INTRODUCTION TO EYLF FACT SHEETS

This series of Good Practice Fact Sheets is designed to give educators ideas for promoting, exploring and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture whilst implementing the outcomes, principles and practices from the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). The ideas and examples are designed to share and build upon the learnings and ideas from interviews that SNAICC conducted with 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education centres and six Indigenous Professional Support Units across Australia in early 2012. SNAICC hopes that the fact sheets will be valuable to all early childhood services – both those with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those without.

The Fact Sheets are not intended to provide a detailed ‘how to’ guide to implement the EYLF, but instead to prompt conversations and ideas on possible approaches. SNAICC hopes that these Good Practice Sheets will be evolving documents and we encourage services to share with us any examples that they think will add to these. SNAICC hopes to then update the factsheets with these new examples and release a new edition within the next 12 months.

A more detailed report summarising and drawing lessons from the consultations, Learning from Good Practice: Implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, is also available on the SNAICC website.

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INTRODUCTION TO EYLF FACT SHEETS

How will they work?
Here’s what the different parts of each fact sheet mean.

- examples of how services have implemented the particular theme
- practice ideas for implementing the particular theme
- quotes from services about the theme

different themes important for that EYLF outcome, principle or practice

Many thanks go out to the following organisations for their participation in these interviews and for providing the ideas, stories, examples and photos that form the content of the Fact Sheets.

Services

- Yappera Children’s Service, Melbourne, Victoria
- Gudjahgahmiamia Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Service (MACS), Wreck Bay, ACT Territory
- Gunai Lidi MACS, Morwell, Victoria
- Koonibba MACS, Koonibba, South Australia
- Minya Bunhii, Ceduna, South Australia
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (TACCA), Launceston, Tasmania
- Lulla’s MACS, Shepparton, Victoria
- Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre, Thornlie, Western Australia
- Yawarra Child Care Centre, Mt Druitt, New South Wales
- Jalygurr-Guwan MACS, Broome, Western Australia
- Aboriginal Children’s Centre, Risdon Cove, Tasmania
- Birrelee MACS, Tamworth, New South Wales
- Gundoo MACS, Cherbourg, Queensland
- Congress Child Care Centre (Ampe Kenhe Apmere), Alice Springs, Northern Territory

Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs)

- Yappera IPSU, Victoria
- IPSU, New South Wales & Australian Capital Territory
- QCOSS IPSU, Queensland
- Aboriginal Resource & Management Support Unit (ARMSU), IPSU, South Australia
- Yorganop, IPSU, Western Australia
- Remote & Regional Aboriginal Children & Services Support Unit (RRACSSU), IPSU, Northern Territory

SNAICC also thanks the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the funding support to conduct this research. The views in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Australian Government.
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Outcome 1: Children Have a Strong Sense of Identity. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH
By focusing on children’s individual, family, community and cultural identity early childhood services help to build children’s self-esteem and confidence. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the idea of personal identity is linked to cultural identity. Harnessing children’s cultural identity helps to develop their sense of being, belonging and becoming.
Identity and community

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children developing a strong identity includes developing a strong identity within your community. Family and community are valuable sources of cultural knowledge and skills, and inviting them into the centre can help children to feel a sense of being and belonging as part of a community.

Community pictures:
At the Aboriginal Children’s Centre photo displays celebrate and reflect the community. The Director describes the photographs, “There’s a whole board of Elders from over generations. There are pictures of Risdon Cove, Oyster Cove, children that used to come here, or political rallies done by the Aboriginal Children’s Centre that got us here. So when people walk in here they all feel welcome, they all feel connected…it’s speaking to the whole community.”

Reflecting community groups:
Lulla’s MACS is in a community with two cultural groups, the Yorta Yorta and the Bangerang. Both are respected in the centre and educators talk to children about the cultures of the groups. The environment of the new centre reflects the culture and stories of both groups, with the outdoor space containing a play-sculpture of a platypus (a Bangerang animal) and a turtle (a Yorta Yorta animal) sandpit.

Build a relationship with your local aged care home to provide opportunities for children to visit and interact with local Elders.

Invite community visitors and Elders to the service to share their skills or knowledge with the children – for example story telling or traditional music.

Include information on all the groups from your local area through language, artwork, displays and discussion.

Celebrate NAIDOC week and National Aboriginal and Islander Children’s Day (NAICD).

Building trust in the police:
Gunai Lidi was concerned that children’s challenging experiences with the police was leading to negative associations. To counter this they initiated a program with the Koori Unit from the community policing squad in their area. Visitors from the Koori Unit now regularly join with the children in everyday activities at the service. This is helping the children to develop relationships of trust and positive experiences with the police. Whilst not culturally focused, the visits enhance culture by providing positive Aboriginal role models.
Fostering family identity for children in care:

At Congress Child Care Centre educators feel that it’s particularly important to support children in protective care to develop a sense of identity within their family. Children in care often receive visits from their family members at the centre. The Director explains that during these visits she always takes a photo for the children, “so they have a really good picture of where they fit in their family. So this might be my biological family but this is the family I live with so they are all important to me…so we take lots of photos of that so that they can have this big connection, so my family isn’t just mum and dad and two kids, it’s mum and dad in this family and then I’ve got my mum and dad there and I’ve got aunts and uncles on all sorts of fronts.”

Identity and family

Children feel a sense of identity when their families are honoured, celebrated and included at their service.

- Create family trees with children for display at the service.
- Take photos of children with their families to put up at the service.
- Get to know each child’s family and culture – where is their family from and what is their cultural group?

Children at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre in Tasmania enjoy a visit from the Elders group.
Identity and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and staff

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and staff help to make sure that the everyday programs and environment of the centre show and celebrate culture. They also provide advice for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in programming and talking to families and children.

Encourage educators to share cultural skills and knowledge they may have with the children such as traditional painting, bush tucker, or local languages.

"If we didn’t have the Aboriginal staff here, we wouldn’t have the strong community links, or the understanding from the community of the children’s and families’ issues. And that’s why our service can respond so well and appropriately to different things that go on." (Director, Birrelee MACS).

Discuss strategies with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators for communicating with families, and promote positive awareness of cultural diversity for all children.

Cultural identity is just “a part of who we are (and) it’s just everyday practice for us.” (Director, Gundoo MACS).

Cultural artwork at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre.
EYLF Outcome 1
CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF IDENTITY

Enriching and informing children’s learning experiences through culture:

Birrelee uses children’s culture to interest them in other areas. The service has worked with a local university to design numeracy and literacy resources that reflect the children’s cultures. The Director describes how this is a powerful way to engage with children on topics that they may not be interested in, “So the numeracy may not engage the child but that sense of connection and identity (in the resource) engages the child.” She emphasises “so definitely our learning experiences have to be culturally centred, and I think that’s why our kids struggle at school, because it becomes a secondary thing or an optional extra. Whereas here it’s our daily experience.”

Fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.

Provide children with puzzles, games, puppets, books and music to share cultures from the local area and also from other parts of Australia.

Identity and culture
Incorporate culture on a daily, ongoing basis at all levels of the service

Look around the centre and make sure that the centre’s environment says ‘if you’re Aboriginal you belong here’.

Use red, black and yellow, and green, blue and white colours in different displays, and through pictures, posters and material throughout the indoor and outdoor environments of your centre.

Share Dreaming Stories with children as a valuable, creative and fun way to talk about culture.

Mugadan and Jungaa:
To celebrate literacy day at Gudjahgahmiamia MACS this year one of the aunties from the community visited the service to tell the children the Dreamtime Story of the area, which is about Mugadan and Jungaa (the lizard and the octopus). To bring the story to life for the children she brought with her a collection of shells, an octopus and some picture cards.

“I think we take for granted… how powerful that cultural connection is when it comes to learning, self-esteem, identity and belonging” (Director, Birrelee MACS).

Play and make traditional music – using clapsticks, didgeridoos and drums such as warups.

Include culturally representative educational resources such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dolls.

Have discussions with children around identity, land, history and what it means to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Put a cultural spin on everyday activities.

Embedding culture:
The Director from the Aboriginal Children’s Centre, the cook, and some of the educators were recently discussing how they could celebrate Easter at the centre whilst still incorporating culture, how to “give a message to our children about what’s important to our community at this time of year.” They decided that as it was also mutton bird season they would focus on this, and so they used natural grasses to make mutton bird nests with the children and to talk about Easter through this cultural lens. The Director describes how this approach didn’t detract from possible experiences at home on Easter, but brought in cultural practices and a celebration of a significant time for the community.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices

Being aware of and integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices helps children and families feel that they belong, and supports important cultural practices.

Supporting traditional sleeping practices:
At Koonibba MACS children are allowed to sleep together on mats on the floor, and can choose to sleep next to their relatives. Educators know that most of their children would not be comfortable sleeping in a cot as it is different to how they sleep at home.

Accommodate different children’s sleeping arrangements – for example many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children prefer to sleep close to their relatives rather than their own cots.

Create a family environment at your service – for example through family grouping time and supporting relatives to care for and teach each other.

View children as independent, capable beings - give them freedom and independence and don’t restrict their activities according to their age.

Colourful paintings represent local culture at Minya Bunhii
Identity, nature and tradition

Connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to nature and traditional uses of the land helps them to develop a sense of identity and connection to the land.

Outdoor cultural space:
At Minya Bunhii a section of the outdoor play space provides an easily accessible cultural learning environment. Visitors often come to the centre to work with the children in this area to cook traditional food such as kangaroo tails and damper. The centre has also had local Aboriginal women visit to make cultural objects and musical instruments such as clapsticks, including using hot wire to burn patterns into the sticks.

Traditional shell work:
At Gudjahgahmiamia MACS a local community member has visited the centre to do shell work with the children. Shell work is an important part of the culture of Wrecks Bay. The children worked with Uncle Tom to create art out of the shells from the local area, and these pieces now displayed in the centre. A book was then created to show this experience through photos, and this is now on display on the children’s bookshelf to remind them of what they did, and to share with parents and visitors.

