

Inclusion Ready News



Sector Capacity Building Program

Issue 1 | February 2026



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From the Manager, KU NSW Sector Capacity Building Program

Welcome back to the 2026 preschool year! KU's Sector Capacity Building Program team are excited to work with you to continue enhancing inclusive practices at your preschool this year.

In this issue of Inclusion Ready News, we share practical information that is pertinent to the beginning of the preschool year. You can read insights to support children with separation anxiety, about toileting independence through a sensory lens, inclusive group times and learn about free resources that can help your team to start the year well through collaboration, as well as about key dates for your diary.

Happy reading!



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

Disability and Inclusion Program Funding Application Dates

Below are details of the 2026 cut-off dates for High Learning Support Needs (HLSN) and Inclusive Environments (IE) funding applications.

Please contact your Preschool Inclusion Consultant if you need support with completing these funding applications.

Application cut-off dates for HLSN Funding	Notification of Outcome and Payment
Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 5 December 2025	Quarter 1: February (By 27 February 2026) Funding is for January to March
Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 6 March 2026	Quarter 2: May (By 22 May 2026) Funding is for April to June
Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 22 May 2026	Quarter 3: July (By 31 July 2026) Funding is for July to September
Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 14 August 2026	Quarter 3: July (By 30 October 2026) Funding is for October to December
Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 16 October 2026	Final adjustments: December (By 4 December 2026) *Only certain types of variations (increase in hours, decrease in hours, extended absence and child has left) and applications for children enrolled after the Quarter 4 application cut-off date will be considered for payment

For further information, please see the [Disability and Inclusion Program Funding Guidelines](#).

Starting The Year Well With Collaboration

As you build relationships with new children who have disabilities or developmental differences, their families and allied health professionals involved in a child's inclusion team, this is a great time to reflect on the value of natural everyday settings like preschool and the importance of working in partnership. [The Inclusion Together Resource](#) can reinforce our practice as part of the child's inclusion team. An important part of collaboration is hearing and understanding the perspectives of different stakeholders.

In order to be on the same page when it comes to preschool visits from allied health professionals, establishing an [Inclusion Team Agreement](#) is a proactive way to formalise how stakeholders work together and promote inclusive practices. In addition, the [Finding Common Ground](#) resource may help with understanding the perspectives and finding priorities to work on together. The Inclusion Team Agreement, is particularly useful to establish at the beginning of the preschool year. You will see a copy of this agreement on the last page of this newsletter.

Supporting Toileting Independence Through a Sensory Lens

Supporting children to develop toileting independence involves more than simply teaching practical skills – it requires understanding how each child experiences their world. A child's sensory processing significantly influences how comfortable and confident they feel when using the toilet.

Begin with a partnership with the child and family

Collaborate with each child and their family to share understandings of the child's needs, create shared routines, language, and strategies so everyone supports the same expectations. Involving the child in decisions and routines can build confidence, respect, and a sense of control over their toilet learning. Consistency is the key to success.

Sensory Considerations and Ideas that may help

Sound sensitivity: Bathrooms can be noisy and overwhelming for children who are sound sensitive. Some may prefer to use the bathroom without peers in proximity.

Ideas that may help:

- ▶ Providing access to noise-cancelling headphones
- ▶ Adding soft wall furnishings may reduce sound
- ▶ Turning off hand dryers
- ▶ Playing gentle background music may also be soothing for some children

Balance: Children who need support with stability may fear falling. Use a firm reducer seat insert, sturdy step stool, and/ or grab bars for stability.

Proprioception: Children who have difficulties sensing their body position may find getting onto the toilet and sitting still challenging.

Ideas that may help:

- ▶ Build awareness of their body through climbing, balancing, and movement experiences
- ▶ Narrating the child's movements can help them to connect with their body and sensations

Interoception: Some children may have difficulty recognising internal sensory signals from their bladder or bowels, while others may be overly aware. This can result in missing cues or frequent toilet use.

Ideas that may help:

- ▶ Establish predictable toileting routines, use visual supports and reminders and include interoception building activities in the daily program to help them connect to their internal senses

Smell: Children sensitive to smells may find cleaning products, residual urine, or faeces overwhelming. Use unscented cleaning products and ensure good ventilation.

Touch: Children highly sensitive to touch may find toilet seats uncomfortable, cold or dislike the feel of toilet paper or water splashes. Children who are under-sensitive to touch may seek additional pressure or not notice wetness.

