

Inclusion Ready News

Term 1 2024

This newsletter is for NSW government funded community preschools in the Central Coast, Illawarra Shoalhaven, Murrumbidgee, Nepean Blue Mountains, Northern Sydney, South East Sydney, Sydney, Western Sydney regions.



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From the Manager, KU NSW Sector Capacity Building Program

We hope that 2024 has started as smoothly as possible at your preschool. We are pleased to be working with you to enhance inclusive practice for children of all abilities in the year ahead.

In this first issue of the year, we share an article about inclusive routines and transitions and talk about our free reflective practice tool that can help you unpack your routines and transitions to increase participation and reduce stress for all children. We plan to launch a refreshed version of this tool later in Term 1. Our Term 1 story about a preschool's 'Road to Inclusion' focusses on embedding Key Word Sign as an inclusive practice as we hear from KU Burwood Preschool Director, Jodie Lenton about her experiences. You will also find information about inclusion-related professional development and upcoming deadlines for Disability and Inclusion funding applications. You will also learn that we have developed an inclusion mentoring package for newer educators that will be piloted in the coming months.

Thank you to those of you who completed the KU NSW Sector Capacity Building (SCB) Program Professional Development Survey in Term 4. We have listened to your feedback and are tailoring our 2024 professional development offerings based on what educators have told us.

Remember to contact your Preschool Inclusion Consultant with any inclusion questions that arise as you settle into 2024. We are here to support you!



Emma Pierce
Manager, NSW Sector Capacity Building Program,
KU Children's Services

Disability and Inclusion Program Funding Application Dates

Below are details of the 2023 cut off dates for High Learning Support Needs (HLSN) and Inclusive Environments (IE) funding applications. Contact your Preschool Inclusion Consultant if you need support with completing these funding applications.

| 2024 cut-off dates for HLSN & IE funding applications | Notification of outcome and payment dates |
|---|---|
| Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 8 December 2023 | Quarter 1 – February 2024 |
| Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 8 March 2024 | Quarter 2 – May 2024 |
| Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 24 May 2024 | Quarter 3 – July 2024 |
| Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 16 August 2024 | Quarter 4 – October 2024 |
| Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 11 October 2024 | Final adjustments – December 2024* |

**Funding for eligible applications will be paid in December and must be spent within the calendar year.*

For further information, please see the NSW government funded Department of Education Disability & Inclusion Program Funding Guidelines:

- ▶ [2024 High Learning Support Needs Funding Guidelines](#)
- ▶ [2024 Inclusive Environments Funding Guidelines](#)

Upcoming Professional Learning

You will find all our upcoming webinars and workshops listed under ‘[Upcoming Events](#)’.

A range of face-to-face workshops and inclusion networking sessions are also being planned in various locations based on regional priorities, please keep an eye on your email for registration details. All our Sector Capacity Building Program events are funded by the NSW Department of Education as part of the Disability and Inclusion Program making them free to all community preschool educators.



Conference Watch

Reimagine Australia, 2023

KU's NSW Sector Capacity Building Program team presented at the 2023 Reimagine Australia conference held in Brisbane in November on the topic: “Beyond Quality on the Road to Inclusion for All” where we shared the focus of the Sector Capacity Building Program (SCB) and discussed video examples of educators critically reflecting on their inclusive practice. This was a wonderful opportunity to share the work we do with an inter-state and international audience. We were encouraged by the positive interest expressed in the work of the KU NSW SCB Program by workshop participants, who included educators, academics and early intervention professionals. We also brought back a great deal of information that we will share with educators in a range of different ways through our SCB work.



Coming up in 2024

- **2024 Professionals and Researchers in Early Childhood Intervention (PRECi) Conference**, 1-3rd May, Surfers' Paradise- Riding the Wave; Advancing Excellence and Equity in Early Childhood Intervention.
PRECi is a newly formed Australian organisation aiming to support and develop a national research-to-practice network focussed explicitly on the area of young children with developmental disabilities.
- **2024 Early Childhood Australia (ECA) National Conference**, 17–20 September, Brisbane - “Realising the Vision: an integrated future for the early years”.

