Connections with the National Quality Framework

Creating a sense of community
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While the resources are available freely for these purposes, to realise the full potential of KidsMatter Early Childhood, it is recommended that the resources be used with the appropriate training and support under the KidsMatter Initiative.
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Introduction
Supporting the National Quality Agenda

KidsMatter Early Childhood is a continuous-improvement framework that supports early childhood education and care (ECEC) services to promote children’s mental health and wellbeing, by:

- providing professional development and implementation support that informs planning and daily practice
- assisting educators to recognise when children may be at risk of experiencing mental health difficulties
- creating a greater understanding of pathways to accessing professional intervention for children showing early signs of difficulties.

KidsMatter Early Childhood is a significant initiative supporting the goals of the National Quality Framework (NQF). The initiative reflects the understanding that early childhood educators play a key role in children’s development by understanding and addressing the risk factors that exist in a child’s life and the protective factors that promote positive mental health and wellbeing.
Creating a sense of community

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Being mentally healthy is vital for learning and for leading a happy and rewarding life. Mental health and wellbeing should be viewed as equally integral to development as physical health.

Early childhood mental health is seen in the capacity of a young child—within the context of their development, family, environment and culture—to:

- participate in the physical and social environment
- form healthy and secure relationships
- experience, regulate, understand and express emotions
- understand and regulate their behaviour
- interact appropriately with others, including peers
- develop a secure sense of self.

Early childhood mental health and wellbeing is related to healthy physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. Early childhood development and life experiences contribute strongly to a person’s mental health and wellbeing during childhood and later in life.

(ResponsAbility, Social and Emotional Wellbeing: A Guide for Children’s Services Educators)

The National Quality Framework is the result of an agreement between all Australian governments to work together to achieve better educational and developmental outcomes for children using education and care services.

The NQF encompasses Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Standard (NQS). The NQS is designed to continuously improve education and care provision across long day care, family day care, preschool, kindergarten and out-of-school-hours care.

KidsMatter Early Childhood, the NQS and the EYLF are strongly connected. All three have a focus on young children’s learning, development and wellbeing.
How does KidsMatter Early Childhood support the National Quality Framework?

Early childhood education and care services influence many factors known to affect children’s mental health and wellbeing. Implementing KidsMatter Early Childhood helps to achieve key outcomes identified in the EYLF and highlighted as Quality Areas in the NQS.

The KidsMatter Early Childhood Framework is divided into four Components.

- Creating a sense of community
- Developing children’s social and emotional skills
- Working with parents and carers
- Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

The first Component of KidsMatter Early Childhood, the subject of this resource, is **Creating a sense of community**. This Component focuses on ‘building a sense of community’, which promotes feelings of belonging and connectedness for all children, families and staff. *(KidsMatter Early Childhood: An Overview, p. 9).*

These goals align easily with many of the Principles, Practices and Learning Outcomes of the EYLF, in particular:

**Principles (p. 12):**
- secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- partnerships
- respect for diversity
- ongoing learning and reflective practice.

**Practices (p. 14):**
- holistic approaches
- responsiveness to children
- continuity of learning and transitions.

**Learning Outcomes (p. 19):**
- Learning Outcome 1: ‘Children have a strong sense of identity’
- Learning Outcome 2: ‘Children are connected with and contribute to their world’
- Learning Outcome 3: ‘Children have a strong sense of wellbeing’.

The graphic on the left shows how all four of the KidsMatter Early Childhood Components are:

- interrelated
- of equal importance
- embedded within and supported by Component 1: Creating a sense of community.
Creating a sense of community

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‘Doing’ KidsMatter Early Childhood is ‘doing’ the NQS and implementing the EYLF.

The ideas in KidsMatter Early Childhood, the EYLF and the NQS are brought together in this resource, demonstrating how the four Components of KidsMatter come together in practice. In other words, this e-book provides answers to the questions, ‘What does this really look like?’ and ‘What would you expect to see if people are doing this in an ECEC service?’

Examples of everyday practice and connections to further reading are provided to support educators in their work with young children.

This resource has been designed to be flexible. You can use it small ‘bites’ or go into more detail if you have time.

You can use it on your own, although using it with others and discussing it as you go along will probably be more beneficial. Questions and points for discussion are built in to help you apply ideas to your service, and you will no doubt have your own questions that relate to your particular context.