Ideas that may help:

- ▶ Adjust for comfort – padded seats, shoes on cold floors, and place toilet paper in the toilet to reduce splashes
- ▶ Families may like to explore whether close-fitting clothes like leggings or looser-fitting clothes are preferred by their child

Vision: Children who are highly sensitive to visual stimuli may find bright lights, reflections, or busy walls overwhelming, while visually under-sensitive children may seek extra visual stimulation.

Ideas that may help:

- ▶ Dim bright lights or reduce clutter for sensitive children; use engaging visuals or lights for those needing more stimulation

Privacy: Some children will prefer to use the bathroom alone for a variety of reasons. Consider children's differing preferences around privacy when thinking about what barriers may exist to using the toilets at preschool.

Remember

Building strong partnerships with both the child and their family and seeking to understand each child's sensory profile is key to supporting toileting, learning and longer-term independence.

By listening, observing, adapting the environment, and providing targeted supports, educators can help children feel safe, confident, and successful in learning how to use the toilet.



Supporting Children and Families with Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is intense worry or distress caused by being away from their parent or carer that is more intense than that of most children of the same age and persists for more than 4 weeks.

Children with separation anxiety may:

- ▶ worry about family members or them getting hurt or having an accident
- ▶ refuse to go to preschool, and/or
- ▶ complain about feeling sick when separated.

How can educators help children with this anxiety?

It is important to find a balance between supporting and reassuring children and allowing children to practise managing their own emotions.

Strategies that can help:

- ▶ Encourage a thorough orientation over several days.
- ▶ Share a ‘Welcome to Preschool’ story to help familiarise children with the people and rhythms of preschool. See [SCBP Starting Preschool social scripts](#) for ideas.
- ▶ Communicate regularly with the child’s family to share ideas on supporting the child and check if there are any significant issues at home that may be increasing the child’s anxiety.
- ▶ Plan a clear morning routine with the child’s family so that the child feels safe and can predict when family members will leave and return (for example, sharing a special goodbye hug or waving from a particular location at preschool).
- ▶ Build trust with the child and family, by greeting the child each morning in a calm and friendly manner. Connect the family to other staff who the child knows well.
- ▶ Help the child to engage in an enjoyable activity on arrival.
- ▶ Reassure families that the child is being supported and communicate about which activities are helpful with settling.
- ▶ Use visual routines to enable children to predict and understand their day.
- ▶ Use a supportive approach to acknowledge what children are feeling and provide comfort. Rather than dismissing children’s emotions with phrases such as “stop worrying”, we can recognise and respect their very real emotions. For example, we could say “I wonder if you are feeling a bit sad about Mum leaving today.”
- ▶ Educators modelling calming techniques e.g. “I am feeling a bit worried, so I am taking some big breaths to help me feel better.”
- ▶ Use a range of opportunities both spontaneous and planned to help children notice their own feelings and those of others and develop the language around these. Please also see [KU SCB Emotional Regulation Guidebook](#) for more strategies.
- ▶ Increase the child’s feelings of safety and connectedness by suggesting they bring a familiar toy or photo from home.
- ▶ If possible, engage a peer in the play to build a social connection.

