be said for the children of families with multiple and complex needs (AIHW). Research shows that the implications of this disadvantage often affect children throughout their life (Molloy et al., 2020).

Research also demonstrates that involvement in high quality early childhood and parenting support programs can alleviate some of these negative impacts for families (AIFS). Families who engage with early childhood education and care services have decided to trust early childhood services with their most precious asset, their children. It stands to reason that developing stronger, trusting relationships between services and families is imperative to sustaining engagement.

## **Discussion**

So how do we move forward to engage all families consistently and continuously with high quality early childhood and parenting support programs? Is there a need to shift the focus from focusing only on the child wellbeing to considering the whole family's wellbeing?

Do we need to shift from the common conception of early childhood experts as the ‘saviors of the child through their early childhood experience’ and move towards authentic, collaborative relationships whereby ECEC services support and consider barriers to participation including parental wellbeing and cultural history? Do we need to rethink how we manage our environments such as family grouping and appropriate children to staff ratios?

### **The issues.**

Currently, in early childhood settings in Australia, practice frameworks exist to ensure that children experience excellent quality teaching and learning. These vary across each state. For example, Queensland Early Childhood Education and Care Services (ECEC’s) often use the Early Years Learning Framework of Australia (EYLF). Victoria uses the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VELYDF). A core aspect of each of these frameworks is developing partnerships with families in early childhood services in relation to planning, assessment, and service delivery. (EYLF, 2009)

While the frameworks also recognise the importance of developing strategies to work authentically and inclusively with multiple and complex needs and Indigenous Australian families, this can be problematic for services to achieve. This is because supporting these families require specialised knowledge, often not taught comprehensively in ECEC courses. In addition, this requires time and resources, many of which early childhood services do not have enough of.

Furthermore, family support services and family intervention services such as child safety, often refer multiple and complex needs families to early education and care services as a supportive strategy for families struggling to cope. This has become apparent in the development of the Additional Child Care Subsidy, Child Wellbeing payments available for families. Services are reporting that they are seeing an increase in families requiring these payments to be in place to remain engaged with the service. (Search Light, 2022)

A Practice Sheet published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) (September 2010) suggests that involvement in high quality early childhood and parenting support programs can alleviate some of the negative impacts of disadvantage on young children and families (Gross et al., 2003; Gross et al., 2009; Melhuish, 2003; Webster-Stratton, 1998). However, service providers can find it challenging to engage families from disadvantaged backgrounds (Cortis et al., 2009).

If it is challenging to engage families in one service, it must be even more challenging to engage them in several such as ECEC, family support, therapy collectively.

In relation to early childhood specifically, when multiple and complex needs families engage in the services, they often have poor attendance and early disengagement. This is partly due to financial constraints. However, as AIFS suggests, it may also be that a service may be intimidating to a family that has had no experience of, or a negative experience, of other service environments.

### **Search Light approach to service delivery.**

Search Light Incorporated early learning centre offers a combination of family support services and early childhood education primarily to young mothers with multiple and complex needs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Feedback provided by the young families attending this service suggests that a child's engagement in early childhood services is as much about the parent's sense of belonging as it is their child's. This is also communicated in SNAICC's "Successful stories to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in early childhood education and care" publication.

Search Light integrates the needs of the family into their service delivery. Search Light recognizes that to achieve optimal outcomes for a child, the parent's needs must be acknowledged. Parental wellness is an important consideration for a child's learning. Therefore, Search Light focuses strongly on developing relationships with families so that parents can share stories and, where possible, solve problems.

The young families of this service have communicated that the additional support, acceptance, inclusion, non-judgment for being a young parent, being able to chat about personal challenges is why they remain engaged with the service. (Search Light Inc marketing interviews, July 2020 @ [Pregnancy and Parenting support Pregnancy and Parent - Search Light Inc](#) )

Poor attendance and disengagement for families with multiple and complex needs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is concerning when we know that engagement in early childhood education and care services increases positive outcomes at school in future years. As stated earlier, there is growing evidence that quality early childhood education and care offers children developmental opportunities and improves school readiness (Melhuish 2012; OECD 2017; Warren et al. 2018) as cited by AIHW, 2020.

The issue is that early childhood service practitioners have very little professional knowledge of how they can best support these families whose engagement and sense of belonging in services also depends on the service recognizing their multiple and complex needs and culture.

