

Inclusion Ready News

Term 3 2023



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From the Manager, KU Sector Capacity Building Program

We hope that term 3 has started smoothly for your team. We are delighted to share the news that the NSW Department of Education have extended KU's contract to deliver the Sector Capacity Building Program from July 2023 to June 2024 across the same eight regions of NSW. This continuity will enable us to work in partnership with you to further enhance inclusive practices in community preschools.

This term we are working with you to establish your 2023-2024 Preschool Profile and Action Plans. This is a great opportunity to build on the strengths and priorities identified over the last 12 months and determine ways you can best utilise the support from your Preschool Inclusion Consultant.

We received lots of valuable feedback about KU's delivery of the program that will help inform the way we continue to support your preschool around inclusion. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the online survey in term 2.

In this issue of 'Inclusion Ready News' we share a Preschool Director's inspiring reflection on the broader benefits for the whole preschool community of embedding inclusive practices across their service. We also talk about play in post-pandemic times. You will also find information about upcoming professional development, conferences and much more.



Emma Pierce
Manager, NSW Preschool Inclusion, 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 Minor Capital Works (MCW) funding applications. Contact your Preschool Inclusion Consultant if you need support with completing these funding applications.

2023 cut-off dates for HLSN & MCW funding applications	Notification of outcome and payment dates
Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 18 August 2023	Quarter 4 - October 2023 (Funding is for October to December)
Submitted by 5:00pm Friday 13 October 2023	Final adjustments* - December 2023 *Only certain types of variations (increase in hours, decrease in hours, extended absence, 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 & Inclusion Program Funding Guidelines at:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/disability-and-inclusion-program/2023-high-learning-support-needs-funding-guidelines#5.5>

Term 3 Professional Learning

KU Sector Capacity Building Program (SCB) professional learning

You will find all our upcoming webinars and workshops listed under 'Upcoming Events' at <https://kudisabilityinclusion.com.au/professional-learning/events>

Our second confirmed webinar for this term is:

- ▶ **An Introduction to Key Word Sign**

Presented by Rachel Knights, Speech Pathologist – Monday 11 September 4:30pm-5.30pm

A range of face-to-face workshops are also being planned in different locations based on regional priorities identified with preschools. Please keep an eye on your email inbox for registration details.

All our webinars and workshops are funded by the NSW Department of Education, making them free to all educators.

Conference Watch

- ▶ **Early Childhood Australia Conference**

4-7 October 2023, Adelaide

<https://www.ecaconference.com.au>

- ▶ **Reimagine Australia National Conference** (formerly known as Early Childhood Intervention Australia)

20-22 November 2023, Brisbane

<https://reimagine2023.world>



Moving beyond quality on the road to inclusion

Melissa Wilson (Director) and Louise Gleeson (Early Childhood Teacher) from Lady Game Community Kindergarten (LGCK) share their experience of embracing the opportunity to progress their inclusion journey.



LGCK has always enjoyed celebrating inclusivity and providing a warm and accepting environment for its community. This year, we met a new child with excitement as we discovered we would have twins begin at our preschool, one of whom has very high learning support needs and uses a wheelchair. The enrolment occurred after the term had started when unexpectedly, two vacancies became available on the same days of the week. It was meant to be!

As a 'pack away' preschool, we are familiar with starting each day with fresh eyes, always reflecting on our environment. However, enrolling a child using a wheelchair for the first time in our 62-year history, who also has a range of high needs, had us questioning how inclusive we really are. We seized the opportunity to focus on our pedagogy and step outside our comfort zone to engage in genuine critical reflection on our inclusive practice. We are continually questioning how we can provide an environment and learning experiences that are inclusive of all children. How can we adapt our obstacle course, our movement games, our creative experiences, construction, the list is endless!

Through this journey, we are not only learning so much about ourselves, we are also developing connections with a range of other professionals, tapping into their knowledge and expertise. We have been invited to attend therapy sessions by a physiotherapist and occupational vision therapist. We have also read orthoptic reports, learnt new vocabulary, and learnt how to tube feed. Our support systems have been invaluable in allowing us to make the adjustments needed to provide an inclusive environment. The KU Sector Capacity Building Program and our KU Preschool Inclusion Consultant have been providing support to navigate applying for Higher Learning Support Needs and Minor Capital Works funding and supported us to advocate for the funds needed to include all children into our preschool. They continue to offer ongoing valuable support, advice and resources. We have engaged in ongoing discussions with the NSW Department of Education to advocate for funds to purchase specialised equipment and make the necessary improvements to the preschool. We are also collaborating with them and the child's family to ensure a positive transition into the school system.

