

JULY 2010

# Foundations

*Developing Social & Emotional Wellbeing in Early Childhood*

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ISSUE**

**SOCIAL  
Inclusion**

**CULTURAL  
DIVERSITY**

**Rural &  
Remote  
AREAS**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES MAGAZINE

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# From the Editor

This edition of *Foundations* explores themes of diversity and inclusive practice, with a focus on how these relate to social inclusion and wellbeing.

Social inclusion is the degree to which people feel connected to others and can participate equitably in their community. It includes people's access to services and their engagement in community activities and networks. It also reflects whether people feel accepted by and connected to other people.

Social inclusion and engaging in social networks can be important protective factors for mental health and wellbeing. Some people encounter barriers to their inclusion or participation, which may include cultural differences or difficulty in accessing services. If we want to support mental health and wellbeing for all people in our communities, we need to find strategies that will help us address these challenges.

Children's services play a key role in contributing to the level of social inclusion in our community as a whole, in the way they work with children and families. By adopting inclusive practices today, services can also give children the opportunity to develop the skills and values they will need to build inclusive communities in the future.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and that it promotes some discussions, partnerships or sharing of ideas in your professional networks. Whenever you are working with families in an inclusive way, you are also contributing to the mental health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

**Karen Stafford**  
Program Manager  
**Everymind**

*Karen Stafford*







# *Supporting Social & Emotional Wellbeing* **Through Social Inclusion**

**By Sara Twohill**

Senior Project Officer, Hunter Institute of Mental Health

Feeling socially included is important for our sense of self and our understanding of where we belong. Belonging to a network of supportive relationships and to a community can be a powerful protective factor for social and emotional wellbeing.

## *Social inclusion*

Social inclusion is the degree to which people are connected with others, can participate in community activities and can access support when needed. In a socially inclusive society people feel valued, their differences are respected, their basic needs are met – so they can live with dignity. Inclusive communities respect the full range of diversity and difference. They also provide people with equal opportunities to access services and to fully participate in activities and community networks.

Social networks play an important role in promoting a feeling of inclusion. Networks can offer individuals and groups an opportunity for social engagement, social support, a chance to apply social influence, participation in meaningful social roles and access to resources and information.

Evidence suggests that greater social inclusion is linked to improved social and emotional wellbeing and better mental health. People who belong to a social network are more likely to feel cared for, loved, esteemed and valued. Social networks have also been found to have positive effects on stress reactions, psychological wellbeing and symptoms of psychological distress such as depression and anxiety. Findings from a study of 2000 people in Finland reported that social support strengthened the mental health of all participants in the study.

Experiencing social inclusion and being engaged in social networks can be beneficial to the social and emotional wellbeing of individuals and communities. Social and emotional wellbeing in turn supports more positive physical health, mental health and educational outcomes.

### *Something to think about ...*

Identify the social networks that are important in your own life.  
These may include family, neighbours, friends, people with whom you share a culture or an interest.

Do these networks support your wellbeing? In what ways?

Is there some way these networks might be more supportive?

How could you ask for that support?

Do you feel a need for more or different social networks in your life?

How might you address this?





Early childhood services have an important role to play in contributing to social inclusion within our community as a whole. A person's self-concept and feeling of belonging are enhanced when they see themselves and their experiences reflected in their immediate environment (such as child care, school or workplace) and in the broader community.

Children develop in the context of their early environments and relationships and they learn about the world and other people through these early interactions. Fostering social inclusion in early childhood helps to create a safe and supportive environment for all children, giving them opportunities for positive social and emotional development and wellbeing.

By supporting children's best possible social and emotional development, within settings where diversity is acknowledged and respected, we can help children to develop the capacity to build positive social networks for themselves and to build inclusive communities when they are older.

Children's services can foster inclusive practices by consciously and actively exploring all forms of diversity, including differences in culture, language, gender, appearance, lifestyle, values, beliefs, abilities and social or economic circumstances.