These families require additional support, flexibility, and positive regard for them and their circumstances.

### **Whole Child Framework**

Search Light Early Learning Centre recognised that the sector could benefit from a framework that supports early childhood services to consider how their service can support families with multiple and complex needs who are currently falling through the gaps. (Chapman 2022).

Search Light Early Learning Centre has developed the Whole Child Framework in consultation with early learning centres, family support services and families. This framework is designed to complement the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia for early childhood practitioners in relation to working with a growing number of children who are at risk of attending school without the necessary foundations.

The Whole Child Framework is designed to support the service's practitioners to collaboratively work with early childhood and external family support services as part of their role. As both childhood services and

family support services have an invested interest in the best outcomes for the child, this approach is considered to be the most effective.

The Whole Child Framework focuses on the belief that children are more likely to reach their full potential if services engaged with children ensure that they are working collaboratively with families and other stakeholders to improve seven elements of a family's life. These are:



## **UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF THE WHOLE CHILD FRAMEWORK**

### **WELLBEING**

Research shows that a child's wellbeing and developmental outcomes can be significantly impacted by their parents' wellbeing and capacity to parent. If a child's parent or primary caregiver is experiencing or has experienced multiple and complex life circumstances which have resulted in trauma responsive behaviours such as emotional dysregulation, then the child is likely to develop needs outside what is considered normal childhood development (AIHW, 2020). Multiple and complex life circumstances may include parents' own childhood abuse, mental health, social or community traumatic events, domestic violence, poverty, intergenerational trauma to name a few.

Support services and early childhood services need to understand that supporting parent wellness and functioning is imperative and inter-related to achieving positive outcomes for a child. (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women; AIFS)

As early childhood services we have a responsibility to consider the relationships that we form with the families as well as the child. If an adult family member feels safe, included, and supported in an early childhood service, chances are the child will as well.

It is also important to take the time to understand the family's story, consider how both the child's development and learning needs can be met as well as the family member's wellbeing.

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

The relationship choices that families make can either increase the protective factors present in their lives or increase the risk factors. Research shows that increasing protective factors in a family's life increases the likelihood that children will experience a safe environment to live in. Family trauma, abuse and neglect increase the likelihood that the next generation will also experience trauma, abuse and or neglect also. Families often do not have the tools and knowledge to make safe and supportive relationship choices if they, themselves have never experienced safe and supportive relationships. (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women; AIFS)

As early childhood providers engage with families on a regular basis, they are in a prime position to be role models in relation to supporting families to experience positive, supportive relationships when they engage with us.

Developing relationships with families with multiple and complex needs takes time. It also takes consistency and accountability. You need to remember to say hello every day if that is what you usually do. The day that you are too busy and the family walks past you is the day that they think that you don't like them anymore. If you forget to do something that you promised to do you may receive a similar response. We are all human though and these things can happen. It is about knowing this and acknowledging this with the family. For example, "Hey Mary, I realized this morning that I was busy and forgot to say hello. I am sorry."

## **SAFETY AND SECURITY**

Social and environmental factors contribute to a family's ability to provide a safe and secure life for their child. If a family is experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, unemployment, housing stress, lack of access to social support, neighbourhood disadvantage, neighbourhood violence, domestic violence then they are unlikely to be able to engage in early childhood services until these needs are met. They may engage in family support services however the extent of the issues may not be known. (Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women; AIFS)

Early Childhood services see families often and if they have taken the time to establish a relationship with families, they may come to know some of the challenges that they are facing. Early Childhood services can refer families to support services and provide access to support for families. More importantly though, they can create a safe space to just sit, have a chat and maybe help the family to feel connected to a community that cares about them. Establishing this approach may mean that families communicate this experience to other families who might then engage also.

## **EDUCATION**

*As quoted by the Victorian Government's EYLDF "Family-centered practice is essential for improving learning outcomes. Research shows that parents' involvement in their child's education is associated with improved learning outcomes for children (Nzinga-Johnson et al, 2009; Huang and Mason, 2008; Hujala, Turja, Gaspar, Veisoon & Waniganayake, 2009)."*

This is true for families who are experiencing positive family functioning. But what about families who are experiencing domestic violence, homelessness, mental health considerations to name a few? These families may have no routines, be engaging in unhealthy eating habits and potentially unsafe sleeping practices to name a few.