Using this resource

This resource shows the connections between KidsMatter Early Childhood, the NQS and the EYLF. Building on an earlier document, KidsMatter Early Childhood: Connecting with the Early Childhood Education and Care National Quality Framework, it demonstrates that the NQS, EYLF and the KidsMatter Early Childhood Framework do not need to be thought about or implemented separately.
**Community in KidsMatter Early Childhood and the National Quality Standard**

**KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 1: Creating a sense of community** holds one of the keys to quality early childhood education and improved outcomes for children.

As the EYLF reminds us:

- ‘children belong first to a family, a cultural group, a neighborhood and a wider community’ (p. 7)
- ‘as children move into early childhood settings they broaden their experiences as participants in different relationships and communities’ (p. 25).

The NQS also recognises the value and complexity of community:

- **Element 1.1.1:** ‘Curriculum decision-making contributes to each child’s learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators.’
- **Element 6.3.1:** ‘Links with relevant community and support agencies are established and maintained.’
- **Element 6.3.4:** ‘The service builds relationships and engages with their local community.’
- **Standard 7.1:** ‘Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.’

**Reflection**

What does ‘community’ mean to you?

What communities do you belong to?

What links does your service have with the wider community?
What is community?

‘Community’ is a term that is used a lot these days in many different ways. There are many different kinds of groups of people that are described as communities.

When you hear the term you may think first of the community you live in. Alternatively you may think about a group you belong to: a club, a sporting team, a place where you do volunteer work, the place where you worship or your workplace. You might also think of a place within your geographical community—a café, coffee shop or even the greengrocer’s—or a community you connect with online.

The use of the word ‘community’ has two definitions, one being geographical and referring to a group of people who associate within the same environment and the second being psychological, a sense of emotional connection, shared values and interdependence. In early childhood communities, the first is a given, while the second requires positive action.

Community is about relationships

We know relationships matter: they are at the core of quality education and care practices. ECEC services have many opportunities to create relationships and build communities.

Reflection

What do you believe about working with children, families, staff, management and the broader community?

What actions do/can you take to enhance the sense of emotional connection among children, educators and families associated with your service?
Why does a sense of community matter in early childhood services?

An ECEC service shares a stable common purpose: it promotes children’s learning, development and wellbeing; that is, nurturing children’s mental health and learning progress.

ECEC communities work to ensure that a sense of belonging, commitment and loyalty extends to all and they develop this over time. Families and children are welcomed, which leads to feeling ‘at home’ and empowered in the service.

These ideas about ‘community in an early childhood service’ are reflected in the NQS, where everything—philosophy, policies, management, administration, daily operations, the curriculum and the program—revolves around this shared understanding of purpose and what is in the best interests of children.

Quality Area 6: ‘Collaborative partnerships with families and communities’ places emphasis on:

- establishing and maintaining respectful and supportive relationships with families
- collaborating with others to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing
- engaging with the local community.

KidsMatter Early Childhood offers further ideas for building relationships through collaboration and partnership.

Each member of a community has something to offer

In strong ECEC communities all members contribute in some way. All contributions are viewed as complementary, each playing its part in achieving the aims of that community.

One parent might be on the parent committee, one might repair broken toys, one might sell lots of raffle tickets; one educator may bring their passion for gardening, another might share their experiences, another might be the very best at maintaining an orderly working and learning environment.

Their different contributions are based on their own strengths and are noticed, acknowledged and welcomed.

A strong ECEC service community is one where everyone feels they are valued, included, working together, and that they belong.
Diverse communities are strong

All communities, large or small, are made up of people who are diverse in many ways, including their age, cultural and language background, life experience, religious affiliation, sexual preference, values, lifestyle and length of involvement with that particular community. ECEC communities are no different and each person, while committed to the common and agreed purposes, also has a unique perspective on and investment in that community. This includes children and staff, as they bring their own experiences of family, culture and community, with unique, individual strengths and needs.

- **EYLF Principle 4**: ‘Respect for diversity’ encourages ECEC services to recognise commonalities and honour difference as ways to enrich children’s learning, development and wellbeing. When this happens, respect for diversity contributes to each child’s sense of identity and self-worth. In turn, when everyone feels that they can be who they are and be valued for who they are, this contributes to strong mental health. An inclusive service has a positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the children and adults involved.

You may like to use this *Thinking about practice* provocation ‘Reconciliation’, in your work with young children to further understandings in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as one aspect of diversity and respect in Australian society.

**Djalaringi Childcare Centre** in NSW, one of the services involved in the initial pilot program for KidsMatter Early Childhood, discusses the way their service celebrated the many ‘faces of inclusion’.