We have navigated barriers to inclusion that we have experienced this year by having open honest discussions with educators, children, families, and external sources. We have a strong team at LGCK who share the common belief that all children have the right to be included and participate in a high-quality early learning environment and we can implement anything that is necessary to achieve this. We have been working together with our families and professionals to identify barriers and develop solutions. We constantly advocate for all children at LGCK and build a sense of belonging for all children.

“The impact on our learning community has been immeasurable, as the children pause and think about how their peers can be included in their play, and conversations. The children have become more aware of those in their environment who have diverse capabilities and may need different requirements to them, therefore building an overwhelming culture of empathy towards each other and creating a sense of belonging for all.”

Enrolling a child with very high learning needs has been a gift. We will be eternally grateful for our new family for entrusting the educators at LGCK to provide an early learning environment for their children. The adjustments we have made to our environment, the connections we have made, our growth as educators and the positive impact on the children and families are now embedded in our preschool and will provide future opportunities for children who have similar capabilities.

Harnessing the power of play in post-pandemic times



The COVID pandemic has changed the world and is a rare example of a shared global experience. As we continue to take steps to ‘return to normal’, it is helpful to remember that, for young children, most of their life has been lived among lockdowns, restrictions, social distancing and isolation from family and friends. This shaped the foundation of their early, most formative years.

With this lens, we can have compassion, empathy and understanding for the many children in our services who have been impacted. Research is beginning to show children having challenges in the areas of social and emotional development, delays in language development and even physical and cognitive development as a result of the pandemic (Mulkey et al., 2023; Centre for Community Child Health, 2022).

As educators, we can use our knowledge of child development and the importance of play to help fill some of the gaps in play skill development that children have experienced. Play is the way that children make sense of their world, and through play and the repetition of play experiences, children learn and develop across all domains of development. Through our relationships with children, engagement in their play, scaffolding language, play and social skills we can support the building of neural pathways in children’s brains.

Signs that children are needing some play support from us might include:

- ▶ Wandering around the environment, seeming aimless and not entering into play
- ▶ Increases in emotional dysregulation during play
- ▶ Disrupting other children’s play
- ▶ Engaging only in solitary play
- ▶ Engaging only in a limited range of play

Responsive learning relationships are strengthened as educators and children learn together and share decisions, respect, and trust. Responsiveness enables educators to respectfully enter children’s play and ongoing projects, stimulate their thinking and enrich their learning.” (EYLF V.2.0, p.21).

How can we support children when they are having difficulty with play?

Here are some tips for intentionally supporting children's play skill development:

- ▶ Always consider the function of the child's play. Sometimes children don't play in the way that we might expect. For example, a child stacking up the cars instead of driving them around. Consider; why might the child be playing this way? We can support children's functional play skills through being a parallel play partner and modelling a range of ways use the cars.
- ▶ When children have communication or language development differences, we can model and extend upon spoken language or gestures and support peers to interpret and respond positively. Remember, communication comes in many forms, not just spoken language.
- ▶ Entering play may be the most challenging aspect for children. Use explicit modelling to scaffold this process.
- ▶ For example, *"Hi Sasha. Could Otto and I come and join in your game?"* If the other child says "yes", we can then ask, *"What part would you like us to do?"* Then support the play and step back as Otto and Sasha become more confident playing and communicating with each other (both children will benefit from our support).
- ▶ If the other child says "no", it is an opportunity to support Otto to deal with disappointment and regulate his feelings. *"Oh, we understand. Sasha wants to play on their own right now. Where else could we go and play?"*
- ▶ Using a visual sequence or visual prompts about what children can do in different play spaces can support them to engage in play independently. For example, photos of different ways to play in the home corner.
- ▶ Support children to build their social play skills by using their interests to create motivating and engaging play spaces. Sensory play can be a positive place to start if we are unsure of children's specific interests. It is also great for building connections in the brain and the senses and is often a space that can be shared by many people, and also used independently.
- ▶ Help children to connect with one another in the play space by describing what is going on, supporting children to share the space and resources and give language to the experiences and feelings that children are showing.
- ▶ Pretend play is considered the highest form of play and is one of the few times that we are activating the whole brain. For some children with additional needs, this type of play can be challenging or confusing.
- ▶ We can support children to begin developing their pretend play skills by starting with simple home life experiences. For example, pretending to drink out of an empty cup or modeling how to represent life through dolls and toys.