How do these families actively and authentically contribute information when their world is in chaos? How do they answer questions about relationships, routines when they know that these might be received with a discerning view?

How do these families contribute to setting learning goals for their children when they themselves are struggling to learn the world of parenting?

The Whole Child Framework advocates for services to take a soft entry approach with families when they initially engage in the service. Show interest in the family as a whole and getting to know them. Develop interview processes which support gathering important information and then spend the time developing a relationship with the family over time so that more information will organically be provided to support the family.

Many services may be engaged in the above processes already. The Whole Child Framework asks educators to build upon this and include the family in intentional teaching moments to support them to develop skills to understand the importance of their child's development and learning. Help them

to feel supported. They don't know what they have never been taught. This requires a sensitive approach as many of these families have experienced trauma, have cultural considerations which need to be addressed and can quickly feel like they are being burdened to add more to an already full plate.

## **CULTURE**

*“Cultural considerations are relevant to all children, whether their cultural identity is the same as the dominant culture. For children of non-mainstream cultures, cultural differences and considerations are easier to discern. It is always difficult to define one’s own culture as we exist within it. As Aboriginal leader Dr. Alf Bamblett has put it, culture is to people as water is to fish – we take our own culture for granted as it is part of our identity and part of our very being.”* Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework 2008.”

Ensuring that families are included and supported to feel a sense of belonging in their early childhood service holistically requires practitioners to fully understand each family, their individual story. Each family will differ. We cannot know everything about every culture and even if we know a lot, each family member’s experience within that culture will differ.

To authentically recognise culture in an early childhood setting requires staff to have some baseline understanding about the culture for the purpose of appreciate enquiry. From here, practitioners need to develop a relationship with the family and get to know their own individual customs, beliefs etc. Families may not know what to share as they just do these things every day and some families may be trying to assimilate for fear of judgment. As Educators, if we show interest, consideration, and adjustment to our processes then families will increasingly feel a sense of belonging.

## **PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT**

Professional support for families who attend our early childhood services is imperative. There are many ways that services can offer professional support to families. Below are a few ways, however professional support requirements are different for different services due to location, capacity, culture etc. The preventative, early support that families receive can make a difference to outcomes.

Research indicates that there are a range of individual and family-related factors in a person’s life that, if present, will benefit their individual wellbeing and the health of their relationships. People are more likely, however, to access help in the face of a crisis rather than access assistance to prevent problems by strengthening these factors. This raises the question of the efficacy and suitability of policies and programs that aim to encourage help-seeking behaviours and/or promote the strengthening of relationships prior to any crises occurring, or problems becoming entrenched.” (Robinson and Parker 2008).

## **Supporting young families**

Very few multiple and complex needs families complete secondary school. For many of these parents, this is because several preventable barriers to continued schooling are not addressed. These barriers include inflexible school policies and procedures, a lack of adequate child care and transportation, and other practical difficulties that make continuing education very difficult (Barling, 2007).<sup>2</sup>

Services that can support young parents to continue with their education is paramount. If services have secondary schools near their centre and they currently transport children to and from the centre, then maybe they could consider collecting the young parents as well so that they can attend school if they have the capacity/room on the bus etc. to do so. The service could also consider picking up other parents who need to attend support services close to the centre.

### **Creating spaces for families to debrief/ engaging in house support.**

Some families may just need a quiet space to sit and talk after dropping off their child. If their world at home is chaos, then sometimes just a cup of tea/coffee etc. in a quiet space with someone to listen is all they need. During this debrief families may communicate some of the issues that are going on in their lives. Services could consider bringing support services to the childcare service to support families with this. For example, if a few families were struggling with toilet training or behaviour then the service could engage a consultant to come out to the service to deliver an information session. The service may have this skillset within their staff team as well.

## **Referrals**

Services could take the time to get to know support services in the community. Giving someone numbers for support services is not always affective. Being able to tell a family more about the organisations, waitlists, explaining why you think they might be a good fit etc. is more likely to achieve results.

## **PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE**

Most parents love their child. The amount of parental knowledge and education that parents may have in relation to raising their child and meeting their child's needs is not reflective of this love. Supporting the development of parental knowledge for multiple and complex needs family's needs to include recognition of the parents' own childhood experience and the impacting factors that may be present as a result of the multiple and complex needs.