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**Reflection**

Think about the families in your service—their differences (diversity) and similarities (sameness). How do you include respect for this diversity in your service delivery? What opportunities do you provide for children to ‘learn about similarities and difference and about interdependence and how we can learn to live together’? (EYLF, p. 13)
The child at the centre of their community

The socio-ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) places children at the centre of a community system. Bronfenbrenner highlights the broad social, political, cultural and economic environment that influences a child’s wellbeing and ECEC services operate in this complex context.

An adapted model (The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, p. 43) illustrates the strong network of services and programs that exist to support children’s learning and development.

Families are identified as significant influences throughout childhood. In addition the model indicates a range of other factors that may impact on learning and development.

The socio-ecological model is one way your service might map its existing connections for children and families and identify gaps and areas to reflect on and take further action. The Quality Improvement Plan process may be a useful mechanism to further understand and connect families to your service, to each other and to the broader community.

This model reminds us that the child does not exist alone, or only in the context of his or her family. There is a total ‘ecology’ of interdependent relationships and networks of support that need to operate in harmony to maximise support for the growing child.


(From The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, p. 43)
Working together

Factors that contribute to creating a positive sense of community in early childhood education and care services include:

- a shared understanding about the service community, mental health and wellbeing and the role early childhood education and care services can play
- positive, responsive, respectful relationships between all community members
- a diverse service community that demonstrates everyone feels that they belong, are valued, are included, and are working together.

At one service, community-building occurred around the amalgamation of the preschool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with the larger mainstream primary school. A community garden was initiated to bring the two communities together using a common project to create a sense of belonging:

The Koori preschool this year has become part of the school and, I mean it’s been here for a while, but it’s actually been amalgamated as being a part of [the] school this year. And so what we wanted to do was to have a project and a day that brought the two communities together to work together on a common project. So that’s why we’ve put the veggie garden in. So that’s community-building day. And we did all the work and then we’ve finished up with a sausage sizzle and the children did some artwork that’s actually stuck on the sides of the boxes. It was a great day. It was really good. Now we’re reaping the rewards of the garden.

(Educator, KidsMatter Early Childhood Evaluation, 2012)
Belonging and relationships in KidsMatter Early Childhood and the Early Years Learning Framework

Belonging and the need for connectedness are particularly significant factors for children in early life.

A sense of belonging has been found to help protect children against mental health problems and improve their learning. Children who feel that they belong are happier, more relaxed and have fewer problem behaviours than others. This leads to more motivated and successful learning.

Belonging and connectedness are similar but different. Connectedness relates to the links between a person and other places or people, while belonging refers more to the emotional attachment that people feel about the connection.

Belonging is one of the three interconnected fundamentals (along with Being and Becoming) in the national EYLF’s vision for childhood. Belonging relates to knowing that you are valued, accepted, respected and cared about by others.

Belonging and Connectedness feature in the Target Areas for Component 1 of the KidsMatter Framework.

Reflection

Two families might be connected as both their children attend the same early childhood service. However, one family rushes in and out at arrival and departure times, while the other spends time engaging in long conversations with staff every day.

Discuss this scenario with your staff team using this example or examples in your own place. How can you ensure both families feel a sense of belonging?
Belonging is about relationships

Positive relationships among children, families, staff and other professionals are a feature of the KidsMatter Framework. Children build, experience and see relationships with people as soon as they are born. It is positive relationships that foster their development, mental health and wellbeing.

- The EYLF acknowledges ‘children’s interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities’ (p. 7). It highlights relationships, especially in Learning Outcome 2: ‘Children are connected with and contribute to their world’ (pp. 25-29).

Learning Outcome 2 explains that positive relationships allow children to feel safe and secure and to develop the confidence and trust in others that enables them to engage with learning. Through their experiences of relationships with family and with educators, they gain skills and understanding about how to develop and strengthen an increasing range of relationships.

When children experience positive relationships they learn to use these skills in their own relationships with others. This, too, has a positive effect on their mental health and wellbeing as their friendship is valued and reciprocated.

Participating in an ECEC service gives children many opportunities to develop relationships with other children. These relationships begin in infancy and develop into friendships.
Creating an effective ECEC community

Positive connections between children, families, educators and the broader community do not happen by chance or by osmosis, or just because a group of people come together with a shared purpose.

