

Additional service offerings in a kindergarten

– integrating children, families and communities



As communities change, kindergartens must respond accordingly by providing flexible service offerings to meet all family's needs. This resource aims to provide service providers, with practical options for additional early childhood service offerings in kindergartens.

The early childhood education delivery platform was developed over 50 years ago, with service delivery historically dominated by community kindergartens. Today, service delivery includes long day care, child and community hubs, and co-located kindergartens and schools, as well as stand-alone kindergartens which provide a valuable service.

As community needs change, some kindergartens may find it beneficial to increase their reach by providing more flexibility to families through offering additional kindergarten services. This resource aims to provide service providers, particularly Committees of Management, and educational staff, in stand-alone community kindergartens, with practical options to provide additional early childhood service offerings.

Types of additional service offerings

As well as providing valuable support to local families, the expansion of service offerings by kindergartens can assist in improving kindergarten financial performance and sustainability by generating additional income sources. Some additional service offerings may require funding through incremental parent fees, and as such, would only be suitable if there is community demand and willingness to pay for the service. Some examples of programs which kindergarten can offer include:

- **Extended hours or wrap-around care:** This allows children to remain at the kindergarten in an early childhood program before or after the formal kindergarten session, providing parents the flexibility to attend to other commitments. The provision of out of hours care may provide the kindergarten with an opportunity to differentiate its service offering and attract additional enrolments, where capacity exists.

An appropriate session fee should be developed to allow for a modest surplus. The session fee will differ by kindergarten based on the operating costs, demand, and the capacity of local families to pay.

The indicative operating cost for these sessions would be \$40-\$50 per hour for one staff member (employed on a casual basis) including associated resources. At a session fee of \$15-\$20 per child for a two-hour session, the program would need 6 enrolments to cover costs.

- **Breakfast groups:** This is similar in concept, or an extension of, extended hours or wrap-around care. This allows children to attend the kindergarten in an early childhood program in the morning prior to the commencement of a formal kindergarten session whereby they are provided with a nutritious meal to start their day. Breakfast groups can provide a means to alleviate pressure on busy parents in the morning as they prepare for work with the reassurance their child will receive a nutritious meal.

A breakfast group session could operate for two hours prior to the commencement of the kindergarten session (e.g. 7:30am – 9:30am) and would require an approved kitchen and educational staff with food preparation/handling training which may be subject to additional costs compared to extended hours or wrap-around care programs.

Additional service offerings in a kindergarten – integrating children, families and communities

- **Occasional care:** Provides flexible child care for children when parents have other commitments. Service providers may consider occasional care as ‘wrap around’ care to kindergarten sessions and may also extend this care to children below kindergarten age, allowing them the opportunity to be introduced to the kindergarten, as well as their parents the opportunity to meet other parents.

The indicative cost of operating an occasional care session with casual staff including an Activity Group Leader and an Educator would be \$75 per hour. With a session fee of \$35 per child, the program would need approximately 9 children to cover operating costs. Note that additional educators are required under the National Regulations where children are under 36 months of age, with nappy changing facilities also required.

- **Multi-age programs:** If enrolments for either three year old or four year old programs are low, then combining three year old and four year old children into a multi-age group, can allow the kindergarten to accommodate all children, rather than turn families away, as well as make the most efficient use of staff and resources.

Research shows that children attending multi-age groups are provided with the opportunity to develop, learn and create friendships just the same as they would in a program of their own age group. Multi-age programs provide the added benefit of children having access to peer support, more varied learning experiences, including peer-led learning, and a wider and more diverse friendship group.

- **Holiday or vacation programs:** This allows children from the local area to attend a holiday or vacation care program. This is usually operated as an extension of the existing kindergarten program however typically combines children from other local kindergartens onto the one kindergarten site. Kindergarten holiday programs offer activities such as games, craft and experiments, incursions and excursions, and can be run as half-day or full-day sessions. It may be necessary for parents to commit to a specified number of holiday sessions rather than run the program on a casual enrolment basis, to ensure sufficient enrolments exist to make the program financially viable. A holiday/vacation program not only benefits parents but allows children the opportunity to broaden their peer network and benefit from attending additional sessions in a different setting.