Strategies to share with families

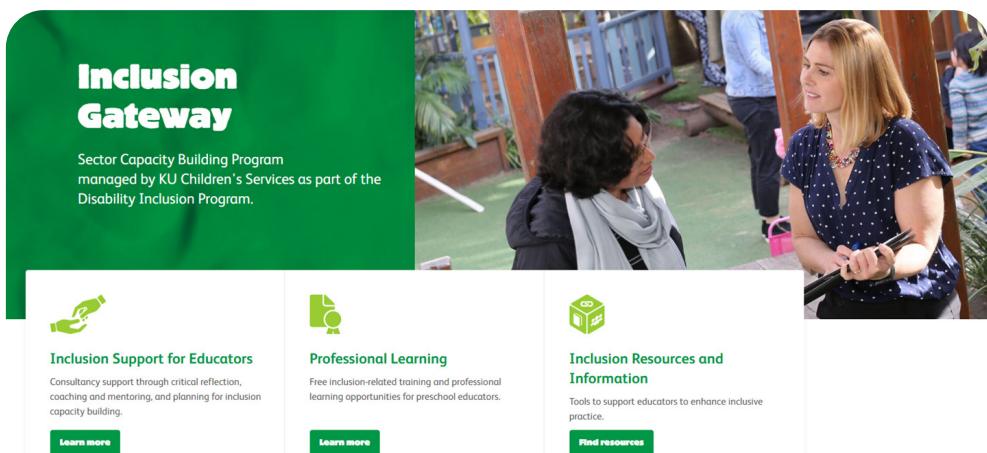
- ▶ **Keeping a predictable routine** can help children to feel secure.
- ▶ **Validate their feelings:** Label the emotion you see in your child and reassure them that others feel like this too.
- ▶ **Use co-regulation strategies:** Support your child to calm their anxious thoughts or feelings by holding their hand, hugging them or just sitting quietly alongside them.
- ▶ **Plan regular relaxing activities:** Find what makes your child feel calm such as listening to music or drawing and make this part of your daily routine.
- ▶ **Regularly practice relaxation techniques:** taking deep breaths, or offering activities that include blowing and sucking, yoga stretches or listening to a guided meditation for children.
- ▶ **Talk with your child's educators:** exchange strategies.
- ▶ **Offer encouragement:** Gently encourage your child to do the things that make them anxious by breaking worrying situations into smaller steps and praising them when they make any attempt.
- ▶ **Seek additional support:** When anxiety persists for longer than expected or is more intense than for most other children, it can help to seek additional support. Your GP can provide contact details for allied health professionals such as a psychologist, or an occupational therapist.

Useful links: [Childhood Anxiety - Learning Links](#) and [Separation anxiety - Be You](#).

KU SCBP Professional Learning

You will find all our upcoming webinars and workshops listed under '[Upcoming Events](#)' on the Inclusion Gateway website.

A range of face-to-face workshops and inclusion networking sessions are currently being planned in various locations based on regional priorities. Keep an eye on your email for registration details. All our Sector Capacity Building Program (SCB) 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.



Inclusion Gateway
Sector Capacity Building Program
managed by KU Children's Services as part of the
Disability Inclusion Program.

Inclusion Support for Educators
Consultancy support through critical reflection,
coaching and mentoring, and planning for inclusion
capacity building.
[Learn more](#)

Professional Learning
Free inclusion-related training and professional
learning opportunities for preschool educators.
[Learn more](#)

**Inclusion Resources and
Information**
Tools to support educators to enhance inclusive
practice.
[Find resources](#)

What's New on the KU Inclusion Gateway Website

- ▶ 'Have a Musically Inclusive Day' webinar presented by Dr Amanda Niland, a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood at the University of Sydney. You can find it [here](#).
- ▶ 'Trauma impacts on development and strategies for educators' This two-part webinar, presented by Bronwen Elliot, social worker and trainer. You can find it [here](#).
- ▶ 'It's Almost the end of the year, Young Children, Big Emotions' presented by Dr Mary Louise Hemmeter, Professor of Special Education, Vanderbilt University, Tennessee. You can find it [here](#).
- ▶ 'Social and Human Rights Models of Disability' presented by Donna McKern and Belinda Monkman. You can find it [here](#).

To access our KU SCBP Inclusion Gateway website, where you can explore more resources, click [here](#).

Conference Watch

Coming up in 2026

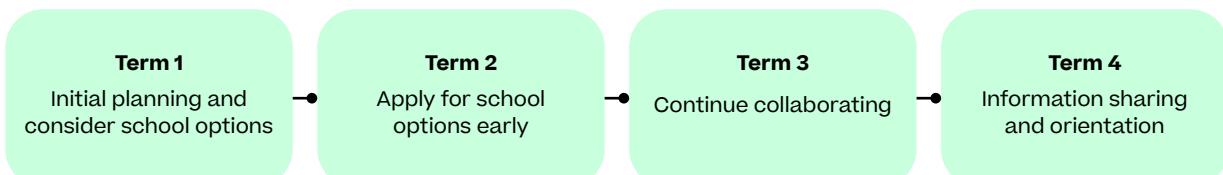
- ▶ Preci 3rd National Conference 13- 15 May, 2026
Wednesday 13 May - Friday 15 May 2026
Adelaide, South Australia
"Better practice, Better Outcomes, Better futures."
- ▶ 2026 Yellow Ladybugs Virtual Conference
Tuesday 2 June - Thursday 4 June 2026, Online
This year's theme is 'bringing it back to the 80's' – reclaiming the past to rewrite the future.
Click [here](#) to keep up to date with confirmation of the 2026 conference dates and details.
- ▶ [ECA National Conference](#)
Wednesday 30 September - Saturday 3 October 2026
Victoria, Melbourne
"Holding the past: Creating the future."