Significant periods of time are needed to build authentic relationships. It takes time to seek new knowledge and skills, and to practice and reinforce the skills and experiences. It takes effort and commitment for people to connect and feel a sense of belonging to an ECEC service.

All services will have different starting points—that is, some will have established a strong sense of community and will be looking for ways to improve and innovate; others will be well on the way to having a strong sense of community; and some services may have had other priorities and may now be thinking about and working towards creating a strong sense of community for the first time.

Many of your current ECEC practices can already be linked to ‘creating a sense of community’. One of the key ideas in the NQS is the notion of continuous improvement, so it may be timely to review the service’s strengths and identify areas for improvement. The principles of the EYLF (p. 12) and NQS Quality Areas 5 and 6, as well as the tools available on the KidsMatter website, might be a great place to start.
Creating a sense of community

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Connecting families with the ECEC community

Reflection

You may want to review:

- your philosophy—what does it say about community? Do your practices reflect your vision?
- the National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program (NQS PLP) e-Newsletters:
  - e-Newsletter 15: ‘Our philosophy’
  - e-Newsletter 28: ‘Revising the service philosophy’
- the NQS PLP Talking about practice video ‘Revising a service philosophy’
- your policies in relation to enrolment, orientation, family involvement and engagement
- staffing policies and practices, e.g. rostering: do these support relationships easily? (Further reading can be found at NQS PLP e-Newsletter 32: ‘Staffing for quality’)

In addition, NQS PLP e-Newsletter 47: ‘Community engagement’ gives practical case studies that may support your service in their further thinking on this.

E-Newsletter 68: ‘Communicating with families about children’s learning’ is also rich in ideas about welcoming families and building a partnership that supports children’s learning.

Education and care services have the opportunity to build a sense of community from the initial enquiry when families telephone or call in looking for a place.

Services that invest time in all types of conversations with families—face to face, by telephone, notes or email—begin to give families the message that ‘this could be a place my child and my family can belong to’.
Making the most of enrolment

The enrolment process is often a time to connect on a deeper level, rather than simply treating it as an administrative processes such as giving families a form ‘to be filled out’.

When management and educators take the time to talk to families and find out details together, there is a much greater opportunity for families to inform educators of their hopes and dreams for their child and what is important to them. This also gives educators an opportunity to discuss the program, what happens in the service and why things are done the way they are. E-Newsletter 70: ‘Transitions’ will give readers different perspectives to consider when engaging with families. It highlights questions that a child, a family or an educator may bring to the conversation.

These interviews can be casual and informal—outside under a tree, in the playroom or on the edge of the sandpit, where the children can explore the environment with the security of their family close by. Allowing older and younger siblings to attend the enrolment interview also gives families a strong message that the service views their child in the context of their whole family.

Spending this time together at the start can support educators if there comes a time when things are not working well and they need to talk to families about ‘hard things’, such as concerns about the child or questions about centre policy.

Finding out more information about families at the enrolment interview also reveals more ‘conversation starters’, offering opportunities to engage families in ongoing conversations.
Helping new families connect with an established community

The director of a long day care centre wanted to create policies that would help new families connect. She was concerned about how, given the nature of continuous enrolments over the year, the service could integrate new families into the centre where other children and families were already established and clearly ‘a part of the place’.

As a team of educators we had to become conscious of this before we could address it. Initially we needed to be aware of the amount of time we spent with certain families, but not all, and how this could be perceived by others.

We made time in staff meetings to discuss ‘what we know about families’ and found we knew lots about some families and little about others. We discussed specific strategies to address this. We wanted all families and children to know that we are keeping them ‘in mind’, that we have been thinking about them and have been looking forward to seeing them again.

(Director, Cooloon Children’s Centre Inc., 2013).

Building connections between families

Asking families about how they would like to be involved and connected is another way to ensure the ‘best fit’ for each family as they all have different needs for connection and belonging.

Some strategies for connecting with all families might include:

- knowing each family’s name and using it when greeting them (you could create list to be displayed in each playroom, for casual and newer staff)
- asking families how to pronounce names that you might struggle with
- sending home an ‘about me’ sheet for families to provide information of their choice, such as about extended family, rituals and traditions, holidays, family pets, special goals for their child and using this information to draw families into conversations
- including information about staff in newsletters and playroom profiles
- introducing families to each other
- inviting families (and those they are connected to) to share their hobbies, interests and employment
- supporting them to linger at arrival and departure, e.g. by providing a comfy couch.
Social and family events can also be a positive way for some families to connect with each other and create a sense of community.