Some examples of ways to acknowledge and respect diversity might include:

- Showing an attitude of acceptance and welcome for all members of the community, regardless of cultural background or other differences.
- Reflecting all forms of difference and diversity in the environment and the program, while avoiding stereotypes, eg through images, artifacts, stories, visitors, activities, music etc.
- Being open to and acknowledging differences in culture, family structure or context and child rearing practices.
- Learning about the needs, interests and culture of each child and family and exploring how best to support them.
- Acknowledging difference respectfully and asking the family if there are any ideas or practices they would like the service to include or be aware of.
- Helping all children to feel included, promoting a sense of belonging and fostering friendships.
- Challenging stereotypes or bias and being aware of unintentional prejudice, such as assumptions about 'conventional' family arrangements.





## Supporting Access and Participation

Services can also adopt inclusive practices by considering whether any children or families need particular support to help them to access or participate fully in the service.

This becomes important where there is some barrier to a child's or family's access to the service or to their full participation – such as language or cultural differences, issues of physical access or mobility, additional needs due to a sensory or developmental issue, *etc.*

In these situations, we as a community need to go beyond being accepting and look for additional strategies that will help to overcome these barriers and challenges to participation. In an early childhood service, for example, this might mean changing or extending typical care giving practices and working with inclusion support workers or other professionals.

### TEAM Activity:

**Here are some questions you may like to reflect on as a staff team:**

Identify any elements of diversity that your service caters for particularly well.

Are there any children or families who use your service who might not experience that sense of inclusion? How would you know?

Are there any aspects of diversity in Australian society that are perhaps not so well represented in your service environment and practices?  
What could you do about this?



Early life experiences lay the foundation for children's social and emotional development and are critical to their wellbeing in childhood and later in life.

When children's services acknowledge and respect diversity and foster inclusive practices, as part of providing a high quality service for children and their families, they are also contributing to improved mental health and wellbeing for individuals, families and whole communities. ●

### References:

VicHealth. (2005). *Social Inclusion as a determinant of mental health and wellbeing*. Mental Health and Wellbeing Unit, VicHealth.



# *Value My Culture, Value Me*

## A Celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Their Culture

**By Mark Lawrence**

Coordinator, Social and Emotional Wellbeing Projects  
Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)  
[www.snaicc.asn.au](http://www.snaicc.asn.au)



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families feel welcome, respected and safe in a service where they see their culture and their communities acknowledged and celebrated. These early experiences in children's services are critical as they can have a lasting impression on children's and families' expectations of, and hopes for, the education system and community services.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience inclusive, supportive, culturally appropriate and high quality children's services it can provide them with a strong and positive start to their early childhood development, especially the development of social and emotional wellbeing.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families may be uncomfortable or unwilling to participate in services where they do not see themselves, their communities and cultures acknowledged and respected. They may feel isolated, excluded or degraded. This can be particularly damaging to a child's sense of self-worth and confidence.

Non-Indigenous children's services can adopt many initiatives to make their services culturally inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The key element in this is for the service to demonstrate that they value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially children, as the First Peoples of Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures need to be valued for being resilient, continuing and a source of pride and strength for communities across Australia. Geraldine Atkinson, SNAICC Deputy Chairperson for Early Childhood and Chairperson of Lulla's Children and Family Centre states "When children know their culture is valued, they know they are valued."

SNAICC (2009) believes that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will grow, learn and excel when their cultural needs are met, valued and respected at home, school, child care and throughout all aspects of their lives." One of SNAICC's eight national policy priorities for children and families is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture should be valued and respected in all policies, service development and delivery affecting our communities' children.





## *Embed Culture in Practice*

SNAICC advocates that “Meeting children’s health, development and cultural needs through programs that value learning and respect for culture is the best way to ensure improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s long term wellbeing and educational achievements.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is a great source of strength to our communities’ children and families, including providing important connections to country, spirituality, family and community. It is important that non-Indigenous children’s services extend beyond superficial forms of promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices.