Visit your local nature park to teach children about hunting, bush foods, stories and traditions.

Go on nature walks to collect bush tucker, bush materials and to build shelters.

Create an area in your outdoor play space where children can cook traditional foods like kangaroo tails and have campfires.

Reflect the natural environment in the centre’s play areas by including native plants from the local area.

Visit your local nature park to teach children about hunting, bush foods, stories and traditions.

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Reflect the natural environment in the centre’s play areas by including native plants from the local area.

Learning traditional kelp work at TACCA
EYLF Outcome 1
CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF IDENTITY

Home grown literacy:
Minya Bunhii has developed their own books to teach parents and children about the local Aboriginal culture and languages. This helps strengthen children’s identity, sense of belonging, and communication skills in English and in their local Aboriginal language. The books display photographs of Minya Bunhii children doing various activities and focus on different themes. These include sharing and caring, picking quandongs and making traditional crafts. The fourth book, “Minya Bunhii Kuliny Muka” (little Nest Babies) uses pictures of children aged from birth to toddlers demonstrating essential skills, and is written in both English and Kokatha (a local Aboriginal language).

Warups (drums) from the Torres Strait Islands

Culture and language:
Learning and maintaining traditional language supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to develop a strong identity and effective communication skills.

- Speak to children in traditional language – helping them to settle in and feel safe at the service.
- Display signs and pictures at the centre to reflect language – such as traditional names for each room.
- Read books and sing songs in language.
- Display signs and pictures at the centre to reflect language – such as traditional names for each room.
- Invite relatives or visitors the service to teach children language.
EYLF Outcome 2
CHILDREN ARE CONNECTED WITH AND CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORLD

EYLF Principle 4:  
RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Outcome 2: Children are Connected with and Contribute to Their World and the EYLF Principle 4: Respect for Diversity. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Focusing on relationships with family, community and nature helps children to be connected with and to contribute to their world. An important part of this connection is that children show respect for diversity, which is also a key EYLF principle.
Studying the tides:
Jalygurr Guwan in Broome takes children to the coast to show the children the tides. These visits are led by a local educator who can share her knowledge of the tidal system and patterns with the children.

Building witljas:
Koonibba MACS educators take the children on weekly nature walks through the community. These walks help to connect children with their environment and ground them in their community and history. Activities such as building witljas (bush shelters) help them to explore the traditional practices of their ancestors and problem-solving as a group. Interaction with community members who come on the walks help them to develop strong links with their community and to see their local natural environment as communal land for which they all have a responsibility - for example taking bark only from the ground and not pulling it off trees.

Connection with nature – through gardens, outdoor play environments and nature walks
helps children to build a strong connection to their world, develop environmental responsibility, an awareness of the seasons and how to care for plants and bush tucker and feel that they belong to the land.

A natural environment:
The Aboriginal Children’s Centre has a purpose-built outdoor play environment designed from aerial photographs of the Furneaux Islands, a highly significant area for the Tasmanian Aboriginal population. Mounds in the playground replicate the mutton bird mounds of the islands, and a mutton bird shed sits in the play area. Inside the centre none of the windows are covered by blinds or curtains, so that the windows present an uninterrupted view of nature. The setting is key to connecting children to the land, as The Director explains, “We’re connected to country every day. You walk in the building and the native hens are running at you, and the kids can hear the kookaburras, there’s a little lake they can see out through the window…It’s all bushland.”

Have regular discussions with children about environmental responsibility, water conservation, paper usage and recycling.

Use outdoor play environments to observe and talk about different seasonal cycles – such as autumn leaves and spring growth.

Arrange to take the children into the bush, to the coast, around the block or to the local park.

Use nature walks to teach children about the local plants of the area, what bush tucker foods are available at certain times of the year and to collect natural materials to use in arts and other activities back at the service.

Creating a vegetable or herb garden at the service can help children feel connected to the land and learn that if they care for the land it cares for them.

If there is no space or resources for a garden at the service connect with a local community garden to give children opportunities to learn about plants and gardening.

Giving children opportunities to work with nature is “about instilling in the children that they own this place. This is theirs…you use it and look after it, it’s important enough to look after.” (Aboriginal Children’s Centre).
Hatching chickens:
Connecting in with the Easter celebrations, Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre recently hosted an incubator with live chicken eggs. This provided children with a unique learning opportunity to learn about the process of chickens hatching through discussions with educators, and then through viewing it happening within their own centre.

Invite a local wildlife group to bring native and non-native animals to the service (and teach the children the traditional names for the animals).

Host an egg incubator and watch the chicks hatch.

Visit a wildlife park or zoo.

Have fish tanks for more permanent animals at the service and to help children learn about caring for pets.

Connection with nature – through animals
Looking after animals teaches children important lessons like compassion, nurturing and responsibility, and connects them with the natural world.

EYLF Tool // Fact Sheet 02
EYLF Outcome 2: CHILDREN ARE CONNECTED WITH AND CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORLD

EYLF Principle 4: RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

Social responsibility

Helping children to feel connected with and contribute to their world includes supporting them to develop a sense of social responsibility and an awareness of the impacts of their actions on others.

- Encourage children to share equipment and foster daily routines around caring for equipment. Talk about why they need to treat equipment with respect – so that it is available and ready for them to all use the next day.

- Provide individual spaces for each child to keep their possessions such as bags and hats and encourage them to be responsible for them.

- Encourage children to develop empathy for and relationships with others – for example through discussions around feelings and different ways to communicate with each other.

Clean up crew at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre

Children learning to take care of their garden, Aboriginal Children’s Centre, Tasmania
EYLF Outcome 2: CHILDREN ARE CONNECTED WITH AND CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORLD

EYLF Principle 4: RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

Diversity

Children can be encouraged to respect diversity on a variety of levels, including cultural, family and individual diversity.

1. **Explore children’s family backgrounds and histories through family mapping and discussions between families, educators and children.**

2. **Introduce diversity to older children by using maps of the world, and books and stories that represent different cultures.**

3. **Cook different cuisines and have discussions about different foods from a variety of cultures.**

4. **Use diverse dolls, educational resources, pictures, books and music to expose children to diversity through play.**

5. **Find out from your parents and families what cultural events are important to them – such as Ramadan – and celebrate these at the service.**

6. **Talk to all the parents at the service about their home life and practices to value the diversity of family cultures and make sure that their culture is included at the service.**

7. **Explore Torres Strait Islander culture – for example traditions, songs, music and stories.**

8. **Talk about different cultural traditions with the children – such as bush tucker or traditional stories of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.**

9. **Explore children’s family backgrounds and histories through family mapping and discussions between families, educators and children.**

10. **“We talked about how different we all are but how we’re all the same. And the kids were like ‘Wow we’re all Koori but we’ve all got different coloured hands!’” (Director, Lulla’s MACS).**

11. **“We talked about how different we all are but how we’re all the same. And the kids were like ‘Wow we’re all Koori but we’ve all got different coloured hands!’” (Director, Lulla’s MACS).**

12. **“At Lulla’s MACS they recently celebrated Harmony Day on March 21st by focusing on Maori culture for Harmony Day, with Maori food and singing”**

13. **“Yawarra Child Care Centre has a number of Samoan children and so teaches the children Samoan to ensure that they all feel that their culture is included and valued”**
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Outcome 3: Children Develop a Strong Sense of Wellbeing; Principle 1: Secure, Respectful and Reciprocal Relationships; and Practice 1: Holistic approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Good practice approaches define the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in broad terms as including children’s social, emotional, creative, cultural, physical and cognitive/intellectual development. Important to children’s social and emotional wellbeing is a key EYLF principle that their relationships with educators and support staff are secure, respectful and reciprocal. This approach also views children’s wellbeing as being linked to the wellbeing of their family and community. A holistic approach to meeting children’s wellbeing needs recognises the importance of a range of additional programs such as health, dental, nutritional and parenting programs and services.
EYLF Outcome 3: CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING

EYLF Principle 1: SECURE, RESPECTFUL AND RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

EYLF Practice 1: HOLISTIC APPROACHES

Healthy families:
Birrelee MACS provides a free wound clinic that is open to anyone in the community. By focusing on educating adults, Birrelee makes sure that children can also receive better health care. Birrelee MACS has also joined with Community Health to provide immunisation services to children and their families, including whooping cough.

Holistic approaches to different needs
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children best develop when they are healthy, socially and emotionally secure, and when their families and communities are supported.

“Working with our community anything can happen on any given day...a child may need one to one (attention), or a family may need assistance that takes half your day. Whether it be just support or whether it’s making phone calls or supporting families in decisions they have to make, or whether it’s working with other agencies to connect them to the families so they aren’t approaching agencies cold face.” (Director, Birrelee MACS).

Have educators available and prepared to assist families in accessing services they need, such as calling a service to make an appointment for them or talking through a decision that needs to be made about their child.

Regular ‘hub’ meetings between local early childhood services provide opportunities to talk about issues such as occupational therapy, speech therapy or children’s developmental needs, and share ideas and knowledge.

Ensuring a lower child to educator ratio can result in more individualised and comprehensive care to each child.

Who educators and support staff are is really important. Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and support staff is vital for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and understanding the local community and each child’s family and home situation.

Build partnerships with other organisations to link families up to other services, like health screenings and dental care. Partnerships with early intervention services such as Noah’s Ark can help services to deliver parenting support and early intervention programs.

EYLF TOOL // Fact Sheet 03
Health and dental open days:
To promote the importance of children’s oral health to parents, Lulla’s MACS opened up the centre to families during a recent dental visit day. This helped families and children understand the importance of dental hygiene and care — with the local newspaper even publishing an article! Birrelee MACS holds open day celebrations for health services and families to build these partnerships and to highlight the importance of health. One celebration included a visit by Super Cuz (a Koori superhero character) and an activity for children to show off their new health knowledge to their families.

Health and dental services
include eye and ear checks; weight and height screening; maternal health services; dental care; occupational therapy; immunisations; speech pathology and advice and information to parents and families.

Provide a bus to take children and families to health appointments or link in with health providers to arrange for them to visit the centre directly.