Free Inclusion Mentoring Support Available To Educators

Our team of experienced early childhood, inclusive and special education teachers provide consultancy support to educators in community-based preschools that KU is contracted to support. As the program name suggests, our aim is to build educators' capacity to include children with disability and additional needs on the same basis as their peers. Coaching and mentoring is available to educators of all levels of experience.

Mentoring and coaching at your preschool may involve:

- ▶ Spending time on the floor together with educators
- ▶ Modelling the use of particular strategies
- ▶ Providing supportive feedback
- ▶ Providing tailored information to educators around areas of identified priority

If you would like to talk about a mentoring and coaching visit or are interested in engaging with our pilot individualised 'Elevate' mentoring package for newer educators, please contact your Preschool Inclusion Consultant to find out more.

Moving beyond quality on the road to inclusion



Photos from the first KU SCB Key Word Sign Basic Qualification workshop delivered in late 2023.

Using Key Word Sign in Preschool Settings

Key Word Sign (KWS) is an augmentative communication strategy that can be used to support children who may have communication difficulties understanding verbal language or communicating their wants and needs with others. KWS can be used as a universal practice with all young children to enable communication between peers and support children to value difference.

KWS combines hand signs in conjunction with spoken words. Just the key words in a message are signed rather than with sign language where all words are signed. KWS uses the signs from sign language, in Australia our sign language is known as 'Auslan'.

Current research tells us that Key Word Signing:

- ▶ Encourages joint attention
- ▶ Helps comprehension of receptive language
- ▶ Helps develop vocabulary and language skills
- ▶ Can reduce frustration by encouraging communication
- ▶ Builds on the use of natural gesture

- ▶ Will not prevent verbal speech and language development, in fact when children understand and have ways to communicate more effectively, this is more likely to act as a bridge to further language development in many cases

The information above has been sourced from [Key Word Sign Australia](#). KU's NSW Sector Capacity Building Program has been providing some initial training via an introductory webinar and some Basic Key Word Sign workshop opportunities. Should preschools want to find a Key Word Sign presenter to take their Key Word Sign learning to the next level, the "find a presenter" tool on the [Key Word Sign Australia website](#) may be useful.

Further links to learn about KWS and Sign Language:

- ▶ Signed English
- ▶ The Scope Shop
- ▶ KWS Australia Facebook Page
- ▶ Auslan Signbank
- ▶ "An Introduction to Key Word Sign" Webinar

Jodie Lenton, Director at KU Burwood Preschool Shares her knowledge of Key Word Sign as an inclusive practice

How did you start your journey into inclusive education?

I started learning Auslan in year 10 at school to contribute to the Duke of Edinburgh award, which was later awarded to me by Prince Edward. What began as an interest grew into a passion for sign language as well as becoming a teacher where I could educate children who are deaf/hard of hearing via Auslan. Throughout the following years I completed various Auslan Community College courses, Auslan TAFE courses and was finally awarded the NAATI II Auslan Interpreter certificate. In conjunction with this line of study, I also completed the Associate Diploma (Social Science), Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood Education) and then the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Teacher of the Deaf). I commenced working with deaf and hard of hearing children, Children of Deaf Adults (CODA)'s and Siblings of Deaf Children in 1997 and continue with this passion to the present day.



How are you embedding Key Word Sign in your practice? How have the children and parents responded?

We have dedicated signing time throughout the week. The signs are deliberately chosen and focus on language that is already embedded in the program. For example, signing may follow children's interests and everyday experiences such as animals, family and routines. In the short time I have worked at KU Burwood Preschool, the introduction of Key Word Signing has been an overwhelming success. It is amazing to see children are spontaneously signing throughout the day. For example, if a child is walking past me on the way to get a drink, or to go to the bathroom they will sign to me to tell me what they are doing and continue on their way with a massive smile on their face. They have enjoyed watching recordings of themselves signing with me on StoryPark, and shared these with their families. Parents have provided positive feedback on how well the children are signing and loving the introduction of the language as part of the preschool program.