*We need to ensure that young children have the conditions they need to develop well: responsive caregiving and secure attachments, environments that provide them with opportunities to participate and learn, protection from the effects of adverse circumstances (Gerhardt, 2014; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004; Richter, 2004; Siegel, 2012). "*

Supporting the development of parental knowledge needs to include access to regular support networks. In relation to multiple and complex needs families and young parents this works well when

it is conducted in a reasonably relaxed and unstructured way, and when the parents are allowed to have input into the content of the program and not "told what to do", but rather "treated as an adult" or "like an equal" (Malin & Morrow, 2009, p. 499). Morrow, 2009; Soriano et al., 2008).

There are 14 guiding organisational values that are the foundation for the Whole Framework. These guiding values are:

1. Social connectedness to others builds resilience
2. Authentic, non-judgmental relationships form the foundation for all learning and healing to occur
3. Professional support needs to be responsive in real time to real time issues
4. Professional support should draw upon current research to inform best practice
5. Cultural healing practices are important and should be recognised
6. All families should be treated equally, and staff should engage in appreciative enquiry in relation to diversity
7. Client participation is essential in all that we do
8. Clients have the right to access quality services regardless of economic circumstances
9. Clients have a right to experience and contribute to, as many life opportunities as possible.
10. The whole family plays a role in a child's life and who is considered a family member may differ for each family
11. Recognition of the importance and value of interagency connectedness and knowledge sharing
12. Policies and procedures should reflect the needs of the client and consider the well-being of staff
13. Staff should engage in professional development opportunities to ensure continuous improvement of our service
14. The protection of children remains paramount

## Elements of the Framework

### Guiding practice principles

These guiding principles are ideas and suggestions provided by different communities. They may be different for your community, however, give a general idea of what can be included. These principles are not designed to be ticked off, but rather to guide practice as each community is different.

 <b>WELLBEING</b> 	
Principle	Outcome example:
The entrance is calm, warm, and inviting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective of the community – could have soft lights, colours of the community, could have a lot of things on display or very little.</li> </ul>
Family interviews/conversations recognise the differing abilities/capacity for families to engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service is flexible and modifies processes to ensure that families are not overwhelmed upon enrolment or during information gathering/data collection. This could mean gathering and providing information slowly over a few visits.</li> <li>• Paperwork may be completed by staff with family permission/conversation.</li> <li>• The service engages with other support services where required to support families with paperwork/commencing at the service, transporting to and from the service, applying for Child Care Subsidy where applicable.</li> </ul>
The family's needs are acknowledged and recognised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciative enquiry occurs to find out what families need from the service in relation to their wellbeing and the family then can see that this has been considered in the environment and practice.</li> </ul>
There is space for families to be supported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service provides a quiet space for families to be supported with tea/coffee etc.</li> <li>• The services provides a space for families to just rest and connect with others.</li> </ul>

<p>There are support resources/ referrals offered to families when needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service sources support resources/information pamphlets</li> <li>• The service makes phone calls for families to refer them to services in the community that may be able to help them.</li> <li>• Staff connect with local community organisations to problem solve, share knowledge and work to support families collaboratively.</li> </ul>
<p>Information about the whole family is acquired for the purpose of appreciation and support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family mapping at interview or when appropriate during the first few weeks and ongoing (who is who)</li> </ul>
<p>The Manager/Director etc. are available at peak times of the day for conversations/referrals/crisis support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Manager avails themselves during peak times by being present in the centre, welcoming families as often as practical.</li> <li>• The management and staff check in with families informally if they can see that they may be issues with the family (paying of fees, attendance, looking unwell, sad, information provided by the family) to see if there are referrals that can be made or if the service can support in any way.</li> </ul>
<p>The service keeps up to date with support services in the community to refer families if needed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Director/Manager attends community networking opportunities.</li> <li>• The Director/Manager research support services in the local community and develops a relationship with these services so that they can advise families accurately on where they can go for support.</li> </ul>