Regularly talk with children and parents about aspects of good health such as hygiene, eating and sleeping well.

Use activities and posters around the service to encourage children to take responsibility for their own health through proper hand-washing, nose-blowing and hygiene habits.

A homemade poster encouraging hand-washing at Gundoo
Nutrition

is a key part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s wellbeing, and is important both at services where children bring their lunch and where meals are provided on-site. Providing healthy meals is particularly important for children who might not receive their full nutritional requirements at home.

Employ strategies to encourage children to develop sustainable, healthy eating habits, for example through educators and support staff sharing meals with children to role model healthy eating and talk to children about healthy food choices.

Form a partnership with another organisation to help deliver nutrition programs to your families and children – for example the South Australian Start Right Eat Right program, or draw on useful resources – like the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation’s Tucker Talk Tips.

Healthy food choices:

At Jalygurr children are helped to make choices about their own eating, with morning tea being spread over several hours so that they can learn to be aware of their own needs and to eat when they are hungry.

Engage with parents about children’s nutrition – share information around children’s food likes and dislikes, nutritious recipes and cooking on a budget.

Use a whiteboard or information board to showcase to families your daily or weekly menu and food tips. A section could also be used for parents to provide their recipe ideas and tips about food likes and dislikes.

Morning tea at TACCA
Supporting mums:
Gudjahgahmiamia runs a ‘mums and bubs’ program in partnership with Noah’s Ark and the Learning 4 Life partnership to support the wellbeing of parents and children. Mums attending the program receive emotional and wellbeing support as well as useful information on supporting their child’s behaviour. This helps to foster their social connections and their ability to respond positively to behavioural challenges. Sessions have included basic first aid, a ‘pamper me, pamper by baby’ program, and a ‘learn to swim’ program which ran for three weeks. The mothers met at the centre in the morning for a cup of tea or coffee, which helped to facilitate their social support networks. They then went to the pool with their children and Gudjahgahmiamia staff.

Supporting the emotional wellbeing, skills and knowledge of parents has huge benefits for children. Additional parenting programs include playgroups, sessions on first aid, positive parenting, child protection, budgeting, sexual health, learn to swim, cooking and nutrition and arts and crafts, or resource libraries that allow families to borrow parenting resources and toys.

Parental support
Children’s wellbeing is linked to their parents’ wellbeing, skills and knowledge: empowered, strong families best support healthy children. Knowing this, early childhood services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families recognise their role in supporting parents as well as children.

Playgroups are valuable opportunities for parents and children to interact in a supported and engaging atmosphere that helps to improve their social support networks.

Link in with local organisations to collaboratively deliver these kinds of programs.
Building on resilience:
Jalygurr’s Coordinator explains that children at the service display high levels of resilience. She feels this is because most children are strongly connected to country, culture and family through regular activities with their families such as camping and fishing, “going out bush so they’re learning about their country”. Educators are able to build on this at Jalygurr by incorporating activities that support and reflect children’s interests and cultural traditions, like visits to the beach and bush.

Incorporate family group time in the daily routine, for example at meal times, or at transition times to help children settle in and leave the service.

Family grouping:
Congress implements a holistic approach to caring for children by using a family group structure within their service. This reflects the wishes of their families, as culturally a family group setting is better aligned with children’s home and community environments and traditions. In consultations staff and families expressed that they were positive about the proposed change, and so educators then conducted research on the area and had training on the theory of attachment. Children are now free to roam throughout the centre, but all still have their own ‘homeroom’ and primary educator carer to provide them with security and attachment. Educators have found that children’s behavioural issues have basically disappeared, which the Director thinks is because there is now reduced competition for toys between children of the same age in the same room. This has reduced educators’ stress and noise levels. The Director also believes that it has made educators reflect more deeply on how to meet the needs of each individual child, rather than an age group.

Utilise resources such as strengths cards for discussions with children about self-esteem and identity.

Social and emotional wellbeing
A strong cultural identity is central to enable children to be resilient, secure and confident adults. In building children’s self-esteem and resilience, how services demonstrate the value and richness of culture is really important.

Reflect on the environment at the service and whether it sends out a message to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that it is a secure, stable and nurturing space.

“'If they can build their self-esteem in the first five years by the time they get to school they are ready for anything.” (Director, Gundoo MACS).

Group meal time at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre

Use family grouping approaches for all or part of a program to create a more natural, family style environment and to reflect traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices. This can support improved social and communication skills, cooperation and a sense of social responsibility within the children. Relatives are often able to settle or calm children who are upset, which helps to make the early childhood service feel safer for them, and to assist with continuity between their home and the service environments.
Relationships with educators & support staff

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships between educators, support staff and children are a key aspect of care, with educators showing respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s interests, knowledge, capabilities, values and beliefs.

Ensure that families have a key educator at drop off and pick up times to help settle the child.

Design educator rostering arrangements that provide children with daily stability – so that they feel that attachments with educators who consistently look after and educate them are secure and dependable.

“One of the main things I tell the girls is that when our children come through the gates and into our centre we’re the ones who have to make a difference in those little people’s lives. And give them the best whilst they’re here at Gundoo, because… when they’re here it is up to us to make that difference in their lives.” (Director, Gundoo MACS).

Relationships in action at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Outcome 4: Children Become Confident and Involved Learners, and related EYLF principles and practices: Principle 3: High Expectations and Equity and Practice 3: Learning Through Play for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH
There are a variety of ways that services can support children to become confident and involved learners, in particular through educators having high expectations of children’s capacities, and through play-based approaches.
Supportive and stable relationships with educators

Help children to be confident in their learning, and provide a base from which children can tackle new challenges and learning experiences.

- Encourage children to try new activities and experiences without pushing them into things they don’t want to do.
- Encourage children’s resilience through discussions about ‘having a go’. See their ‘mistakes’ as learning experiences.
- Encourage and praise children to help them cope with and overcome frustration when they can’t do something.
- Key to supportive and stable relationships is trust. When children have trust in their educators they develop the confidence and motivation to extend themselves and to tackle new challenges and learning experiences.
- Work one-on-one with individual children to give them the confidence to try something new.

“”It’s that ongoing praise for children that gives them the confidence that they need. And that’s what we really promote when attracting staff working with Yappera, and the current staff working here - that children are all capable and competent learners.” (Director, Yappera MACS).
A strengths based approach:
At Congress Child Care Centre, the Director explains that “if a child loves building in a sandpit but doesn’t know how to use a pencil, for me I’d be saying well let’s get sticks and draw because culturally that’s what they’ve been doing at home. Then we can actually build up that interest in the sand and then we can add crayons and build on that.” This is particularly important for children who may lack experience in certain things – like using tools such as scissors or pens - as it builds on their skills in other areas.

Strengths based approaches
Help children to become confident and involved learners by focusing on their strengths, rather than what they can’t do, in all activities and interactions.

“Don’t look at what the child can’t do but what they can nearly do – and build on this with support and encouragement.”

Identify the best way to teach a particular child rather than expecting the child to learn through a predefined process.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing philosophy sees children as capable, independent learners – providing a strong foundation for encouraging children to be responsible and to learn through active experience.

“That’s a real positive I think we can take out of culture, letting children be children to be able to explore and experiment, but knowing that there is a safety net around them.” (Branch Manager, Congress Child Care Centre).

Honour and build on the child’s knowledge and experience.

Describe what children can do instead of what they can’t in observations, learning stories and portfolios.

Display children as confident and capable learners in their observations, portfolios and learning stories.

Focus on observing what children are thinking, not just what they’re doing. Be aware that the process can be more significant than the final outcome.

Working to children’s strengths:
At Birrelee MACS, educators became increasingly concerned that one child wasn’t really talking. Through informal discussion with his mother, the Director discovered the child’s interest in dinosaurs and set up a learning environment that contained many dinosaur activities and toys. The change in the child’s behaviour was extremely positive: the Director describes how, “He then taught the group the names of all the dinosaurs, he knew the lot...so the kids were then choosing their favourite dinosaurs from the display...And he was in charge of all that. So this was a child that didn’t speak, he was in charge of giving a new group of friends all that knowledge. And it was such a powerful moment for him, but also for us – we understood him a lot more so we can care for him more effectively as well.”
Designing activities through discussions:
Educators at Gudjahghhamia “ask open-ended questions to (children)...they give them that starting point, and children will just run with it”. Educators make sure that all children can join in these conversations and that their suggestions and knowledge are taken seriously. As the Director describes, children need to be supported to feel “that their opinion is valued, because they see it come to fruition.” This helps to children to view themselves as active contributors, because “it’s not just the one person that’s having the say all the time or the teacher being the leader, it’s up to them to make those decisions as well.”

Demonstrate high expectations of children by scaffolding their learning using their existing knowledge and experiences.

Build activities from children’s interests, skills and knowledge. These can come out of yearning and unstructured conversations – for example about what they did on the weekend.

Engage children in exploring their world – for example encourage children to investigate what insects they might find in the garden or bush, and then follow this up with storytelling, art, investigation and play activities.

Ask parents for photos of activities their child enjoys to provide ideas for activities to do with that child.

Engage with a specific, key interest a child might have, and encourage their interest through ongoing projects, excursions, discussions and activities.

Children directing their own learning
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are given opportunities to direct their own learning in order for them to become confident and involved learners.

Cooking at the Aboriginal Children’s Centre
Unstructured play:
At Jalygurr Guwan educators have created a collage table with arts and crafts materials that children can visit as and when they choose, to create whatever they like. Educators provide the materials, and ensure that the space is engaging and appealing to children, but then leave the children to create their own artwork by following their imagination and interests. Jalygurr Guwan’s Coordinator feels that this reflects that “staff aren’t really choosing what they want them to do, the children are choosing what they want to do and the staff are just there to guide them.”

“Don’t underestimate children’s ability to learn through play!”

Create unstructured, open-ended learning opportunities that encourage children to independently and confidently investigate, imaginatively design and direct their own play.