Think creatively, rather than just decorating a corner of a room with a boomerang or a dot painting. Services should explore how they can learn more about the culture of their local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and reflect this by enabling the service and staff to embed culture and community into programs and activities for children, staff and families

## *National Aboriginal and Islander Children’s Day*

Since 1988 National Aboriginal and Islander Children’s Day (NAICD) has been held annually on the 4th of August. It is an opportunity for all services and organisations with a focus on children and families to celebrate our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Promoting and celebrating the day in your local service and community is one way to reinforce the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. This can foster our children’s sense of belonging, identity and social wellbeing.

Each year, SNAICC identifies a theme for NAICD that highlights a current issue or concern facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, or a focus for celebrating our children and culture. This year the theme is *Value My Culture, Value Me*.

In 2010 the aim of NAICD is to emphasise the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to know they are loved and valued. Ensuring that they have every opportunity to nurture and explore a healthy and strong sense of self and community is an integral factor in achieving social justice for our children.

## *Celebrating the Day in Your Centre*

NAICD provides an opportunity to involve all children, their families and members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in activities and celebrations.

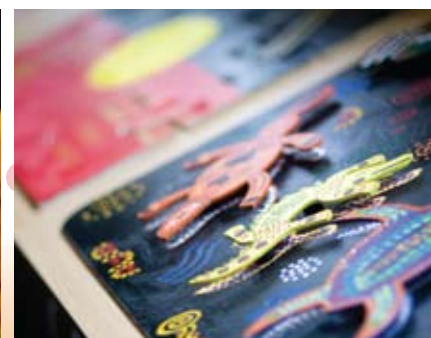
Many early childhood services conduct activities that reflect and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural themes, such as:

- craft activities that draw on the Aboriginal colours (red, black and yellow) and Torres Strait Islander colours (blue, green, white and black)
- singing, playing or reading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander songs, music and stories
- inviting local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders or performers to share stories, songs, or history
- creating a window or notice board display celebrating the local community's culture and history
- holding joint activities with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services
- or having a party with fresh fruit, fairy-bread and decorations featuring the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colours.

Whatever your service chooses to do, it is important that it is 'strengths-based' and features positive images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture and highlights their strengths and achievements.

Here are some ideas from past NAICD activities and events:

- Beanangirng Kwuurt Institute (WA) provided morning tea, entertainment and activities including the Dindima Dance Group, Elder story telling, activity tables, sports activities, face painting, balloons, a clown and pin the tail on the kangaroo.
- Port Augusta Early Years Parenting Centre (SA) hosted a mini info-expo and family day. A special friendship banner was made with the children's paintings.
- Families at Seymour East Preschool (VIC) planted indigenous plants, had a sausage sizzle, invited a local Elder to visit, had face painting, Aboriginal music, songs, Dreamtime stories and art activities. ●



## References & Resources:

For information on **National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day**, and to order posters and related resources, download activity sheets, and register your NAICD event visit:

- [www.snaicc.asn.au/children](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/children)
- [http://srs.snaicc.asn.au/\\_uploads/rsfil/00432.pdf](http://srs.snaicc.asn.au/_uploads/rsfil/00432.pdf)
- [www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/map-aboriginal-australia](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/map-aboriginal-australia)
- SNAICC, 2009, 8 Priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care: [www.snaicc.asn.au/policy](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/policy)





A photograph of two Indigenous women with dark skin and curly hair, smiling warmly at the camera. They are positioned side-by-side, with the woman on the left slightly in front of the one on the right. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and a building.

# *Developing* Partnerships

**By Jannelle Gallagher**

Director, Kurri Kurri & District Preschool Kindergarten

In 2002 - 2003 our pre-school was facing a crisis due to falling enrolments. It was essential that we developed a better understanding of the community we served.