It may be preferable to use casual staff for holiday and vacation programs as the use of staff employed in the kindergarten’s regular program may create complications for managing annual leave and term breaks. The indicative cost of the program with an Activity Group Leader and an Educator running the program would be \$110 per hour. At a cost of \$9 per hour (or \$36 for a half-day session of 5 hours duration), approximately 13 children would be needed at each session to make the program viable. A high level of certainty in enrolments is advisable, as holiday and vacation programs have a high level of fixed cost, require a significant commitment on the part of the kindergarten and once committed to for a particular vacation period are difficult to cancel if demand does not materialise.

Determining the parent fee for complementary programs

Complementary programs are generally not funded by the Department of Education and Training. The cost of offering such programs (such as staff costs, and other expenses) are required to be funded entirely by parent fees, as not to place a financial burden on the kindergarten. The cost of employing staff for additional hours can be determined by establishing:

- The basis of employment and gross staff hourly rate, including on-costs, by determining:
 - the qualification level and the applicable rate of pay for each staff member
 - casual loading requirements (usually 25% above base rates to cover entitlements)
 - the employer superannuation guarantee (typically paid at 9.5%)
 - the workers compensation insurance premium (typically paid at 1.8%)
- The number of hours (teaching/contact and non-teaching/non-contact) for which staff will be remunerated for, remembering that casual staff members will be required to be paid for a minimum of two hours per day.

Any additional resources required to support the program (e.g. the cost of food, incursions, excursions, other materials) will need to be costed and included. The parent fee can then be determined by taking staff and additional costs and dividing by the number of children attending the program.

Additional service offerings in a kindergarten – integrating children, families and communities

- **Assisted play groups:** This allows children to attend a play program or early childhood program at the kindergarten with a parent once or twice a week. Such groups are generally offered to families with children who are too young to attend three year old kindergarten. Children are able to explore and interact with other children outside their family in a semi-structured environment while parents are provided an opportunity to meet and develop relationships with other local parents. Assisted play groups may also be favourable to future enrolments at the kindergarten, as parents attending assisted playgroups may be more likely to enrol their child/children at the kindergarten.

Assisted play group sessions are usually led by an Activity Group Leader (AGL) although they may also be led by an Educator. An indicative cost per hour for staffing and resources for a session is approximately \$50 per hour with a session length of two hours, and a session fee of \$9 per child. Based on this scenario, the minimum number of children needed for the session to meet its costs would be 11 children. Note that additional educators are required under the National Regulations where children are under 36 months of age, with nappy changing facilities also required.

- **Parent information sessions:** This allows parents of kindergarten children and the broader community to attend an information session presented by an expert on a topical early education and development issue. Example topics during a session could include speech and language development, nutrition for children, and online family safety. Such offerings enable parents to broaden their understanding of early childhood development, ask questions, learn from the shared experience of other parents, and engage with other parents. The sessions also provide an opportunity for the kindergarten to engage with and promote the service to parents in the broader community, creating awareness of the kindergarten’s philosophy and facilities and encouraging future enrolments.

Holiday/vacation programs

Holiday or vacation programs are generally operated during the school holidays for a full day from 8:30am to 4:30pm, but can also be run on a half-day basis if desired. Activities should vary according to the children’s age and interest, but may include:

- projects: gardening, art & crafts, and cooking
- incursions: animal visits, visits from emergency services, puppet theatre, music and dance, Lego
- excursions: planetarium, museum, zoo and nature parks, circus, discovering the local area
- indoor activities: story-telling, word and number games, song and dance, charades
- outdoor activities: ball games, bouncy castle and outdoor “free play”.

¹ A comprehensive outline of multi- age program is available in the resource titled Multi-age Groups: working with mixed age groups available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/regulation/mixedagegroup.pdf>