Open-ended, unstructured learning through play
Play-based learning challenges children, helps them to be inquisitive and makes them want to explore. It’s also a key way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learn. Learning through play is about giving children opportunities to make up their own games and challenges and work together to explore how to use a space and materials. This creates an environment where children, not adults, are directing the learning.

“A natural environment:
Play-based learning creates the most natural environment in which children can develop. “Children need to learn and explore comfortably through play without being watched and pressurised. Otherwise they’re not going to learn” (Director, Gunai Lidj).

Whilst educators may have an idea of the structure of an activity, what children experience should be a flowing, self-directed and fun experience.

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"I think that it’s actually developing the child’s overall sense of being, self-esteem, social skills, all that – just by playing.” (Director, Gudjahghamiamia MACS).
Problem-solving and learning environments:
Educators at TACCA recently created an activity using toy car tracks and different surfaces to encourage children to explore different senses and textures and develop their spatial awareness. This included using different gradients and surfaces for the car ‘tracks’, for example ice trays to let the children explore slipperiness and sand to let them explore depth and texture. Educators then questioned children around issues such as “which one will float?” or “which one will be fastest?” and so forth to encourage their curiosity and experimentation skills.

Designing a learning environment that challenges children to be confident and involved learners is as much about deciding what not to put into an environment as what to put in.

Set up a learning environment that reflects the local natural environment and encourages children to explore different natural materials – for example local beach or bush habitats. This can also help children to feel connected to the land and their local culture.

Provide support to children without actually doing things for them – for example showing children how to use materials and tools, but not what to create with them.

Natural resources encourage children to use their imagination to make each resource what they want it to be, for example painting on bark, ‘fishing’ with a stick or ‘cooking’ with gumnuts and seed pods. They also help children to learn about their local environment.

Set up a ‘cultural space’ as a learning environment within the service for children to explore and learn about their culture. This could include photos, artwork, materials and resources that reflect the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Learning environments can encourage children to problem-solve – exploring what things are and how to use them.

An outdoor play space rich in natural, open-ended materials teaches children not just about the environment, but how to play and to be inquisitive learners.

Learning environments
Environments and materials play a large role in encouraging investigative, play-based learning.
EYLF Outcome 4: CHILDREN ARE CONFIDENT AND INVOLVED LEARNERS

EYLF Principle 3: HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND EQUITY

EYLF Practice 3: LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Present children’s capabilities:
At Birrelee MACS a photo diary of cooking sessions shows parents how capable their children are and encourages them to try cooking activities with their children at home.

“By coming here and feeling that this is a safe place, (children) can develop their potential and they might be able to better their lives ahead.” (Director, Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre).

“He’s going to say ‘no they can’t do it because they’re too young’. So we try to eliminate the word no out of everything. And so if it’s safe then certainly they will get the opportunity to do it.” (Director, Gunai Lidj).

Involving every child:
At Gunai Lidj educators believe that activities should be offered to all children at the centre, and so for example when cooking activities are happening all children are involved – with even the youngest “being given a bowl to stir”. The Director points out that this helps to push children to try new things and to be confident in their learning.

“Help children to learn about safe play – for example having a camp fire at the service to teach them about fire safety; climbing trees or stairs; or water play.”

Provide children with opportunities regardless of their age.

Respect each child as an individual with unique capacities and knowledge.

Help children to learn about safe play – for example having a camp fire at the service to teach them about fire safety; climbing trees or stairs; or water play.

“It’s about supervision, it’s about high expectations and about children being able to use things in the right way.” (Branch Manager, Congress Child Care Centre).

High expectations of children
Support them to be confident and involved learners. This is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who may come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with self-esteem and confidence important to help them break out of intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Present children as strong, capable and confident learners in all communication with parents. Portfolios and other documents that parents view can be particularly helpful, as they focus on children’s strengths.

“Positive interactions with children support them to have high expectations and confidence in themselves and what they can personally achieve.”

“We’re not going to say ‘no they can’t do it because they’re too young’. So we try to eliminate the word no out of everything. And so if it’s safe then certainly they will get the opportunity to do it.” (Director, Gunai Lidj).
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the **EYLF Outcome 5: Children are Effective Communicators** Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

**THE APPROACH**

Effective communication encompasses many interactions, activities and learning experiences, and is critical to all EYLF outcomes, principles and practices.
Positive educator engagement with children
supports increased concentration, helping them to develop confidence and communication skills.

Group discussions
help children to develop listening and speaking skills in communicating with adults and peers in a group setting.

Explore other approaches such as the Abecedarian or Montessori approaches to extend children’s language, listening and communication skills.

Consider how you communicate with children, finding a way to be at their eye level can improve engagement and connections with them.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture values oral communication and storytelling, so use play as a valuable opportunity to prompt children to describe to you what they’re creating or doing.

Actively interact with children in all play and activities.

Use group time to promote children’s effective group communication skills by encouraging children to share their thoughts, knowledge and experiences with others.

Use interactive storytelling, reading, singing and discussions as useful ways to learn more about and understand children’s interests and what they would like to do at the service.

Encourage children to tell stories, and encourage discussions about connections to family, nature, or relatives at the service.

Use traditional languages and words in discussions – this can encourage children to be confident and connected to learning.
Talking about feelings:
At Yawarra Child Care Centre educators regularly encourage children “to voice to other children how they’re thinking or feeling, so in telling them ‘don’t do that, I don’t like it’, trying to encourage them to express why they don’t like it, so it’s not always the staff intervening in things.” This helps children to learn how to articulate how they’re feeling, and also to understand how their actions impact on others.

Support children through positive interactions and guidance to become more effective communicators, for example through rephrasing or reflective listening to help them express their feelings.

Encouraging positive communication between children, for example sharing and co-operative play.

Educators supporting children to interact with others

plays an important role in supporting children to learn positive strategies for (verbal and non-verbal) communication and engagement with others.

Offer learning environments that encourage small group play to facilitate communication.
Reading books and storytelling are valuable ways to help improve children’s reading and language skills, amongst other things, as well as helping them to develop rich imaginations.

Make storytelling an interactive process where children are encouraged to engage with the story. Ask the children questions about the story, or have them imagine and create parts of it themselves.

Tell stories in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages – or invite a community member to do this. This helps children to be connected to their learning and is a fun way for children to learn or maintain traditional languages.

Form a partnership with a literacy organisation such as the Let’s Read program run by the Smith Family.

Include families in your literacy programs – for example by holding a family fun day focusing on literacy.

Create your own resources such as books and games to support their children’s literacy and numeracy skills - resources that reflect the local context will be more meaningful for children (for more information on this read about Minya Bunhii’s home-grown books in Fact Sheet 1, and see also SNAICC’s Aboriginal Children’s Self Publishing Workshop – How To Kit).

Use technology to support children’s communication – for example through educators and children collaborating to use the internet to find out information, and then making books or resources to reflect what they’ve learnt.

Use bilingual books to raise children’s awareness of other languages.

Use storytelling as an opportunity to explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander folklore and Dreamtime stories.

Invite Elders into the centre to tell stories and talk about culture.

One of the books created by Minya Bunhii: Kuliny Muka (Little Nest Babies)

Literacy and families:
Yawarra Child Care Centre celebrates literacy through incorporating it into fun activities. They recently held a family fun day in conjunction with other local organisations to promote literacy development within the centre. A free family barbecue was held, and fun activities for the children. This helped to involve parents in the centre, and to support them to understand the value of literacy and their role in their child’s development.
EYLF Principle 2: 
PARTNERSHIPS

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide organisations and early childhood educators with some strategies to implement the EYLF Principle 2: Partnerships to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

This fact sheet focuses on good practice principles for partnerships with parents and families, and contains some ideas for action.

THE APPROACH

Children’s learning and wellbeing outcomes are most likely to be achieved when services create, develop and sustain partnerships between families. Successful partnerships between early childhood educators and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families recognise that the concept of family in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is broader than traditional interpretations based on the nuclear family structure.

A connection to and partnership with community also needs to be at the heart of any early childhood service that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This is because families and communities are both critical supports in providing early childhood care and development services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
**EYLF Principle 2: PARTNERSHIPS**

The Director of the Aboriginal Children’s Centre describes that their relationships with families are always built on trust, which is established over time by consistent educators and support staff. She describes how, “Those connections have been built over generations, and that’s what makes this place special, it’s the fact that somebody can drop their child off here and the same person who was running it when they were here is still here. At the moment there’s three staff working here in different capacities that were children here. How do you document that? How do you say my community values me as a child, and now my community is valuing me as an adult?”

**Principles for partnerships with parents & families**

Certain principles are vital to establish and sustain partnerships with parents and families.

- **Relationships built on trust** mean that parents feel that the early childhood service is safe, non-judgmental, supportive and culturally appropriate. A service that understands Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is able to provide the flexibility that parents need, for example retaining a place at the service when children are absent for cultural or family reasons.

- **Non-discrimination** means that all families feel comfortable dropping by for a cuppa and a chat – through an ‘open door’ policy for example - and that community politics don’t get in the way of families accessing the service.

- **Engaging on a strengths basis** with parents means focusing on a child’s strengths in educator-parent communication. In documentation focus on what a child is feeling and experiencing during an activity – as this is something parents are more likely to connect with and appreciate, and also gives them trust that educators care about a child and know what they are feeling.

- **Understanding and responding to parent’s needs and current circumstances** helps ensure accessibility to the service - including physical accessibility through bus transport and affordability through lower fees.

- **Respect and equality in parent partnerships** means that educators take active steps to treat all parents as equals and respect their knowledge and capacity as the child’s first teachers.

- **Educators understand that their role is broad and involves not only looking after the kids, but also having involvement with the child’s family**. Careful educator selection criteria, recruitment and training can ensure that educators understand the full breadth of their role.

- **Educators and support staff who are related to families or have community connections** can help parents to feel safe, welcome and comfortable in leaving their child at the centre, and also leads to more regular attendance. Local educators are also able to bring their knowledge of the child’s family, culture and community into how they support them at the service.