A survey of parents highlighted that cost was a huge factor in families' decisions on attendance patterns for their children. Meanwhile the Bureau of Statistics website provided us with a valuable insight into our local area. The Bureau's data indicated that the number of pre-school aged children (3-5 year olds) in the Cessnock Local Government area was declining. However, it painted a very different picture for our Indigenous families. While there were 68 pre-school aged Indigenous children in the Cessnock LGA, not one child accessed an early childhood program.

This information prompted our pre-school to embark on a journey of reflection on our practices and ultimately lead us to develop a friendship and partnership with our Indigenous neighbourhood centre - Barkuma.

As luck would have it Deb, the CEO of Barkuma, had arranged an open day and training course for organisations in our area. The course was confronting, asking us to stop and think about the service we offered.

Was the service truly reflective of all our families in the Kurri Community? Were we welcoming of Indigenous families? What did we really know about our Indigenous heritage? The harsh reality was that I knew little or nothing about these families and without guidance and support I would never manage to engage with these families or persuade them to trust me "a white fella" with their children.

My pre-school's journey had begun.

First we needed families to know that we existed. That was easy - we already had a brochure advertising the pre-school - or was it? Deb took a look. Her first question was: "Where are the kids?" We had a "lovely" sterile picture of our playground perfectly manicured and devoid of any trace of children playing and making discoveries. And it was too wordy. How would the families we were trying to reach know that they were welcome here?

We consulted with Barkuma and after many phone calls and visits Deb finally felt we had the brochure right. We agreed!

The second barrier was cost. Deb had flagged \$10.00 per day as manageable for most families. Meetings with successive Ministers from the Department of Community Services allowed us to advise the government that cost was a contributing factor to our declining numbers in general and a critical factor in excluding our Indigenous families.

The third hurdle was the legal obligation to have families complete enrolment forms. To them these were seen as an invasion of their privacy - we simply wanted to know too much. The staff at Barkuma assisted us again. It is still an ongoing challenge to get this right.

It was also time to rethink the way we handled phone enquiries. Instead of asking the caller for all their details we needed to give them information about the Centre. We now have an open door policy where families can visit the pre-school to see the Centre in action. This allows families and children to “check us out” before placing their names on our waiting list.

For all my plans to be realised I needed the management committee and staff to have ownership of this new partnership our pre-school was forging with Barkuma. Deb therefore arranged a training day for us. The staff were enthused. In the wake of that training we ordered our first Lemon Myrtle tree and planted our bush tucker garden. We changed our sign to include the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian flags and proudly flew these flags from our flag poles. A Rainbow serpent from the Dreamtime graced our bike track protecting her eggs and circling our totem pole complete with children’s handprints. Our children visited Barkuma, exploring the gardens, telling Dreamtime stories while sharing a bush tucker morning tea. Deb ensured we had suitable visual material in our classrooms, and helped us build our resources of Indigenous books and dolls etc. We used Indigenous fabrics relevant to our community as table cloths and bean bags and fabrics were available for the children to use in role plays etc.

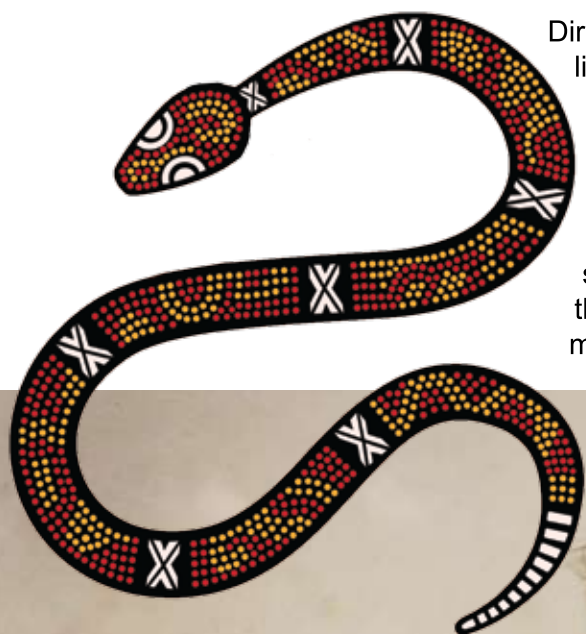
Directors’ meetings were held at Barkuma to further develop links within our community. We continued to develop relationships between the two centres based upon mutual trust and respect.