# RELATIONSHIPS

Principle	Outcome example
<p>Families are greeted when entering the service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A familiar face to say hello and check in with how everyone is doing.</li> <li>• Little anecdotes can be shared.</li> <li>• Check in or follow up if the family has shared some challenges.</li> <li>• Check in about good news.</li> <li>• Ask for feedback on how things are going at the service and explore suggestions for new ideas</li> </ul>
<p>The service demonstrates that their entrance environment promotes a sense of belonging for their particular community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand your families – ask them what makes them feel safe and included and ensure the entrance demonstrates these needs.</li> <li>• Engage families to set up the entrance or bring items to contribute.</li> <li>• Ensure that tasks that need to be completed by families are achievable without stress (sign in, children settling etc.)</li> <li>• Surprise families with different welcoming initiatives from time to time (fresh baked food, take a flower, card, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p>Interactions with families and children is trauma informed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff recognise how trauma impacts families and demonstrate sensitivity, understanding and supportive conversations.</li> <li>• Families are asked how they would prefer communication to occur.</li> <li>• Staff remember little details about what is happening in the lives of the family and check in with how they are doing.</li> </ul>
<p>The service engages in practices that support participation and respond to barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service provides food, nappies and any other items that may be a participation barrier.</li> <li>• Transport may be offered or carpooling organised.</li> <li>• Flexible hours</li> </ul>

<p>The service recognises that families are all unique and engage with extended families' members where appropriate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations occur to understand the role of extended family members and their role in the service (visits etc)</li> </ul>
<p>Families feel that they can engage in the early learning space where focus is not only on their child's wellbeing but also their own.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service gets to know the family in an authentic way. Families are welcome to engage in the program in the mornings and are not encouraged to leave quickly.</li> <li>• The service takes the time to get to know the family and value them as part of the early learning community.</li> </ul>
<p>The service shows unconditional positive regard to all families and demonstrates a strength-based approach to concerns and feedback.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service staff treat all families equally.</li> <li>• Staff check their own biases and beliefs.</li> <li>• Professional conversations are strength based and focus on solutions.</li> </ul>





# SAFETY AND SECURITY



Principle	Outcome example
<p>There is a strong emphasis on attachment in the program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service program recognises the importance of strong attachments and supports children’s attachment to family.</li> <li>• The service recognises that family attachments may be strong in extended family.</li> <li>• The service program focuses on building strong attachments by creating safe, predictable routines and staff.</li> <li>• The service emulates as much as possible the safe predictable routines at home.</li> <li>• Where routines cannot be emulated, staff and families work together to create a new routine for the service in which the child feels safe and secure.</li> <li>• The service provides high staff to child ratios so that children can have their attachment needs responded to in a timely manner.</li> </ul>
<p>Honest conversations occur with families in relation to child protection concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns are discussed with families in a strength-based conversation focusing on solutions.</li> <li>• Agreements are made with families about addressing the worries.</li> <li>• Support is offered to address the worries.</li> <li>• Conversations occur in relation to the policies and procedures if the worries are not addressed as per agreement.</li> </ul>
<p>The physical space is safe.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audited by regulatory body.</li> <li>• Safety checklists</li> </ul>
<p>The service provides behaviour expectations for families, and this has been developed with families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All children need to feel safe. Children with additional needs have plans in place to support their safe participation in the service as well as the safe participation of others.</li> </ul>

	These plans need to be trauma, culture and individual needs informed.
The service delivery is in line with community needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service engages in regular conversations with families to set goals and ensure that the reasons for engaging align with the services mission.</li> </ul>
Staff are employed with qualifications relevant to the service and community need.	<p>Staff may need to be qualified or skilled in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early childhood development.</li> <li>• Early childhood trauma</li> <li>• Family support</li> <li>• Parenting</li> <li>• Crisis counselling</li> <li>• First Nations</li> <li>• Health and wellbeing</li> </ul>
Families can access the service safely and feel safe whilst at the service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversations occur with families in relation to safety concerns and how they can be supported</li> <li>• The service ensures that all staff are informed about who can access the service.</li> <li>• The service has risk management and safe procedures in place.</li> </ul>
The program is flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program recognises that family's ability to participate is fluid and evolving depending on capacity and circumstances and the service is flexible in supporting these needs.</li> <li>• The service encourages participation working towards outcomes.</li> </ul>
Families feel included.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family members are supported to engage in early learning in the same space if required or preferred.</li> </ul>





# PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Principle	Outcome example
<b>Families</b>	
The service provides sessions on parental wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun sessions on self-care</li> <li>• Domestic Violence information sessions</li> <li>• Accessing support services</li> </ul>
The service provides information/sessions about child development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The centre offers regular information sessions on child development topics</li> </ul>
Families are offered information about their child’s development and supported to seek additional support where required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child development assessments are conducted on children within the first few weeks.</li> <li>• Meetings with families are scheduled to discuss their child’s development and set goals for the program.</li> <li>• Meetings with families are scheduled to discuss their child’s development and set goals for home.</li> </ul>
The service offers one on one support for families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families can make appointments to discuss their child, their concerns about their own circumstances etc.</li> <li>• The families can access drop-in chats with the Director as required.</li> </ul>
The service encourages peer support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate sessions for families experiencing similar circumstances.</li> <li>• Introduce families to those who may have similar interests.</li> <li>• Hold coffee mornings.</li> </ul>
The service develops a Child Development Plan for each child who is demonstrating developmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental milestones checklist</li> <li>• Develop an emotional support plan.</li> <li>• Develop a behaviour plan which is trauma</li> </ul>

differences.	informed, developmental difference informed and is in consultation with the family.
<b>Staff</b>	
Policies and Procedures are trauma informed and consider First Nations family's needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revision of policies and procedures with expert knowledge</li> <li>• Consult with First Nations communities in relation to revision of policies and procedures.</li> </ul>
The service assesses the needs of the community and the assesses the gaps in staff qualifications and or experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service develops professional development plans with staff to ensure that qualifications and or experience is responsive to community need.</li> </ul>
Educators are trained in developmental trauma – neuroscience informed training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators are trained in either tertiary trauma aware education.</li> <li>• Undertake professional development in trauma informed practice</li> </ul>
Programing, practice and critical reflection are responsive to trauma needs of children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular check-ins and team meetings occur to critically reflect on practice with a trauma informed lens.</li> <li>• Program and practice tools/documentation considers trauma informed practice</li> </ul>
Staff are supported by EPA's and the personal needs of the staff are considered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff are supported to recognise the impacts of working in early childhood and family support with regular check-ins.</li> <li>• Staff are encouraged to access EPA's when the recognise signs of vicarious trauma or work-related stress.</li> </ul>





# EDUCATION

Principle	Outcome example
<p>The service delivers a program which support the learning of children and families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service uses a combination of an approved learning framework such as EYLF and the Whole Child Framework.</li> </ul>
<p>The program is flexible, and conversations occur to support flexible attendance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families are encouraged to discuss attendance barriers with service staff.</li> <li>• The service recognises the impacts of challenging family situations and cultural needs and makes a flexible attendance plan with families.</li> <li>• The service is understanding and works on a support plan to increase attendance where possible.</li> <li>• Families are supported to understand the important developmental outcomes that occur when children attend early childhood education opportunities regularly.</li> </ul>
<p>Educators engage in critical reflection daily and that this critical reflection is open to all possibilities and is trauma informed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service develops critical reflection tools that support and recognise the impacts of trauma and how trauma needs can be supported for children and families.</li> <li>• Critical reflection respects the influence of culture, family circumstances, family diversity, language diversity and children’s individual personalities on children’s development.</li> </ul>
<p>Children are supported to engage with consideration to their circumstances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators/support staff ensure that they are aware of personal circumstances impacting learning and consider this in their programming.</li> <li>• Routines are adapted to the individual needs of children and are trauma informed.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programming supports smooth transitions from home to the centre/playgroup etc</li> </ul>
Learning and development is considered in the context of the child and their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environments respond to what is happening at home for children.</li> <li>• Educators recognise the impacts of trauma on learning and respond to the body and emotional responses for children.</li> </ul>
Families' education is considered important.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service recognises that families may need support to understand their child's developmental needs.</li> <li>• The service supports families as much as possible to reach their own goals for education (this may be formal education, parenting education, therapy etc.</li> </ul>
The service recognises that best outcomes for children need to be inclusive of the whole family and their community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children's development is seen holistically within the context of their family.</li> <li>• The service recognises that families and communities are experts in relation to their children's needs.</li> <li>• Practices reflect the inclusion of culture, extended family, parental knowledge, and family values.</li> <li>• Rich conversations occur to understand how the service can support the family as a whole.</li> </ul>





# PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE



Principle	Outcome example
Strong family relationships are supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The service supports families to build safe and secure attachments with their child. This could include providing family support sessions, peer sessions, child care so that they families can have a break for self-care etc.</li> </ul>
Families are consulted about their family and their outcome needs from the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outcomes for children are inclusive of outcomes for families. That both as seen as interrelated.</li> <li>Families are encouraged to share their outcome needs of the program from enrolment. These outcomes may be mapped in relation to the organisations legislated requirements for funding (DSS, CAPS, ECEC etc. if required).</li> </ul>
Gaps in parental knowledge are identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The service has conversations with families about their child. Gaps in knowledge though conversations are noted, and the program responds to the families need for support.</li> <li>The service may use a formal assessment tool to ascertain gaps (usually funding requirement based)</li> </ul>
The service works with any statutory or support agencies address any concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The service aims to support families who have been identified as requiring additional support and work with support agencies to support families.</li> <li>The families' additional support needs are valued and recognised as important free of judgment.</li> </ul>



# CULTURAL CONNECTEDNESS



Principle	Outcome example
<p>Appreciation is made for cultural priorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service enquires about cultural priorities for the family (for example events, family commitments)</li> <li>• The service enquires about how they should support the family’s cultural priorities.</li> </ul>
<p>The program recognises cultural ways of connecting, supporting, educating, and learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service engages First Nations staff where possible or engages with First Nations people in the community.</li> <li>• The service consults families about their ways of teaching their children.</li> <li>• The service encourages families to support cultural teaching in the service such as visits sharing information, having family and friends come to share information, activities).</li> <li>• The services consults families on cultural importance in relation to the program, the environment, family grouping, access, and communication.</li> <li>• The service works with cultural advisors in the community to support the development of belonging.</li> <li>• The service works with cultural advisors in the community to support the development of the program.</li> </ul>
<p>Staff develop relationships with families and children to understand their individual needs and goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentation is completed with family’s needs and goals.</li> <li>• Daily program planning includes family’s needs and goals.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is space for families to communicate needs in the daily programming document.</li> </ul>
Children’s behaviour is understood within the context of their family, circumstances, personality, and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children’s behaviour is understood to be influenced by personality, family circumstances, trauma, and culture. Services ensure that evaluations consider all of the impacts and assumptions are not made.</li> </ul>
Cultural and family expectations are considered and appreciated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service values different parenting styles and child development outcome priorities.</li> <li>• The service works with the family to support their priorities where possible.</li> <li>• The service engages in supportive and informative conversations with families if cultural or family expectations contravene the rights of the child.</li> </ul>
Children’s development considers the context of their circumstances, experiences, and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service seeks information to inform assessments and provide support based on information gathering about family circumstances, challenges, past and present trauma and cultural values and practices.</li> </ul>
The service recognises and responds to cultural and intergenerational trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service recognises that intergenerational trauma impacts children and families who may not have experienced the trauma themselves directly.</li> <li>• The service values learning more about the family’s trauma, impacts and how they can support the family to feel safe.</li> </ul>
The service supports cultural practices and works with families to seek solutions to regulatory challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The service appreciates that some cultural practices are challenging to meet with regulatory requirements so seeks to problem solve respectfully and collaboratively with the family.</li> </ul>

Families culture is represented authentically and inclusively of family input

Culture is understood in the context of individuals. Appreciate enquiry is a natural part of practice for all cultural practices and celebration days and not just assumed.



As mentioned previously, The Whole Child Framework is a fluid framework that needs to be adapted to each service. The principles and outcome examples have been developed in consultation with a small number of other early childhood services and community services thus far.

Without actually seeking input from all communities in Australia (which is time consuming and a bit beyond our little service in Sunnybank), there will certainly be some principles that do not apply to your service, or you may even have extras that could be included. There may even be feedback on what is already written here.

We all have our own unique community, and the aim of this document is that it is intended to grow, evolve, and change as we build our collective knowledge through connection with as many services working with families as possible.

An important element of information gathering is that families are included in the process as well. We encourage you to use the elements of the Framework to engage in collaborative conversations with families.

If you would like to contribute to this document, please email Search Light Inc with your suggestions and feedback. We encourage constructive feedback as only from feedback can we learn how to best support our families.

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