Do you have any advice for educators who would like to implement Key Word Sign?

Enrol in as many courses as you can, read some materials about the Deaf community and Auslan and have fun with it! Educators could consider enrolling in short courses like the Introduction to Key Word Sign certificate, download apps such as the NextSense Auslan Tutor, making it meaningful to the children in your service while respecting the Deaf community's culture. As a special event you could show an episode of 'Sally and Possum,' an Auslan children's TV program. You can also display Auslan posters/key word signs as well as the alphabet around the room. You could also include stories and toys in your program showing people who communicate in different ways.

What are the benefits for children from Key Word Sign?

In my practice I have seen children:

- ▶ Increase their capacity to communicate with peers, friends and family members who use Auslan
- ▶ Develop the neural pathways and cognitive processes unique to using a visual language
- ▶ Learn and develop an understanding of another language that uses their hands

Key Word Sign:

- ▶ Can help provide a voice to children who aren't communicating verbally for whatever reason
- ▶ Encourages children to develop an understanding of others' perspectives
- ▶ Empowers children to build social connections
- ▶ Breaks down barriers around different ways of communicating

What does the future hold for Auslan?

I am excited that there is so much growing interest in Auslan. After years of advocacy from the Deaf Community and Teachers of the Deaf, Auslan will now be available to implement as a language choice in the NSW School Curriculum for primary and secondary schools in 2026. For the first time, NSW students will be able to learn Auslan as their first language or an additional language through the new syllabus. By learning about signing at preschool, children are starting to develop knowledge of this second language in the important early years.

What resources would you recommend for educators?

- ▶ Bilby Auslan
- ▶ Sally and Possum
- ▶ Deaf Connect
- ▶ Auslan Hub
- ▶ NextSense Auslan App
- ▶ Auslan Signbank
- ▶ Aussie Deaf Kids
- ▶ ACECQA Equity, Inclusion, and High Expectations

Responsive routines and transitions



As we embark on a new year of welcoming children back or building connections with new children, it is a great time to review and reflect on our current practices around routines and transitions. While reviewing the whole day might seem like the obvious place to start, it may work best to start by reflecting on just one part of a day that some children and educators find challenging.