It was then time to welcome our first Indigenous child!

We now have several Indigenous children enrolled in our service. An Indigenous Childcare Worker continues to provide the essential link between our two cultures and centres as we move forward together. ●

*“By such small steps on the path of knowledge, you see, we will more easily find each other.”*

*Prof. Mick Dodson*







# *Don't Ask, Don't Tell:*

## ARE SAME SEX COUPLES IN CHILDCARE INVISIBLE?

**By Ellen Newman**

Project Officer, Hunter Institute of Mental Health

Recently I was enjoying a day off and as the rain set in for the afternoon I found myself watching M\*A\*S\*H. The episode, which originally aired in 1974, dealt with the issue of homosexuality in the army. The message of the episode was simple: people are people and should be accepted, regardless of sexual orientation. I sat mesmerised as a 36-year-old sitcom explored an issue that is still relevant in today's society.

In the United States a policy has existed allowing homosexual people to serve in the army on the condition that they did not disclose their sexual orientation. This has been unofficially known as the *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* policy. Recently Barack Obama has taken steps to repeal the policy with views to create a culture where gay and lesbian people in service can feel included and accepted. While this is a significant milestone some would argue that there remains an unofficial 'don't ask, don't tell' policy within the community as a whole.

### **Case Study:**

When Amy and her partner moved, they needed to find a new long day care centre for their daughter. After viewing 15 centres they made their decision based on the nice play areas and the friendly, inviting staff at the centre.

During the enrolment process Amy had to answer questions about her partner, and she was asked for a name and for *his* address. After correcting the staff member's heterosexual assumption, Amy noticed that the relationship was never acknowledged again, although the family remained with the centre for two years.

Amy and her partner found in their experience of accessing childcare that their relationship became invisible and that their family structure was not even talked about, much less included. According to research they are not alone. Robinson (2002) reported that most of the early childhood staff who participated in a study on diversity and equity did not consider that the existence of gay and lesbian relationships or families might be explored as part of promoting diversity in an early childhood setting.

Amy's experience with long day care did not make her feel included or accepted as a member of the service or the community. "During this time we did not experience any meanness or direct comments, but more a feeling of being ignored. They were simply not open to our relationship and there was no active inclusion. I would have loved for them to encourage the normality of the situation, to talk to our daughter about it and have some resources or activities for her, like books with two mothers."

"Our daughter has always had two mums and to her this is normal but it would have been nice for the staff to acknowledge this by talking to her about it. We did not feel included in the centre, they were always rushed and it was hard to get them to share information about her day with us."

This was vastly different from the family's first experience with long day care, where there had been a great deal of communication at the end of each day. Staff had shared lots of information about their daughter's day and her activities. As Amy says "It created a warmer atmosphere and helped us to feel included."

Amy explains that as a young lesbian couple moving to a new town, she and her partner did not feel able to assert themselves and explain their wishes to the staff at the long day care centre. There was also the pressure of work and a need to find care for their daughter quickly.

"Now we are more experienced and have talked to other same-sex couples about their experiences with childcare. Other parents have not had the same experiences of feeling invisible that we had."

"We are considering having another child. Next time we will talk to the centre in detail about our desires and be more insistent on the centre being inclusive of our family structure."





Now Amy and her partner feel more confident and have a local support network. They feel that their desire to have their family structure become more visible, as other families are, can be fulfilled. However is it the role of the family to assert their desire for inclusion, or is this something that communities and services should be talking about more actively with families?

Exploring issues of family diversity, including gay and lesbian parents, is one important way in which children's services can contribute to inclusion as part of the broader community, and can help to raise children's awareness of diversity in all its forms.