- **When educators live and work in a child’s community** “they often know why a child’s behaviour has changed, or what’s happening in a family’s life.” (Director, Yaperra Children’s Service).

- **“Our parents are a fantastic resource for us. (They) very easily communicate with us, let us know anything we need to know concerning their children, any concerns they might have about the service.”** (Director, Gunai Lidj).

- **Birrelee MACS’s Director explains,** “We understand that we have been trained and we’re qualified in (early childhood education), that’s why we have that knowledge. That doesn’t make us the experts. So what we do is, as we’re learning about things, we just share it with families.” Part of respecting families choices and knowledge is then leaving them to decide whether they want to take on the information or not.
EYLF Principle 2: 
PARTNERSHIPS

Family input: 
TACCA includes a section in their programming plans for families to contribute ideas to centre programs. Families can bring in photos of their children engaged in different home activities. Educators first ask families who they feel will be more active in sharing, finding that this encourages participation of families less involved in the centre. One educator describes how seeing family’s photos displayed on the wall prompts others to think “they’re up on the wall, well we’ll bring in a photo from home, we’ll show what we did”.

Sharing with families: 
Birrelee MACS makes sure that all resources they create can also be used by families to help them support their child’s development. Birrelee recently created a DVD to teach children lingo and have shared this with families. The Director explains “There’s no point in keeping lingo here and it not being taught anywhere else.” The resource is designed as a simple, encouraging and fun tool for families to share and learn together.

Educator-parent information sharing can happen through conversations or written formats or regular conversations – which particularly supports parents with low literacy levels. This builds strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families, and is particularly important for children who access the service via a bus service.

Daily diaries or communication books can include information about activities a child did, what they learned, and what they enjoyed doing – and both parents and educators can share this information.

Settling in: If a child is having trouble settling in educators can write a note for parents highlighting a positive experience their child had during the day to help reassure them and give them something to focus on with their child.

Open days or evenings are valuable opportunities to invite families in to share children’s work and achievements, provide information, and to celebrate particular events such as literacy days, health visits, or days for particular family members, such as fathers, mothers and grandmothers. They are also useful to link up families with other services – such as health and dental.

The Parent Partnership is an innovative approach Gudjahgahmiamia uses to gather information from parents – which helps Educators better focus on achieving the EYLF outcomes for each child. Parents and staff both complete information sheets that ask them to comment on how they think the child is developing under different EYLF components. This has helped parents to appreciate the role of the educators, “It’s like a validation for them - we know what we’re doing. We’re not just baby-sitting, we’re educating their children.”

Information nights: 
Yappa Children’s Service holds regular information nights for parents and families. Verbal and visual presentations as well as handouts provide information on different child care theories and theorists, the early childhood frameworks, program design and activities, educational outcomes and the importance of the early years in a child’s development.

Parent input provides in-depth information on children’s strengths and interests, their family and home life, and any particular health or additional needs to inform weekly programming ideas, enhance continuity for children between home and the service and help educators understand each individual child better.

“We find some of our parents don’t read a lot of the information they take home, so we find a very good communication tool is to have a whole big wall full of photos, so a parent when they collect their child each day can go ‘oh, ok, this is what my child is doing in the kindergarten.’ ” (Director, Yappa Children’s Service).
Partnerships with community

Services play an important role in the development of their local community. Building a stronger community helps develop families who can better support children’s development, and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s identity and connection.

Community outreach – for example through NAIDOC week and National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) – is a valuable way of building partnerships with families, communities and increasing the profile of the service.

Community visitors to the service can share particular skills and knowledge with children, such as arts, music, dancing, cooking, story-telling, traditional language or other aspects of culture.

“What makes (Gundoo) unique is (that) it is a community centre, run by community people. I think we all work well together. We support each other and we try and go that one step further to make a difference in our community as well as for our little children. It is that...community base and community connection.” (Director, Gundoo Macs).

“I don’t think we’ve ever thought this place is about strengthening just children, this place is about building a stronger community.” (Director, Aboriginal Children’s Centre).

Mobile outreach service:
At Jalygurr Guwan partnerships with the community are fostered through a mobile outreach service run in partnership with the Department for Communities. The service reaches about ten children and families a week who wouldn’t normally access mainstream services, and meets on a local oval. It provides free activities for babies up to five years of age, and also helps link parents in with local health services.

Family time, Horn Island
EYLF Principle 2: Partnerships

Community Management Committees

are a unique way to build partnerships between services, families and communities, and help ensure that a community early childhood service is truly managed by the local community. They can oversee all major service decisions, and provide support in many areas - fundraising, policies, recruitment, parent handbooks and information, and strategies for engagement with families.

- Help services stay true to their original mandate and evolving community needs. Committee members often have or have had relatives at the service, and understand both the service, its history and goals, and community needs and dynamics.

- Provide a forum for parent’s ideas and feedback, and help make sure that services follow up and implement this feedback.

- Build trust between parents and the service by providing a strong link to the community – helping families to feel that a service is part of their community.

- Work with service directors, educators and support staff as a team to keep each other informed about sector changes, requirements and updates.

- Foster partnerships with other organisations through committee member’s personal or professional connections, including with relevant health and family services.

- Raise and maintain educators’ confidence and direction through showing respect for the work of educators and their role in caring for and educating children.

- Promote the service with the wider community – including advocating for and raising awareness of the service to the wider community and government.

- Families “know what their children want and need from a service. So (the Committee) gives you a good insight into what they see as important for their children, rather than just what we think they should have.” (Director, Yawarra Child Care Centre).
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Practice 2: Responsiveness to Children and Practice 4: Intentional Teaching in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

An intentional teaching approach requires educators to develop programs and learning experiences that are purposeful and respond to children’s needs, strengths and interests.
EYLF Practice 2: RESPONSIVENESS TO CHILDREN

- Include all educators (& trainees) in observations and programming to draw on each person’s strengths and perspectives, support staff development and spread the workload.

- Reflect on whether there is space within your program for flexible and extended learning opportunities depending on how the activity is going on the day.

- Consider having ‘focus children’ each week or fortnight, developing particular activities to meet their specific developmental needs and level, to make sure that each child’s individual learning needs are being met.

Programming and planning reflects services strong intentional teaching methods.

EYLF Practice 4: INTENTIONAL TEACHING

- Think of the service’s planning process as a cycle – starting with observations, documentation, child and parent input, programming, implementation and then back to observations.

- Use planning processes as a valuable time to encourage educators to reflect on learnings from the previous program, their roles as educators and their objectives behind using different activities.

- Link up EYLF outcomes, practices and principles to activities in your programs.

- Review children’s profiles and photos from the previous few weeks to build on each child’s strengths and interests and extend upon their learning.

- Include other people’s feedback into the plan – for example external support staff or workers from partner organisations.

- Include a space within your plan on relevant community, cultural or family events, a box for educators’ reflections, and questions from families and children for follow up.

- Develop service-specific programming templates to help with cyclical programming processes.

- Look for the learning opportunity in each activity.
EYLF Practice 2: RESPONSIVENESS TO CHILDREN

**Programming webs:**

Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre's Director describes their programs as child-based and as representing 'webs' of themes rather than boxes of activities. Educators start with a central theme or material, such as 'dinosaurs' or 'playdough' through which they want to teach specific things, and then from this build a web of different experiences and activities for the children. This is however still flexible to allow for spontaneous learning and child-directed experiences. The Director explained a basic plan that might, for example, include play based in the garden, where the children could discover a butterfly or a snail which leads on to a different tangent based on this experience. Responding to the children's expressed interests, the educator might then find books or different resources on snails or butterflies, or the children might choose to construct these creatures out of dough. As the Director highlights, "it just flows on from what the children are interested in... (there's) a bit more involvement from the kids – you don’t just sit down and the teacher decides what we’re doing." She feels that this responsiveness to children increases participation, "when it's something they're interested in, they become a bit more involved and concentrated because it's something they want to know."

**Room dynamics:**

At Gunai Lidji educators recently needed to make some adjustments to ensure that a more dominant child wasn’t disrupting the other children. They first reflected on his interests, and then put in place a strategy to ensure that he could be occupied as soon as he came into the room to help to minimise disruption to other children. The Director describes that this is working very successfully, but that being responsive may require being flexible in putting in place new strategies as needed.

EYLF Practice 4: INTENTIONAL TEACHING

**Holistic programming:**

The Aboriginal Children's Centre views their program as a holistic plan for children’s care and development. All aspects of care are factored into their program, including routines around meals and hygiene, as this is all part of “what messages we want to give the children about healthy eating practices, outdoor play, good physical activity.” (Director).

**The emergent curriculum:**

Educators at Yawarra Child Care Centre demonstrate intentional teaching and responsiveness to children by building their learning program around children’s interests and strengths whilst still incorporating “teacher led experiences and ideas, and things that we think they need to learn about.” Programming reflects emergent curriculum principles and is now more about post-programming. This involves taking into account what has worked with previous activities in designing new plans, and then setting up a learning environment to facilitate this. Educators allow the children's interests and abilities to direct the flow of activities. At the end of the day educators reflect on the activities and then record the program.

**Programming and planning reflects services strong intentional teaching methods.**

**Learning and social contexts**

Children’s learning occurs in social contexts, which means that programs need to engage every aspect of the child’s life.

"Having a really clear idea of where you want your program to go and what learning you want to happen, you can see the change in kids on the floor.” (Educator, TACCA).

Study the dynamics of a room to make sure that the needs of all children are being met.

Consider with educators any existing group patterns – for example do some children dominate? Are other children not finding the space for their own activities?

The weekly program at Gundoo MACS

EYLF TOOL // Fact Sheet 07
A construction focus:
At TACCA one child’s interest in building activities prompted a recent monthly program focus on ‘construction’. Educators then realised that this was something quite a few children were interested in – for example other children recalled activities at home where they helped parents with painting rooms, building a dolls house and renovating a kitchen. Educators arranged an excursion to a local hardware store, and set up activities focusing on building, constructing and deconstructing things, bringing real building materials such as timber and recycled materials into the centre. They sung songs about building to encourage children’s communication, and had discussions about different building roles in the community such as road workers or designers. They also planned for a community member to visit the centre to talk about construction.