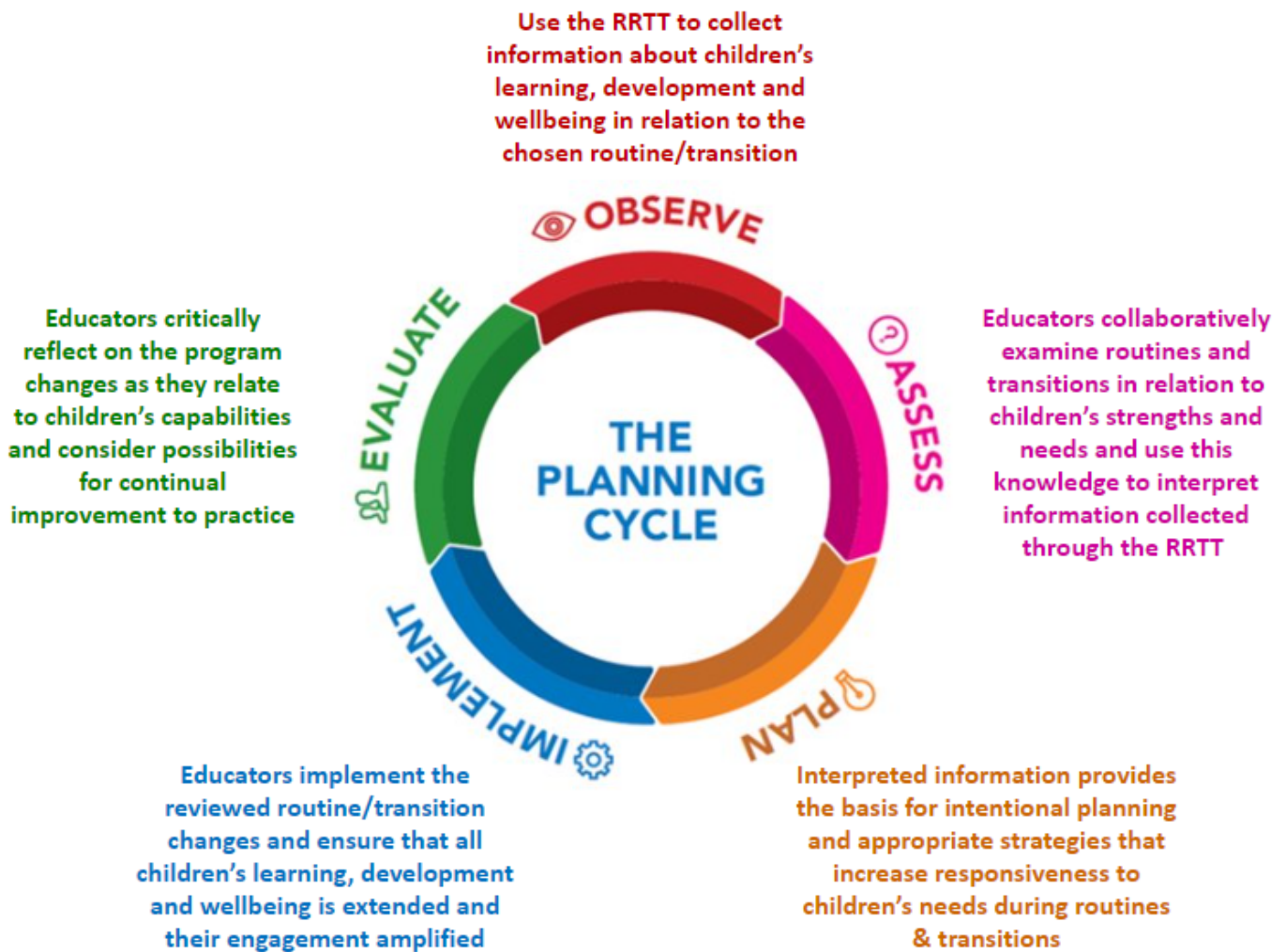
Routines and transitions can become more inclusive when we are purposeful, aware, and intentional in both our planning and our practice. Through critical reflection we can create routines and transitions that consider the needs of the individual within the routine, as well as the nurturing of relationships and the potential for learning. Routines and transitions that are not flexible enough and do not accommodate for the diverse needs of children, may prevent a child from fully participating. This can be a source of stress and frustration for both educators and children. Inclusive routines and transitions are responsive, flexible and enable all children to meaningfully participate.

Many routines and transitions can be complemented by the use of visual supports. We can support all children's communication; sensory and emotional regulation needs by using visual supports to provide an environment of predictability and emotional safety and security, especially in those early weeks. Visual supports provide a concrete message that allows time for children to process expectations. They help build children's independence as they enable children to prepare for transitions. By providing visual supports based on daily schedules, children's sense of security increases and any anxiety about what their day might look like, may be reduced. Over the past year, the team at The Kornmehl Centre at Randwick has been reflecting on their routines, rituals and transitions and enlisted the support of their KU SCB Inclusion Consultant to help upskill the educator team and provide guidance on the use of visual supports. The preschool's Director, Terry explains,

"One of our goals for 2023, was to support all educators to implement the use of visual schedules daily. This required upskilling the team and supports from our inclusion consultant. After attending an in-service training around visual supports, we adjusted routines slightly to include a gathering at the start of the day to explain the routine of the day and what to expect, using the visuals on a special visual board. We noticed the children responded positively and observed many children heading over to the visual schedule at different times of the day to check what was happening next."