The modern day Australian family is very diverse and could include single parents, grandparents as primary carers or families with two mums, to name just a few examples. To create a safe and supportive environment children's services staff need to be inclusive of diverse family structures. For many families this means acknowledging their differences rather than ignoring them. ●



### *Something to think about ...*

On Mother's Day, Amy's daughter only made one Mother's Day present, despite having two mothers. How hard must it be for children with two mothers or fathers to decide who they are going to give the one present to?

Why not encourage a child to make a present for both parents?

Think about other diversities of family structure, and how sensitive issues relating to family can be brought up for discussion.

On enrolment, how can staff ask open-ended questions about the child's family and home context, avoiding assumptions about a 'conventional' family?



### **References & Resources:**

Robinson, K. H. (2002). Making the Invisible Visible: gay and lesbian issues in early childhood education. *Contemporary issues in early childhood*, Volume 3 (3).  
[http://www.words.co.uk/pdf/validate.asp?j=ciec&vol=3&issue=3&year=2002&article=8\\_Robinson\\_CIEC\\_3\\_3](http://www.words.co.uk/pdf/validate.asp?j=ciec&vol=3&issue=3&year=2002&article=8_Robinson_CIEC_3_3)

The Rainbow Families Council: <http://rainbowfamilies.org.au/>

<http://rainbowfamilies.org.au/>





# Children's Services in Rural and Remote Areas

By Kylie Hill



The Northern Roads Activity Van (NRAV) is a mobile preschool based in Inverell, Northern NSW. There are currently two vans that cover approximately 800kms per week. The vans enable staff to provide quality early childhood education to almost 80 preschool-aged children at seven small, rural and isolated villages surrounding Inverell. Without the NRAV these children would be unable to participate in preschool without travelling long distances.



## Removing Remoteness

There are many obstacles and barriers that staff need to overcome when delivering preschool from a mobile van but there are also strengths that come with this unique form of delivering education. One of the strengths of the NRAV is that we are well positioned in the communities to develop and foster social inclusion, relationships and to incorporate diversity.

The majority of the families utilising our preschool are from agricultural or rural backgrounds: owning, managing or working on farming properties. On average the population of the communities we visit is under 500 people, with each village having different characteristics. Each village is visited weekly by the NRAV with classes being held in the local community hall or school. Operating from dwellings which are not purpose built and are shared with other community groups means staff need to be flexible and work with others.

As we travel to these outlying villages, we provide socialisation and networking opportunities within the children's communities. These opportunities are not just for the children but also their families and the wider community.

Our preschool sessions are often the only early childhood education that the children are exposed to. Likewise this is often the only social interaction with other children, aside from siblings, that they experience during the week. To combat this isolation NRAV strives to provide an environment where many opportunities are available for children to develop a social network of peers that will progress throughout their preschool time and continue into school. NRAV brings together a stable group of children and families from the same area or community to form important relationships.





## *Continuity and Care*

Groups of children are much smaller than in conventional preschools. On average we have 10 children attending our preschool daily. This can be beneficial, particularly to those shy and isolated children who have had little or limited social interaction. It can provide an environment that is less threatening and daunting for children.

One of the NRAV teams has had the same two staff members for over 15 years. Having a consistent staff contributes to the successful formation of relationships between children, staff and families. It has resulted in us having the privilege of educating not only one child but entire families! The familiarity of staff creates an ease when forming relationships as we have often met the child as a newborn when parents were collecting older siblings from preschool.

NRAV is able to take a limited number of two year olds and this is particularly positive for the formation of friendships and relationships. The younger siblings are able to attend the same session, developing self-esteem and confidence knowing that they have the security of their older sibling being nearby.


Three of the venues are located in local schools. This is a particularly successful strategy for children to develop friendships and relationships with other children who will attend that school. It provides a wonderful transition from preschool to school. The children's confidence and self-esteem are apparent as there is familiarity with the venue, teaching staff and older children at the school. As a preschool community we feel valued by the school and are invited to school events such as: book week parades, sporting events and morning teas.