Transition to School: Timeline

While we acknowledge that the preschool year has just commenced, for children with disabilities, the process of transition to school, making informed decisions and applying for different schooling options needs to begin early.

Term-by-term guides are available to help educators support families navigate and plan. You can find the Term 1 Transition to School guide [here](#) and the Term 2 Transition to School guide [here](#).



Moving Beyond Quality on the Road to Inclusion

Inclusive Group Times

Late last year we invited educators in Northern Sydney to join us for a new workshop ‘Reimagining Inclusive Group Times’. We interviewed three of the attendees, Fiona, Kylie and Sonali from Birrahlee Preschool, Lane Cove to share their feedback

What drew you to attend the inclusive group times workshop?

We had been reflecting on our group times and wanted to know whether we were on the right track in ensuring each child was participating in a way that was meaningful to them and that they felt included.

What were the key ideas or strategies from the training that you decided to implement in your classroom?

We focused on making group times more inclusive by broadening how we present information to suit a variety of learning styles. The workshop provided some information on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and we now explore content through a range of ways e.g., songs, videos, books, visual supports, and small-group discussions. Small groups are used more intentionally to connect with each other, extend conversations and deepen learning.

How did you adjust your existing routines or planning to create more inclusive group times?

We refined transitions to support children’s regulation. This includes opportunities for large-body movement before seated group times, followed by calming songs or rhythmic activities to help everyone settle as they enter the group.

Have you observed any children who have benefited significantly from the changes you have made?

Yes—children who previously found group times challenging are now more engaged and confident. We have also added alternative seating options such as rocking chairs, carpet squares, wobbly cushions, and a quiet space when needed.

What challenges have you faced when implementing more inclusive group times, and how have you worked together to overcome them?

A key challenge has been balancing diverse needs while keeping group experiences flowing. We have reminded ourselves of the “why” behind group times and that it’s okay to abandon the plan when it’s not working to prioritise connection. We engage in ongoing team reflection and open communication to help us overcome challenges and refine our approach.

How has your understanding of inclusive group times evolved since the SCBP workshop?

We now see the value of inclusive group times for supporting understanding, increasing participation, reducing sensory overload, and building confidence. The training affirmed that inclusion works best when we are proactive, intentional, and flexible.

Brighter Beginnings Connect and Communicate Toolkit

Are you supporting children who have language and communication difficulties at your preschool?

'The Brighter Beginnings Connect & Communicate Toolkit' has been created by the NSW Department of Education and NSW Health to support the development of communication skills for 4-year-old children within early childhood education and care services.

The toolkit is designed to equip early childhood educators with information and resources on 4-year-old communication development to use in everyday practice. The tool kit includes resources educators can adjust to suit your preschool context.

You can find these resources [here](#).

Completing the sections of the reflective workbook can be logged as 12 hours of professional learning. The workbook is available [here](#).

National Best Practice for Early Childhood Intervention Framework now available

The newly released official National Best Practice for Early Childhood Intervention framework is now available for educators, early childhood intervention practitioners and families. Click [here](#) to access.

Understanding best practice in early childhood intervention helps educators to support families to make informed decisions about what early childhood intervention supports they choose for their child. Knowing about best practice also enables educators to collaborate effectively and promote the importance of inclusive practices when allied health professionals visit your service.

The framework includes:

- ▶ The official National Best Practice Guidelines
- ▶ A series of short videos
- ▶ Written resources
- ▶ Best Practice “looks like, and doesn’t look like” guides
- ▶ IA decision-making infographic and guide for families
- ▶ A guide specifically for early childhood educators: [The National Best Practice Framework for Early Childhood Intervention – A guide for early childhood educators | Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing](#)

This framework has been developed by PRECI (Professionals and Researchers in Early Childhood Intervention).

Preschool Inclusion Consultants in Focus

We asked four of our KU SCBP Preschool Inclusion Consultants:

- ▶ What do you find most inspiring about your role as a Preschool Inclusion Consultant?
- ▶ What does inclusion mean to you?