The KU NSW SCB team has developed a 'Responsive Routines and Transitions Tool (RRTT)' that provides an opportunity for educators to contribute their ideas and plan for successful routines and transitions. An updated version 2 of this tool will be launched at a webinar on 2nd April. [Register here.](#)

Using the ‘Responsive Routines and Transitions Tool’ as part of the Planning Cycle



Adapted from *The Early Years Framework V.2* (2022)

Educators are also encouraged to consider how you can incorporate children's voices and views. The "Responsive routines and transitions tool" and related recorded webinar with Wendy Shepherd are available on the KU SCB Inclusion Gateway website. Your KU Preschool Inclusion Consultant is also available to deliver an in-service and support and guide your team through this process.

"Educators who prioritise nurturing relationships through culturally safe and responsive interactions, provide children with consistent emotional support. They value the role of familiar routines and everyday rituals in children's lives, and ensure children develop the abilities and skills, such as self-regulation, and understandings they require for interacting with others."
(EYLF V2.0 AGDE, 2022)

Transition to School for children with Disabilities and Additional Needs

We will be sharing information relevant to each preschool term in every issue of our newsletter to help educators to understand and support children with disabilities and their families in relation to the transition to school.

Important activities for Term 1 of the year prior to starting school

Educators can:

- ▶ Identify children with additional needs and establish which children will be attending school the following year.
- ▶ Familiarise yourself with school options in your area, referring to the Department of Education policies, school exemption information, and the Ready Set School resource for Educators. Your Preschool Inclusion Consultant is available to provide assistance with further detailed information about local transition to school options and detailed information for families of children with additional needs.
- ▶ Meet with families for initial discussions about preferences and options for their child's schooling, providing information regarding public, Catholic and independent schools and support classes.
- ▶ Provide families with practical information about the transition to school process from the Department of Education and using resources from Reimagine Australia's Ready Set School resource for Families.
- ▶ Encourage families to make contact with their local public school as this provides a guaranteed place for their child.

Support families to:

- ▶ Talk to their child's preschool/day care teachers, therapists, and early intervention professionals to discuss the support that might be needed at school.
- ▶ Consider options and attend open days, arrange visits to schools and/or support classes if relevant.
- ▶ Arrange preliminary interviews following visits to open days and schools of interest.
- ▶ Think about potential questions to ask to prepare for approaching schools.
- ▶ Following visits to open days and schools of interest, arrange preliminary interviews.
- ▶ Check with schools of interest which assessments or standardised tests might be required and useful for enrolment. Also check the date that applications and accompanying assessments are required by the school.
- ▶ Plan and book updated assessments. Examples include a cognitive assessment for children who have been previously diagnosed with a Global Developmental Delay (GDD) and others where there is a suspected GDD. Examples of assessments include The Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) conducted by a psychologist and/or a Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF) language assessment with a speech pathologist to provide detailed information about the child's expressive and receptive language.

For more information see our new Transition to School for children with disabilities page on the KU SCB Program Inclusion Gateway website [here](#).

Preschool Inclusion Consultants in focus



Julie Kaney
Northern Sydney and Western Sydney
Preschool Inclusion Consultant

What do you find most inspiring about your role as a Preschool Inclusion Consultant?

I am inspired by the uniqueness of each preschool and how these amazing preschools are supporting the child and family's educational journey. Every educator wants the best for the children, and they are building such incredibly strong connections with the families. Preschools play such a vital role in connecting with their local communities in supporting, equity, supporting children regardless of their circumstances, strengths, gender, capabilities, or diverse ways of doing and being. It is a selfless, powerful gift to the child, family and community.

What does inclusion mean to you?

Inclusion has been a passion for me over 35 years and defines me in my work as I connect with educators and children every day.