## *Exploring Programming*

Programming and planning focuses and builds on the children's interests, while trying to include opportunities to expand their social networks. Recently the children participated in a letter writing activity which provided an opportunity to meet new peers.

The project began because the children were interested in post offices, letters and mail. In rural communities the mailman may only come a few times a week. Receiving mail can be an exciting experience, providing links to the outside world.



Children were encouraged to create letters or drawings, for families and for the children at another NRAV venue. The children were then able to follow up with an excursion to meet the new friends they had written to. This helped to enlarge their social circle.

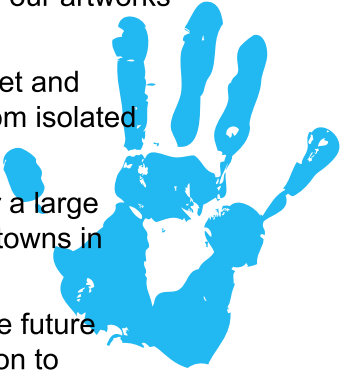
Another chance to expand the social circles of the children occurred when we were invited to participate in an art exhibition. Jack and Jill Preschool in Inverell organised the event, which provided numerous opportunities for socialisation. There were group collaborations to complete the artworks for the exhibition. Then we had the exciting bus trip to Inverell, to view our artworks at the gallery.

After seeing the artworks we were able to visit Jack and Jill Preschool where we met and interacted with a large number of children. This was an opportunity that children from isolated communities wouldn't normally have.

While the NRAV provides services to these villages, our time is limited as we cover a large geographic area. Some families may decide that they are willing to travel to larger towns in order for their child to access preschool on more days.

The visit to Jack and Jill's provided families with a link to another preschool. If in the future parents decided they wanted to access more preschool, they now have a connection to a service in town.

While our venues may not be state of the art or purpose built, they are very special to us. It is a wonderful privilege to offer our families a rich variety of social interactions and I treasure the fact we are able to form such close bonds to the diverse children and families that we encounter. The service provides an opportunity for isolated children and families to come together and form important relationships. ●



*"The future depends on what  
we do in the present".*

*Mahatma Gandhi*



# *Communicating with Children & Families* from Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds



Imagine that you are a space explorer setting out on an uncertain journey to discover life beyond our solar system. You arrive on a populated planet. Those who are living there seem to welcome you and invite you to stay, but everything looks and feels different.

The people speak a language you can't understand. Their food looks different and tastes strange to you and it's hard to prepare. They work and play in a curious manner and there seem to be complex social rules that you don't know how to even begin to understand.

In a similar way, moving to a different country can be a huge challenge for families, even more so if they do not speak the local language. Simple things that we take for granted - such as counting to ten on our fingers can be completely different in another culture. For example in China the hand gesture for the number eight is an L made with the thumb and forefinger.

How can we ensure that we are inclusive of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families?

## *Getting Started*

Children can find the transition into childcare a difficult and confusing time as it is a new environment and they are separated from their primary carer. When children speak limited or no English this can make the experience all the more daunting and confusing. Suzanne Sutherland from Mayfield Central Community Preschool shared some strategies she has adopted to try and aid the transition into preschool for the CALD families at her centre.

"We have a process, as do many preschools, where we try to spend some time with the parent before the child actually starts. I would usually allocate about an hour, to talk to the parent about what will happen at pre-school. We discuss how the staff will take observations, record information in an individual portfolio, where the portfolio is kept and how to access it.

We have a daily journal and display boards to complement the portfolio and show parents what's happened during the day. I think taking the time to communicate all of this to them during this early stage gives them reassurance that their child is going to be receiving quality care and they will be able to see what is happening."

"It is important to explain to families who haven't previously accessed care how the system works in Australia; for example how they can apply for subsidies to make childcare affordable. These families, like most, need help to understand the differences in funding sources between the state preschool system and the federally funded childcare services."



Even after families have been introduced to the centre initially, further time and effort is needed to build a strong partnership. Additional questions about child care or cultural difference came up at any time.