Embracing children’s interests:
At Birrelee MACS, educators understand that football is a huge community passion – and something children are very interested in. The centre Director describes this as “understanding the cultures within our culture.” They utilise and embrace this in how they engage with children. For example, one child is very keen on football and already a good player. The Director explains that whilst he is talented at football, “we can’t get him to concentrate on other things. So we use the football – we made up this makeshift goal and we had to count how many times he could get it in. So we got ‘one, two, three, four – hang on there’s a four on my dice, let’s find it. Ok let’s do it again. This time there’s a 6 on my dice, let’s find it’. So you just take those opportunities and you value them.”

Responding to children’s interests
In programming draws on a strengths based approach and understanding that children learn best when they are interested and engaged in an activity.

Observing what children are thinking and feeling, as well as what they’re doing.

Build children’s interests and strengths into the planning stage – share the curriculum-making with children.

Seek parents input into the program – through informal discussions or more structured methods to ensure their feedback is recorded. For example, you could ask parents to bring in photos of different activities that they do at home with their children.

Reflect on how you build activities on children’s interests during the program cycle. For example, educators can hold discussions with children during and after an activity, and can then build on this through further activities such as excursions, art, play dough, construction, singing or music, group discussions, reading and story-telling, and visitors to the service.

Celebrating the coast:
At the coastal based service of Gudjahgahmiamia fishing is a popular activity in the community and with the children. Drawing on this, educators recently planned for art activities to create fish, and then hung them up in a fishing net displayed in one of the rooms. An excursion to the beach gave children the chance to gather shells and other sea materials. Educators focused on stories and pictures that related to the sea, which provided a starting point for children and educators to share personal stories. A fish tank has been added to the room so that children can now observe and learn to care for fish.
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Practice 5: Learning Environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Learning environments provide powerful opportunities to stimulate children’s creativity, imagination, problem-solving and physical activity.
Natural materials and settings

Learning environments that mimic natural outdoor environments and use natural materials provide unique opportunities to encourage creative play, and help children develop rich imaginations and problem solving skills. They are also important in connecting children to their country and to nature.

Use natural objects such as shells, wood, stones, pine cones or gum nuts to prompt children to explore different materials and incorporate them into free, unstructured play.

Set up a natural environment within the service – for example indoor ‘trees’ or beach environments.

Use natural materials in art, construction or playdough activities.

Respecting the environment:
Bireelee MACS uses natural environments and materials to teach children that possessions can be special and need to be looked after regardless of cost. As the Director describes “We have very precious rocks that we found that we washed, and they didn’t cost us anything… They’re put in a beautiful wooden basket, and the way these rocks are treated you’d think we paid a million dollars for them. So it’s about respect.”

Beach habitats:
Gudjahghmiamia often sets up spaces in the centre that mimic the local beach habitat, using beach sand, shells, shark eggs and cuttlefish bones. This encourages children to use their imaginations and different senses to explore varied environments, textures and shapes.

Have confidence that a child’s imagination provides them with more play opportunities than any environment or resource can!

“There’s so much out there in that natural environment to listen to, to see, to touch, to smell.” (Director, Aboriginal Children’s Centre).

“Many people think you need resources to have a service running, whereas a lot of these kids would use a stick… and pretend that they’re fishing.” (Coordinator, Jalygurr Guwan).
Outdoor learning environments

Are valuable spaces in which to encourage children’s physical activity, problem-solving and investigative skills.

Lessons from nature:
The Director of the Aboriginal Children’s Centre describes their outdoor space as a learning environment in itself. Children can experience different textures through gravel and sand surfaces, stone steps make a natural climbing frame, and challenges are provided in the form of bits of wood and rocks to climb over. Inspired by the philosophy of Claire Warden and the nature kindergartens in Scotland, they are exploring ways to allow children to experience nature in all weather. These experiences all contribute to helping children to feel connected to their world by being “out on country, learning from each other, learning about nature’s lessons, about the trees, the leaves, the bush, the country, the bush tucker.”

Reflect on how the service’s outdoor learning environment reflects the local culture and environment – for example showcasing local plants or providing space for activities that reflect the local culture – like campfires and outdoor cooking.

Gardens provide valuable outdoor spaces in which children can explore and problem-solve – for example investigating bush tucker or learning how to grow plants.

Design outdoor learning environments that encourage children to be physically active and inquisitive – for example using climbing materials or structures.

An active outdoor environment at Jalygurr Guwan
Deconstructing barriers within learning environments
Gives children choice over where they want to play and responds to their learning needs and interests.

Reflect on the barriers that exist in your environments – do you separate outdoor and indoor learning spaces?

Provide outdoor and indoor quiet spaces where children can have time out to play or read.

Think about how the room can be set up to lower noise levels, or what materials or equipment can be added to absorb sound.

Ensure activity and equipment provision are developmentally appropriate to support children’s success and confidence.

Consider how you give children choice over where they want to play.

“A lot of our children do prefer to be outside for most of the time, so it’s just trying to work out ways that we can provide for all their areas of development while they’re outside. Trying to set up the room, make new ways to link the inside and outside play, so that if they want to be outside they can, and we’re not telling them constantly ok you need to be inside now, or you have to be outside now. So we’re trying to find ways to make our program work so that the children have the choice of what area works for them.” (Director, Yawarra Child Care Centre).
**Deconstructing barriers within learning environments**

**Gives children choice over where they want to play and responds to their learning needs and interests.**

### Quiet spaces and lessening noise:

At **Gunai Lidi** educators have recently reviewed how they can set up their learning environments to lower noise in the rooms and to provide children with opportunities for quieter activities. One room now has a wooden frame draped with material so that children can choose to take themselves out of a noisier environment. The centre encourages children to direct their own activities by setting up tables with specific activities that children can choose to do on their own. This gives children time on their own and a break from educators and other children.

### Learning environments and space for quiet time:

**Congress Child Care Centre** has opened the centre up so children are free to play indoors or outdoors. Initially with all activities available in all rooms some activities weren’t getting used, as the Director explains “because there wasn’t enough of them in every room and there wasn’t a good space”. They redesigned their approach to create specialised rooms within the centre, including rooms for creative arts, a scientific discovery and construction, finer arts, and a room for quieter activities and finer cognitive work. Following staff training on brain development and trauma, educators adjusted the environment so that children are free to go outside, or to go to a quiet space. The Director believes that this is vital for children, to have time when they can withdraw and be quiet, and also to have control over their environment and where they want to be. She comments that “I think that’s another one of the reasons why some of the behaviour issues have disappeared too, so that children who want to be by themselves can actually find…a quiet space right away.”

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An open environment:

**Koonibba** views the entire centre as a learning environment and allows and encourages children to explore the entire service. The centre Director feels that this is about giving children choice over which learning environment they wish to engage with – for example if they wish to have some quiet time away from the other children then they can play with the toys in the office.

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Games and puzzles
A construction-focused environment:

At TACCA a recent focus on construction prompted educators to adapt the indoor environment so that the ‘home corner’ was changed to a ‘workshop’ with relevant tools and dress ups such as helmets, ear muffs and high visibility vests. Books and puzzles were included about building and tools, and the outdoor area was updated to include construction tools such as witches hats, some of which were loaned from the local city council.

Learning environments that reflect children’s interests

Engage children, encourage them to focus on activities and build off their strengths.

Provide different play areas and opportunities within the once space to create different learning opportunities and environments for children.

When setting up a learning environment focus on what you want to facilitate through the environment, and try to imagine all the different experiences that children could get out of the activity.

“If you plan your environment really well it teaches - it takes on an educator’s role.” (Director, Birrelee MACS).

Create learning environments that can be modified throughout the day to respond to children’s interests, energy levels and needs.

Construction play at TACCA
EYLF Practice 8: ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with ideas to implement the EYLF Practice 8: Assessment for Learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Processes of gathering, analysing and presenting information all help services to document assessment for learning. Learning stories, individual child portfolios and photos are all valuable tools to capture children’s learning, feed into planning processes, and communicate a child’s progress and development to their parents. They also help educators and parents develop strategies for parents to support their child’s learning outside the service, which assists continuity of learning and partnerships with parents.
Learning stories

incorporate photos, a description of an activity and the learning experience, and can be easily created from daily notes and observations.

Focus learning stories on either individual or group learning.

Include follow-up experiences, educator evaluations and feedback or comments from children and families in your learning stories.

Share learning stories with parents and families as a way of showing them what their child is doing at the service. Display them about the service – including at eye level so that children can also view them.

Link learning stories to the EYLF and development outcomes to help think about what outcomes or experiences a learning story might represent.

Develop a simple learning story template for parents to take home and fill in, including a section to record what their child said about a particular activity.

Capture reflections throughout the day:
TACCA has a particular strategy for making observations, keeping a large notebook in the main room to document educator’s thoughts about each child’s learning. Having this easily accessible means that these observations can be recorded as they happen and can then feed into programming and children’s portfolios at the end of the day. These observations are shared with families. Because educators do not feel pressure to record a comment about every child every day, the focus is on the value of the observations rather than the quantity, and can provide a balanced view of the day. As one educator describes, it’s about capturing “particular moments of the day that really stood out to each carer. It gives the whole team’s view on a day, it’s not just one person writing down what they think.”

Demonstrating development:
At Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre photos taken in the babies’ room were included in a recent book made by the educator, showcasing the different development groups and corresponding pictures of the children engaged in activities, such as building blocks. This was shared with parents.

Linking learning stories to the EYLF:
Gudjahgahmiami educators create learning stories that are specific to the five EYLF outcomes. These provide a brief description of the outcome and a photo showing the experience. These learning stories help educators to reflect on the outcomes they are aiming to achieve for children, but also help parents to understand their children’s development at the centre and the connection to the EYLF outcomes.
Portfolios are a record of each child’s learning and experiences over the year. They are updated regularly, and are given to parents at the end of the year.

Create portfolios in collaboration with children – for example through asking children to talk about what is happening in a photo.