I love that inclusion enables parents to make choices which can open doors of possibility for their child. I believe in a whole preschool approach, where all educators embrace the uniqueness of the child and enable the child to engage in experiences with input and participation from everyone. I know that through a positive culture of inclusion, children thrive. Inclusion is amazing!



Grace Qualtieri
Murrumbidgee Preschool Inclusion Consultant

What do you find most inspiring about your role as a Preschool Inclusion Consultant?

As a Preschool Inclusion Consultant, I love the support I can give to more remote preschools and am proud to be part of the Murrumbidgee SCB Team. Due to their remote location, networking and face to face support is very limited. The vital connection these remote services are making with families is truly heartwarming. It is inspiring to see the amazing difference these services are making in inclusion of all children.

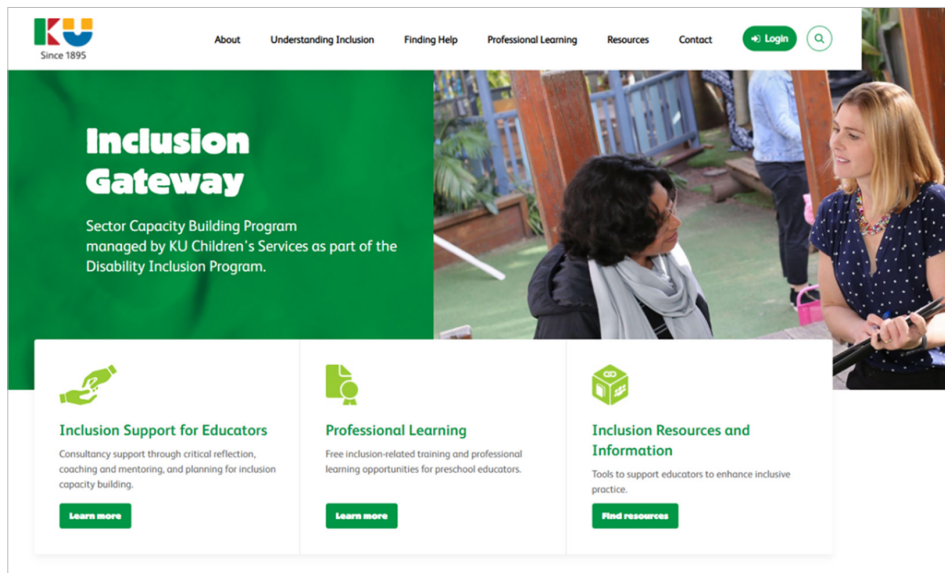
What does Inclusion mean to you?

Everyone has the right to be included and participate. Viewing equality regardless of abilities is always in the forefront of my personal and professional sentiments.

I believe inclusion in early childhood should be embedded in everyday practice to support, and value individual children and families.

I am honoured to witness so many preschools who embed such a positive, inclusive culture to work towards the best outcomes for every child.

KU Inclusion Gateway Login Details



www.kudisabilityinclusion.com.au

To access a wide range of free inclusion resources and professional learning on the KU Inclusion Gateway website, use the following login and password:

Username: CommunityPreschool

Password: CommunityPreschool

Information for educators about the KU Sector Capacity Building Program

The Sector Capacity Building Program Preschool Inclusion Consultants are funded by the NSW Department of Education to:

- ▶ Increase educators' capacity to include children with disability and additional needs on the same basis as their peers.
- ▶ Increase educators' capacity to provide specialised transition to school support for children with disabilities and additional needs.
- ▶ Enable equitable education outcomes for children with disability and additional needs consistent with the five outcome areas of the Early Years Learning Framework (Identity, Connectedness, Wellbeing, Confident and Involved Learners, Communication).
- ▶ Support educators to understand the external support options for children with disability and additional needs, and how these supports can be used to complement the preschool program.

Your preschool is entitled to 8 hours of support each term from the NSW Sector Capacity Building Program.

Contact your consultant directly or go to <https://kudisabilityinclusion.com.au/contact>