Introduction

Bega Valley Shire Council education and care services have a strong commitment to actively promoting equity in relationships. This is based on respect for each child as a unique person with her or his own cultural identity, family history, religious beliefs, abilities, interests and needs. Equity and respect for similarities and differences requires our community to find ways to:

- ensure each child has a strong sense of identity, wellbeing and a connection to her/ his world
- expose children to cultural contexts other than their own
- reflect on, recognise and challenge unfairness, bias, prejudice and stereotypes that may impede each person’s access to learning,
- promote ways of thinking, feeling and speaking that value and include our diversity and invite access to learning for everyone
- include resources in the environment that improve access to learning wherever possible.

At times, there are financial, human resources or physical environmental constraints that act as barriers to access to learning for a child. Where this occurs, we will undertake all reasonable efforts to include children by working with families to source additional funding, specific support services or to make environmental changes.

Strategies

Enrolment

The Nominated Supervisor and Administrative Officer will:

- Ensure Commonwealth and State Priority of Access guidelines are followed when enrolling children, and that families receive additional assistance to complete all enrolment procedures if needed. This may include connecting the family to interpreter services.
- Work with families, interpreters and case-workers to plan an inclusive service orientation program for each child and family.
- Regularly review the enrolment and orientation process and identify how these could be improved.
- Relationships with families
- All Educators, Staff and Others will:
  - use non-judgmental and respectful communication with families
  - seek information that extends their knowledge and understanding of diverse family contexts, practices and beliefs.
Networking
The Nominated Supervisor and Administrative Officer will:

- Work with other agencies to ensure financial and administrative barriers to inclusion are identified and where possible resolved
- Provide records and systems of accountability for support funds received from external agencies.
- Educational Leaders and Educators will:
  - Work with advocacy groups to ensure our policies and practices continue to address the needs of children and families
  - Work with Brighter Futures staff and other caseworkers to provide information, resources, links and specialist assistance and early intervention to families
  - Work with families, specialist children’s services, Brighter Futures staff and other caseworkers to identify and use a range of strategies that will support each child’s access to learning
  - Attend individual child planning and review meetings. These must be held in non-contact time as part of usual program planning allocations. Children should not be present. This is necessary to ensure safety of children, to maintain confidentiality and to protect family privacy.
  - Develop and submit Service Support Plans and Applications for additional funded child support in a timely manner.

Programming
Educational Leaders and Educators will

- Observe:
  - how each child and educator understands and practices her/ his identity and relationships with others
  - note how each child and educator in the environment responds to diversity
- Question, reflect on and assess
  - how power and privilege are distributed in and through language and programs.
  - how the distribution of power and privilege continues or challenges unfairness, bias, prejudice or stereotypes.
  - how programs enhance a child’s identity, cultural competence and wellbeing
  - how programs and teaching strategies encourage participation, progress, learning and relationships
- Plan and implement conversations, learning experiences and intentional teaching strategies that are consistent with approved curriculum and:
  - support each child to develop a strong sense of identity
  - support each child to be connected with her or his world as an active contributor
  - offer correct information about diversity to children
  - expose children to other cultural contexts
  - challenge bias, prejudice and stereotypes.
• Use resources and materials that:
  o represent diversity in respectful and non-exotic ways. These materials will include stories, music, paints, artefacts, menus, clothing, sleeping facilities, and other play equipment.
  o undertake professional development or staff training sessions
  o that enhance the quality, relevance and diversity of programs offered to children.

Respectful behaviours (see Respectful Behaviours Policy)

Educational Leaders and Educators will:
• Actively seek information about diversity in our community and share it with children and others in respectful ways
• Identify and address issues of ability, gender, culture, family diversity, that may act as a barrier to each child’s learning
• Challenge children and adults who demonstrate unfairness, bias, prejudice and stereotypes
• Reflect on our own practices for unfairness, and how bias, prejudice and stereotypes may be unintentional outcomes of our work with children and families.

Environmental design

Educational Leaders and Educators will:
• Design the learning environment in ways that ensure all children, including children with different abilities, have physical, emotional and social access to learning experiences
• Reflect on and include factual and respectful images, materials and information about all forms of diversity in the learning environment
• Create spaces in which children and adults can have conversations about how to challenge unfairness, bias, prejudice and stereotypes that may impede each person’s access to learning.

Evaluation

Educational Leaders and Educators will:
• Ask questions about how programs enhance a child’s identity, cultural competence and wellbeing.
• Assess how programs encourage participation, progress, learning, approved curriculum outcomes and relationships
• Examine each aspect of the program and ask:
  o how learning is accessed, by whom and when?
  o who is not able to access learning, and why?
  o how access to learning distributes power and privilege? Does this continue or disrupt unfairness, bias, prejudice and stereotypes?
  o what can we do and say to promote access to learning for all children?
  o how have our own bias, prejudice and stereotypes acted as barriers for access to learning for children and families?

Education and care services and programs are inclusive, fair and engage with access barriers for children, families and others.
Statutory legislation and considerations


References

- Bega Valley Shire Council Children’s Services, Respectful Behaviours Policy, Operational Draft 2012
- Playworks (2000). Including children with different abilities. Workshop notes