Include in portfolios anything you think relevant to show a child’s learning – including photos, observations, learning stories, artwork, assessments, writing, songs and notes.

Have children regularly take their portfolios home to share with their families and encourage families to add to them. This can also help to strengthen educator’s communication and relationships with families.

Portfolios can be presented in different ways – including through scrapbooks, folders, ring-binders or photo albums.

“So with a four year old you can say, ‘Tell me about what you’ve done and why you’ve done it’ and you can write it down from their voice. So you are then involving the child in their program development. And you’re developing literacy skills because you’re exposing them to the written word... those squiggles on the paper actually mean something and it does relate to this photo that we’re putting there too. So it’s all about literacy learning too.” (Branch Manager, Congress Child Care Centre).

Children’s profiles at Gundoo MACS
Photos

Provide easy, visual records of a learning experience. They are also a useful quick way to capture an experience without having to record large amounts of information. Photos help to capture children's facial expressions, concentration and interest in an activity - which is difficult to do through written observations alone. They therefore help educators and parents to learn more about a child’s engagement with an activity and their development.

- Take unposed photos that capture children engaged in real activities.
- Use a video camera to record footage of activities without educators having to pause to take photos.
- Remember to always get parent’s permission to publicly use a photo of their child.
- Reflect back on photos or videos when writing up observations or creating learning stories.
- Reflect on and document why you’re taking a photo.

The point is not to take a photo for the sake of taking it, “it’s about what’s the significance of this photo? What learning is happening? Why am I taking this photo? What’s different in this photo that (the child) doesn’t do any other day?” (Branch Manager, Congress Child Care Centre).

Capturing evidence of a child’s planning and building experience at TACCA
EYLF Principle 5: ONGOING LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Principle 5: Ongoing Learning and Reflective Practice in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH

Self-reflection is a valuable and necessary process for educators to ensure that they are always examining their own practices, reviewing outcomes achieved and creating new ideas. This leads to improved intentional teaching practices for educators through encouraging a deeper understanding of their roles as educators.
Reflection within programming processes

Planning time provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on past activities, environments and children’s experiences, and adapt programs as needed to ensure the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Hold regular discussions with educators to reflect on the previous week’s program. These can be based on reviews of daily notes, observations and children’s portfolios.

Use children’s portfolios during programming to help stay up to date on a child’s attendance and identify further activities to assist a child in their development.

Include a section within your programming template for educators to record their reflections on the day or a specific activity.

Think about whether and how a certain practice or activity is culturally appropriate.

Reflecting on values:
The Branch Manager of Congress Child Care Centre describes how their reflective discussions seek to go deeper than exploring whether an activity worked or not; they are about how an educator’s practice or values affect a certain outcome or experience for a child.

“I don’t think a day goes by when staff aren’t reflecting, because you can clearly see without writing down what is working within your program. In order to develop a new program each week you need to be able to reflect on what worked well, and what didn’t in the week prior.” (Director, Yapper Children’s Services).
EYLF Principle 5: ONGOING LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Personal and group journals

provide unstructured, confidential and open-ended opportunities for educators to record their thoughts and reflections on programs, activities, practice, and how to best work with children and families. They also provide spaces to reflect on their own practices as educators – whether activities worked and any issues or changes that need to be addressed. Group journals can capture many different perspectives and build a comprehensive picture of a programming period.

Look back through personal or group journals for ideas when designing future programs.

Conduct weekly reflections with all educators to review activities, group dynamics and outcomes and write these up in a journal.

Display weekly group journals or page examples from them for parents, educators and children to see.

Review photos when writing diaries to reflect on what the children are learning and experiencing, and how to expand on this in future programming.

Encourage educators to use journals to document their role as educators in each activity – providing evidence of this role, how they carried out activities, what they were happy with and what they would change.

Personal reflections:

At Birrelee MACS personal diaries are used to create space for people to reflect in ways that suit their own personal needs. As the Director describes, “some people want to write things down, some people just want to have a yarn. So it was an option for people that didn’t necessarily want to talk about it in a staff meeting.”

Planning and reflecting
EYLF Principle 5: ONGOING LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

**Yarning and oral sharing**
Is a valuable way to reflect on activities and practices, and to think about ideas and future directions. It can also provide a simpler way to reflect than writing down notes or journals.

**Ongoing professional development and learning**
helps educators to be responsive to the needs of the particular children at the service, and to ensure that they are also always challenging and improving on their own practices.

- **Use regular staff meetings** to review all aspects of service delivery, from programs to dietary and health aspects.
- **Explores different teaching approaches** such as Montessori and the Abecedarian approach as a way to encourage educator’s ongoing learning.
- **Encourage educators to record** internal evaluations or notes from professional development they have attended, in order to encourage them to reflect more deeply on what they can learn from it, and how they can implement it in their practice. Educators could then share learnings from the training they have attended with the rest of the team.
- **Arrange follow-up on-site presentations** to explore topics of particular interest to educators and support staff.
- **Have one educator (on a rotating basis) take minutes from a meeting to provide a written record of people’s ideas and discussions.**
- **Build relationships with a TAFE to support educators in their ongoing learning through professional development and/or further study.**
- **Match professional development courses with the particular needs of the children attending the service at the time.**
- **One Director describes how “if we have a meeting and people are just wanting to share we have someone that takes those minutes and writes it all down. So even though that person (sharing) may not have the literacy skills or want to write it down it’s still documented somewhere. For their own journey as well.” (Birrelee MACS).**
- **One Director describes how “if we have a meeting and people are just wanting to share we have someone that takes those minutes and writes it all down. So even though that person (sharing) may not have the literacy skills or want to write it down it’s still documented somewhere. For their own journey as well.” (Birrelee MACS).**
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- **Match professional development courses with the particular needs of the children attending the service at the time.**

**Ongoing learning to meet children’s needs:**
At Jalygurr Guwan several educators recently completed a course in Makaton to better interact with and support the needs of one of their children who has a hearing impairment. They have now brought this back into the service and are teaching children Makaton through displays and pictures around the rooms.

**Build relationships with a TAFE to support educators in their ongoing learning through professional development and/or further study.**
- **Arrange follow-up on-site presentations to explore topics of particular interest to educators and support staff.**
- **Match professional development courses with the particular needs of the children attending the service at the time.**

**Have one educator (on a rotating basis) take minutes from a meeting to provide a written record of people’s ideas and discussions.**

One Director describes how “if we have a meeting and people are just wanting to share we have someone that takes those minutes and writes it all down. So even though that person (sharing) may not have the literacy skills or want to write it down it’s still documented somewhere. For their own journey as well.” (Birrelee MACS).
EYLF Practice 7: CONTINUITY OF LEARNING AND TRANSITIONS

This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide early childhood educators with some ideas to implement the EYLF Practice 7: Continuity of Learning & Transitions in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Understanding, valuing and supporting the rich and unique aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture helps all early childhood services to encourage and support inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to strengthen awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for all children.

THE APPROACH
Building on children’s home environments at their early childhood service helps them feel secure and confident. There are three focus areas for application of the principle of continuity of learning: between service programs, drawing home practices into the service practices, and drawing service practices into home play. Supporting children through transitions is also essential to helping them feel secure and comfortable with change, and setting them up to thrive in new environments. Educators can help children transition when they first come to a service, support them through their daily transitions into and out of the service, and support them to transition away from the service to school.
Continuity between service programs

Helps children to feel secure and confident in their learning and interactions within that space. It also helps to build on and increase children’s learning.

View your program as a cycle to build upon children’s learning throughout the year.

Make daily transition times – including packing and tidying up – a fun time rather than a chore. Encourage children’s cooperation and independence during this.

Align educators’ teaching styles to make it easier for children to transition through the programs.

Aligning teaching styles:
At Yapper Children’s Service an emphasis on aligning educators’ teaching styles helps to ensure that children experience continuity between the programs. The team of 22 have each brought their own unique teaching style to the service. The Director highlights how they have been encouraged by the EYLF to align their programs: “You all end up with the same teaching style and the outcomes for the children end up being the same across the board, right from babies. So it’s actually allowed the children to transition easier through the programs...”

Imaginative outdoor play
Continuity between the home and service experiences and practices is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who may have specific traditional child-rearing practices. It also helps to support parents to build on children’s learning at home.

- Replicate the sleep environments children experience at home – for example relatives sleeping close together (for more on this see Good Practice Sheet 1).
- Consider family grouping options to help children experience an environment similar to that at home and their communities (for more on this see Good Practice Sheet 3).
- Support family dynamics: Yawarra Child Care Centre’s Director explains that in many of the children’s homes, the older children help raise the younger children, and so at the centre educators “keep this tradition happening within the centre” by supporting older children to teach the younger ones, or helping older relatives settle younger children when they are upset.
- Sharing the educational program: At Lulla’s MACS educators feel it is very important to share with families information on their educational program and its objectives. Recently they have been talking to parents about the EYLF and the Abecedarian approach they are trialling at the centre. This information sharing assists parents to understand how they too can conduct learning activities at home. Educators are also developing a home-based kit to assist parents to run educational and fun activities at home with their children.

- Encourage children and families to provide photos from home – for example of siblings – to create photo walls or books.
- Talk to parents about the service program, activities and goals and provide them with resources to assist them to build on children’s learning at home.
Transitions within the service

Particular strategies can be useful to make transitions for children as smooth as possible at the beginning of the year, when they are entering a new service, and through the daily transitions to and from the service.

At the beginning of the year focus attention on activities, discussions and stories on identity and connection to support children to figure out where they belong within a new program and within the service.

Encourage existing children at the service to support new children entering the service by explaining the routines to them.

Get to know new children who are coming into a program from a younger room – for example by using their portfolios and family history from the previous room. This can help educators understand what the child is interested in and what needs they may have before the child enters the new program.

Display a child’s artwork in a new room to make them feel at home.

Family group time at the beginning and end of the day can help siblings and relatives support each other to settle into the service and to leave more smoothly at the end of the day.