Jennifer Day

*Western Sydney/Sydney/
Northern Sydney*

I am inspired by the incredible educators in our community preschools. Your commitment to inclusion and high expectations for every child make my work so rewarding. I love visiting preschools, building relationships, and supporting reflective practices.

Inclusion to me is recognising that equitable means fair. It involves advocacy and action to find ways for children who need additional access to support and resources to promote their learning and well-being.



Nicole Hyde-Giezekamp

*Illawarra Shoalhaven/
South Eastern Sydney*

This role offers daily opportunities to connect, learn and stretch my professional knowledge. It is a privilege working alongside educators, examining practices and environments, expanding thinking, and optimising inclusion. Celebrating progress together is an absolute joy.

Inclusion means nurturing participation in ways that feel best for all children, creating spaces where they feel truly valued. It may be complex to find the pathways at times but, to me, inclusion is beautiful in its simplicity: it is a sense of belonging.



Carol Nagel

Northern Sydney/Shoalhaven

Sharing space, passion and professional relationships with preschool and SCBP colleagues whilst witnessing and nurturing day-to-day inclusive practices, environments and insights is a genuine privilege of my role.

Inclusion is everything, everywhere, all the time. Inclusion is something we experience, extend to others, do in practice and can intellectualise. It is felt, seen and everyone deserves inclusion.



Donna McKern

Northern Sydney

I am inspired by the heart of the educators I work alongside. I value their knowledge and experiences, and the trust they place in me as we collaborate. Educator resilience and willingness to explore practices create space for inclusion.

For me, inclusion means belonging, being truly seen and valued as you are. It is the experience of acceptance and affirmation, the recognition that each child matters as a valued part of our community. Inclusion is a child's right to belong.

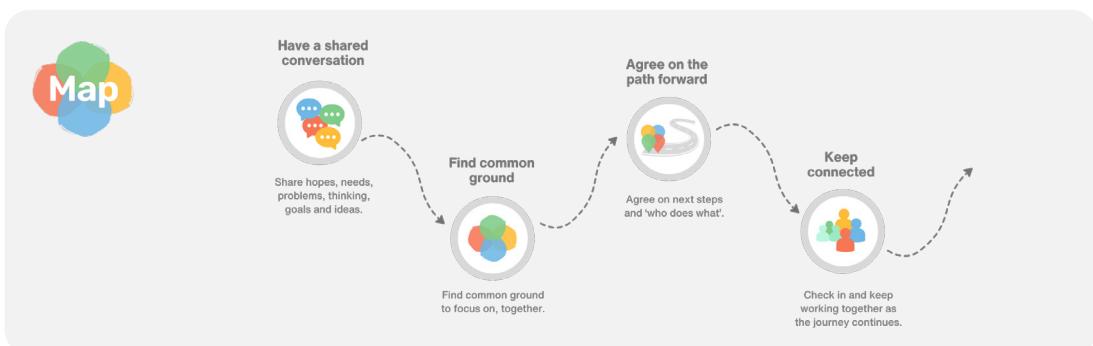
Inclusion Team Agreement

Click [here](#) to download the Inclusion Team Agreement.

Inclusion Team Agreement



Inclusion Together will help you to build an inclusion team that works well together to support children to play, learn, develop and thrive.



In relation to teamwork, we commit to:

- ▶ using the *Inclusion Together* Map to guide our work together;
- ▶ considering each team member's communication preferences;
- ▶ listening to understand the perspectives of other inclusion team members;
- ▶ actively seeking to understand and include the voices of children;
- ▶ making decisions together; and
- ▶ discussing concerns with the whole team as they arise, as part of a formal or informal check in.

In relation to best practice, we commit to:

- ▶ conducting therapy activities that are play-based and fun in children's natural, everyday environments with peers or siblings; and
- ▶ supporting children's learning and participation by planning therapy and activities around the child's interests, preferences, likes and strengths.

In relation to the ECEC service, educators commit to:

- ▶ welcoming families, carers and ECI professionals to the service; and
- ▶ sharing service information, including the service philosophy, policies and regulatory frameworks, that impact on ways of working.

In relation to the ECEC service, families, carers and ECI professionals, commit to:

- ▶ visiting and conducting activities in accordance with the ECEC service philosophy, policies and regulatory frameworks as communicated by the nominated supervisor; and
- ▶ keeping to agreed times for therapy activities as closely as possible.

Name:	Role:	Signature:	Date:

<https://inclusionagencynswact.org.au/about/inclusion-together>