How can we support children when they are having difficulty with play?

- ▶ Be playful!
- ▶ Offer support when the need arises – this may be physical support, offering language and communication or adjusting the environment so everyone is included.
- ▶ Be patient and allow some time before ‘jumping in’. Children, particularly children with additional support needs, need time to process what is being said and what is happening.
- ▶ We are most effective when we are not directive, and when we follow the child’s lead. For a child who engages in very solitary play and has less awareness and interest in people around them, this may start with imitating the child’s sounds and actions to build joint attention and awareness of you within their play space.
- ▶ Take on the role of a play partner and be careful not to become the focus of the play.
- ▶ Be mindful of asking questions. Even open-ended questions such as ‘What are you doing?’ might unintentionally draw children out of the play and back into the ‘real world’.
- ▶ Most importantly, have FUN!

If you would like more support or information about this topic, please contact your KU Preschool Inclusion Consultant. You may like to ask about having a team in-service to further explore supporting play for children with additional needs facilitated with your team. Our webinar ***The Power of Play; Scaffolding Play in Post-pandemic Times*** is also now available to view on the KU SCB Inclusion Gateway website.

You might also be interested in ‘Play + Learn Together’ – a play resource for parents and educators developed by Early Start at University of Wollongong in partnership with Playgroup Australia, ECA and funded by the Ian Potter Foundation. It is a free resource underpinned by research with practical examples, age and developmental ranges and links to EYLF Outcomes, Principles and Practices.

<https://www.playandlearntogether.com.au>

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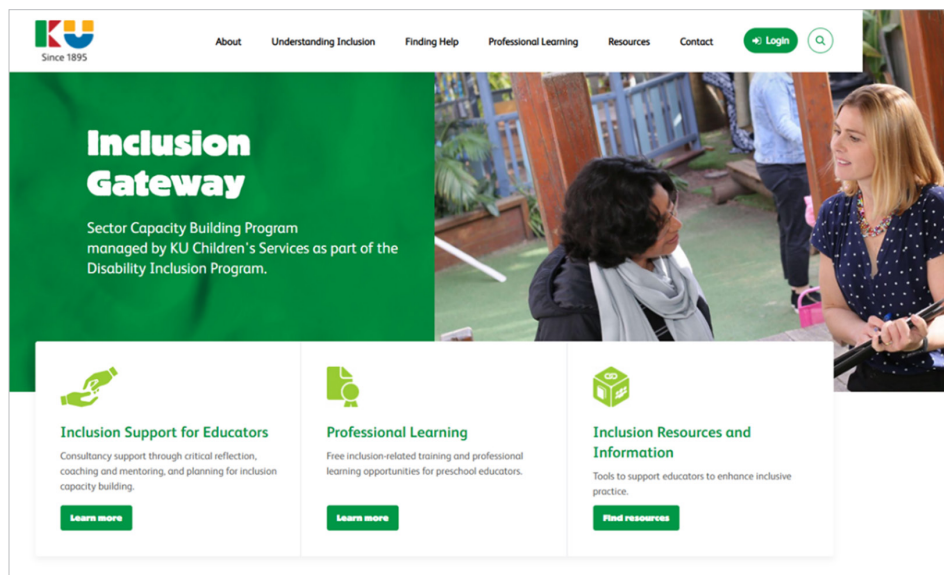
Please let us know of any specific support you may be needing.

The Sector Capacity Building Program is funded by the NSW Government Department of Education as part of the Disability and Inclusion Program.

On the next page:
KU Inclusion Gateway
website login details
and printable poster for
your staff room



KU Inclusion Gateway Website



www.kudisabilityinclusion.com.au

To access 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 support each term from the Sector Capacity Building Program.

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