Starting a new year:
At Yappera Children’s Service educators help children to deal with the complex emotions that may arise during transitions times. As the Director explains, “Now that we’re at the beginning of the year a lot of it is about identity and connection for the children, so they’re trying to find their place in programs, in particular our new children.” Educators work with children to help them understand transitions, to help them find their identity and connection within the new program, and to manage their feelings and emotions as they do this. They do this by focusing on “stories such as helping, sharing, sad and happy and things like that.”

Supporting family dynamics:
Yawarra Child Care Centre’s Director explains that in many of the children’s homes, the older children help raise the younger children, and so at the centre educators “keep this tradition happening within the centre” by supporting older children to teach the younger ones, or helping older relatives settle younger children when they are upset.

Belonging within a new room:
Educators at Birrelee MACS support children to transition through the centre, for example from the nursery to the preschool room, by making sure that “there’s a bit of that child in that new space” – something that the child can recognise as theirs and that therefore helps them to feel that they belong in the new room.
Transitions to school or kindergarten

Are both a challenging and exciting time for children and their families. Transition to school programs and/or informal support by services can support children and families through this time.

- Focus on building positive relationships with local schools and kindergartens, including building new relationships as school staff change.
- Link up families of children who will be attending the same school, and families previously enrolled in the service whose children are at the school to help start a support network when their child enters school.
- Where needed help parents fill out enrolment forms, and attend meetings with families and the school to help families communicate their child’s needs. This can empower families to feel confident in expressing what their child needs at school.
- Incorporate some kindergarten or school activities at the early childhood service to ensure continuity of learning between the two services and prepare children for the transition.
- Support staff visits to the kindergarten or school, and vice versa, to foster understanding of each other’s programs and ensure consistency of service provision.
- Work collaboratively with other organisations to meet any additional needs – such as health or developmental needs - children may have to ensure that they are as ready for school as possible.
Helping children and parents prepare:
Congress Child Care Centre’s preschool readiness program focuses on a holistic response that supports child and parental emotional needs. Educators have found that enrolling a child in the child care centre and building child and parent confidence in educational institutions assists in overcoming any mistrust a family may have in institutions. Once the family is ready, the child can then transition on to preschool.

School preparation visits:
Minya Bunhii and Gundoo MACS take their oldest children to visit the local school to build familiarity and connections with the teachers and environment. At Minya Bunhii siblings or relatives at the school are brought into these visits to help support the child’s experience of and preparation for school.

Preparing for the classroom:
Gudjahgahmiamia runs a program with Noah’s Ark to ensure that children experience continuity of learning and transitions. One morning a week a teacher from the local school visits Gudjahgahmiamia to work with the oldest children in a separate room set up to replicate a kindergarten classroom. Here the teacher works with the children on learning activities to prepare them for school, bringing new resources to prompt children’s interest. The Director describes that a benefit of this environment is that the children are able to work without distraction from the younger children, commenting that “it’s just a bit more personalised.”

Family support and school connections:
At Birrelee MACS educators focus on supporting families to be in charge of the transition to school. They invite local school principals and kindergarten teachers to the centre to talk with families over a cuppa and cake. They then support families in the school choice they make. If needed educators attend the school with the child and family, and assist with transport where a child attends a kindergarten program in the afternoon and Birrelee in the morning. As the Director describes, “we just support it as much as we can, as much as needed, and we back off once we’re not needed.” She believes that educators play an important role in making sure that school staff and parents are on an equal footing, and that parents are comfortable to raise any issues they want. Educators also talk to school staff about children’s behaviour, and strategies to manage this. She feels that this encourages schools not to label children on their first day of school, but instead to adopt the methods that educators at Birrelee know works with a particular child.

Preparation for the classroom:
Gudjahgahmiamia runs a program with Noah’s Ark to ensure that children experience continuity of learning and transitions. One morning a week a teacher from the local school visits Gudjahgahmiamia to work with the oldest children in a separate room set up to replicate a kindergarten classroom. Here the teacher works with the children on learning activities to prepare them for school, bringing new resources to prompt children’s interest. The Director describes that a benefit of this environment is that the children are able to work without distraction from the younger children, commenting that “it’s just a bit more personalised.”

Communication books:
At Jalygurr Guwan educators support a child with a developmental delay by using a communication book to facilitate communication between the kindergarten he attends in the morning, Jalygurr staff and the child’s parents.

Helping schools communicate with families:
Birrelee MACS is a member of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group. This helps them to participate in wider conversations on school transition, for example they have supported schools to change the way that they communicate with Aboriginal families during the orientation phase. The Director describes how “one of the schools has put lots of Aboriginal artwork on their flyers, they’ve got red, black and yellow, they’ve got pictures of Aboriginal students and families on their flyers. So families can identify with it straightaway, but more importantly the kids see that they belong there straightaway.”
This Good Practice Sheet is designed to provide educators with some ideas to overcome challenges they may experience in implementing the EYLF.

THE APPROACH
Implementing the EYLF has created a number of challenges for services, including engaging with the technical language or ‘jargon’, difficulties in attending staff training, and new requirements such as documentation and programming. However services are also developing some creative and valuable strategies to overcome these challenges.
Managing workload & documentation

Taking small steps

Ensuring a positive transition for educators

Supporting educators to program

Educator leadership

the main methods services can overcome these challenges

Managing workload and documentation

Use photographs as a quick, easy and useful tool to use when writing up observations, learning stories, portfolios and when talking to parents.

Set up a computer within the rooms to help educators quickly type up notes during the day, although remember this can also take educators’ time away from interacting with children.

Provide educators with more off-floor time to complete documentation.

Spread the workload amongst all educators and trainees by having everyone make observations, take photos, contribute to programming, and create learning stories and portfolios.

Use simpler methods of observations and notes that can be written up during the day – such as notebooks for all educators to jot down their thoughts (see the example from TACCA in Good Practice Sheet 9 on ‘Capturing reflections throughout the day’).
**Educator leadership:**

To help them engage with the EYLF, *Yawarra Child Care Centre* educators met with their IPSU officer to talk about what they were comfortable with implementing and what they still wanted to learn more about. Each educator then picked a particular outcome to focus on and learn about. The Director feels that this approach helped educators become leaders in a particular area. Educators have now been able to share their knowledge with each other, as the Director explains “And then they’re the person to go to, so if you’re having trouble with area two, then you can go to that person, and say ‘well I really don’t understand this bit, can you help me?’ It’s giving them more of role in it, so it’s not always coming back to me for the answers.” Once educators are confident in one area they are able to move on to focus on another area. By breaking the EYLF up into smaller pieces in this way the Director feels that it has been less overwhelming for the educators, “they’re not trying to learn it all at once.”

**Educator leadership and sharing**

Educator leadership and sharing can be a valuable motivator within a team, and is key to successful implementation of the EYLF. Educators can support each other through open communication, encouragement and sharing ideas and knowledge to implement the EYLF.

“I couldn’t do it on my own as a manager, you had to have staff that were willing to step up outside of their role and take a real leadership role in the environment and be able to assist their staff, and have the patience to be able to explain to staff. So we were lucky here to have that.”

(Director, *Yapper Children’s Service*).

- Support other educators to understand how the EYLF connects with practices they are already implementing. This can give them confidence in what they are already doing and support to tackle next steps.
- Encourage interested educators to develop EYLF templates or resources to share with the team.
- Motivate and inspire educators by sharing practice ideas from other services, and as a team reflect on how these can be adapted and implemented at the service.
- Foster leaders from within the team to share their enthusiasm and knowledge with others.
Use the EYLF as an opportunity for educators to explore their own strengths and interests – for example in photography, child development or learning environments.

Support educators in reflecting on their current practice and how this links to the EYLF, to allay concerns they may have that the EYLF requires all new practices.

EYLF benefits:
At Gunai Lidji transitioning to the EYLF is seen as an opportunity for educators to “sit and talk about the reasons for (the EYLF), and how we find that it meets our needs - what we’ve been looking for and planning for the children.” Part of this is empowering educators to take ownership of the EYLF. The Director describes her vision for how each educator can take on the EYLF, “If we give each staff member some empowerment in their room, they’ll embrace this better. That’s my goal.” She believes that all educators need to be involved and to understand what is happening in their room in terms of children’s development.

Jalgurr Guwan’s Director has motivated educators by emphasising that that the EYLF is an opportunity for them to “start fresh”, to work together and to develop planning processes that they are all happy with implementing.

Ensure that educators have all of the resources they need to plan, including folders, stationary and relevant EYLF books and guides.

Ensuring a positive transition for educators
Key to supporting educators to engage with the EYLF is helping them to understand the benefits and making the change a positive experience. As the benefits become clearer educators’ confidence will also grow.
“And in our work...we are trying to counter that fear of starting, and of over-thinking it. We are saying: ‘Okay, let’s go back to the very beginning and look at the Vision’. We say: ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming are three really good concepts for you to think about. If you do nothing more than really engage with the idea of how children attending this service Belong to this group – and to their family and community; and how they Be who they are in this moment, right now; and who do we want them to Become?’. That’s a strong basis for educators and services to start their programming, and for them to start their connection into the EYLF.” (Christine Dimovich, Yorganop IPSU).

Unpacking the EYLF:
Birrelee MACS unpacked the EYLF into a document that they could work with. This involved literally taking the document apart, as the Director explained “we took the staples out of the booklet…and we spread it out the way we understood it and read it, because it doesn’t read like a book.” She describes how “So we then thought, what are the principles, what is being, belonging and becoming? How do we identify with that? Is it culturally appropriate? Do we want to change it so it is culturally appropriate?” This helped them to understand how the EYLF fit with and could support their practices, values and the outcomes they wanted to achieve.

Taking small steps
Allows educators to build up their knowledge and confidence. It is also important to build on what’s already happening with a service – focusing on recognising and acknowledging the EYLF outcomes, principles and practice educators are already doing and how they can build and improve on these.

Have each educator choose an area they want to learn about so that they can become the ‘go to’ person with the service for that area, and can then share this knowledge with the other educators.

Take the document apart to work out a particular area you can start focussing on.