"Once I have explained how the centre works I can ask them questions and that's when I try and get information about what's culturally relevant and what their experiences have been. When the families don't speak English or have limited English this can be quite a difficult process. Sometimes the parents will bring along an interpreter, which works really well. If I know in advance that an interpreter is required then I can try and arrange one. In one recent case we had conducted the initial interview with an interpreter but on the first day when the family came in I still had a question that I needed to ask and the parent couldn't understand what I was asking. He was very resourceful, he pulled out his mobile phone and dialled his friend who acted as an interpreter."

### *Inventive Interpretation*

Sometimes it is necessary to think outside the square to communicate messages and help to develop a relationship with the families and children. Suzanne explains that digital photography has been useful to convey messages to children such as when it is time to come inside, or to demonstrate sequences of events such as hand washing. People other than official interpreters can also prove to be a valuable resource.

Suzanne has accessed interpreters from various sources including:

- utilising funds from the CALD component of the RAM funding preschools receive, or in the case of long day care centres a bicultural worker may be available through the Inclusion Support Agency
- through the university Teach Outreach program
- bilingual childcare workers
- through the local community
- family and friends of the parents
- other parents at the centre who speak the same language.

"I encourage staff who speak a second language to let directors know because it can be very helpful. Centres can call on their own staff to act as interpreters and we have now built a network with several other centres in the area who are happy for us to utilise their bilingual staff if needed."





### *Something to think about ...*

If you were travelling to a distant country with a different culture what items would you take to remind you of home?

Photos of your loved ones and favourite places, a few favourite objects or even some seeds of your favourite plants?

By including decorations from different cultures and encouraging families to bring objects and photos from home you can create a sense of familiarity and belonging in the centre.

It also may encourage children to share their diverse experiences, skills and knowledge with each other.

*We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic.  
Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings,  
different hopes, different dreams”.*

*Jimmy Carter*

### *Handy Tips*

Here are some things to consider when a family from a CALD background starts at your centre.

- Even if a family can speak English they still may require an interpreter for long conversations where important information is being exchanged.
- When using an interpreter speak directly to the family and not the interpreter.
- Speak slowly and clearly, using a basic vocabulary.
- Pause after two to three sentences.
- Make sure that you have been understood.
- Provide key information in a written format.
- Researching different cultures can be very useful but don't assume, ask individuals what is relevant to them and their family.
- Find out as much information as possible about the child's home routines. Meal times and sleep patterns may alter and it is important to try to maintain continuity in the child's day (De Gioia, 2009).
- Use visual aids, for example Suzanne has laminated photos of what food is appropriate and not appropriate for children's lunch boxes.
- Many of the parents are keen to build relationships with you and will come to social gatherings at your home or invite you to their homes. Home visiting is an excellent way to really understand a child's culture. ●

### **References & Resources:**

De Gioia, K. (2009). Parent and staff expectations for continuity of home practices in the child care setting for families with diverse cultural backgrounds. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, Volume 34 (3), 09–17.

Information on working with an interpreter can be found at:

[http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/working\\_with\\_interpreters.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/working_with_interpreters.html)

[http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/working\\_with\\_interpreters.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/working_with_interpreters.html)



# Useful Links to Parenting Resources and Information

Here are some helpful websites which contain information on pregnancy, babies and young children. You may like to share these links with families at your service. You may even find some interesting fact sheets that you would like to print off and send home in your parent newsletters.

**Child and Youth Health**

[www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)

**HealthInsite**

[www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Child\\_Health](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Child_Health)

**Kids Count**

[www.kidscount.com.au](http://www.kidscount.com.au)

**NSW Multicultural Health  
Communication Service**

[www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/](http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/)

**Office for Early Childhood  
Education and Care**

[www.education.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/  
resources/parent-tip-sheet.html](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/resources/parent-tip-sheet.html)

**Raising Children Network**

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

**Zero to Three**

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

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