One service found that keeping attendance statistics from each event was a way to determine which families came to everything and which families came to nothing. Educators decided to send home personalised invitations as well as asking individual families to attend. At each family event, educators made a deliberate effort to spend time with the families who were new or who had very few connections to ensure their participation was inclusive and not further isolating.

Another great starting point is talking with families every day about their child—what happened on the weekend and, on departure, sharing a part of the child’s day and achievements. This does require educators to be ‘tuned in’ to each child. Engaging with the family (and child) at the beginning and end of each day personalises the child’s experience at the service and forms a web of ongoing and supportive connections.

For families, being connected means knowing they can seek support when they need it, that they will be listened to, and that they can work together with educators to help their child learn and develop.

Support may come from talking with staff or from making connections with other families and support agencies. Sometimes families might be feeling that things are going well, but they just want to have a general chat about their child.

On communicating with families each Monday, one service director realised that many families, especially single-parent families, were isolated on Sundays. In consultation with families an informal gathering was proposed for 9.30 am each Sunday morning at a local playground. This group ran itself, with several regular families and others, including staff, attending on a less frequent basis.
Being connected helps keep parents and educators informed about what children are learning and doing at the ECEC service. They are then better able to support each child’s mental health and early learning experiences.

More ideas and readings on collaboration with families:

- KidsMatter’s Connecting with families elearning
- The National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program’s e-Newsletter 35: ‘Collaborative partnerships with families’ and NQS 6: ‘Collaborative partnerships with families and communities’, will provide additional information and expectations for quality education and care
- the NQS PLP’s Talking about practice video ‘Partnerships with families’ may be a great starting point for an educator meeting conversation.

Reflection

What evidence is there that families feel welcomed in your service?

Are there some families that appear less connected than others?

What interferes with families feeling welcomed?

What could you do, or do differently, to build stronger connections between families and the service, and build supportive networks among families?
Different kinds of communities in the ECEC setting

Thinking about children as a community

Groups are a naturally occurring phenomenon. Feeling part of a group, whatever the reason for the connection, provides a sense of belonging. ECEC settings play a significant role in supporting and fostering positive peer relations and the development of social skills, for all young children.

A sense of community develops naturally between some children. For other groups it takes careful planning with active educator intervention and engagement.

Wellington Community Children’s Centre gives examples of their practices that build a sense of belonging and connectedness.

Some practices have the potential to work against children’s feelings of being connected to friends and part of a viable, enjoyable community. For example, in early education and care settings, decisions about grouping children might have been based on arbitrary reasoning, such as their ages. The regulatory framework now offers services flexibility in relation to how children are grouped, based on interests, strengths and need, rather than merely their ages.
One service connects children to a home room with a dedicated primary caregiver, allowing flexibility and choice in where children play and who they play with. Throughout the day, intentional, small group times in familiar places, based on learning abilities and interests, create a sense of security. These groups also create a sense of belonging to a smaller community group within the service; a sense of togetherness.

This sense of belonging within a small and safe micro-environment provides opportunities for children to contribute to their learning by taking up challenges. They are able to explore relationships on a different level, which promotes and enhances their social and emotional wellbeing and learning.

Watch the short Observing practice video ‘Arrival time’ to see the significance of educators’ commitment to children’s wellbeing on arrival at a service.

Another service allows children to settle in either playroom each morning, based on the child’s choice (encouraging agency), as well as running an indoor–outdoor program. This allows children to be where they are more comfortable and allows siblings to be together for large periods of time during the day.

This flexibility supports children to feel more relaxed as they are able to control large ‘chunks’ of their day and engage with their preferred educator and preferred playmates and/or siblings. They can explore more independently and follow their curiosity about the environment in their own time, demonstrating and gaining a sense of control and power over decisions and choices.

This idea of children ‘taking the lead’ and doing some things at their own pace and in their preferred way supports the principle of feeling included; a focus in a Target Area of KidsMatter Early Childhood’s Component 1: Creating a sense of community. ‘Inclusion’ means creating opportunities for children, families and staff to feel that they belong in an inclusive service; one that understands, respects, welcomes, celebrates and provides for individual differences, strengths and needs.
Thinking about staff as a community

Creating a sense of community amongst staff is an essential aspect of a setting that successfully supports young children to grow up socially and emotionally strong.

Management structures can support their service community by employing a staff team that is largely permanent and stable. This gives teams time to build a shared vision and understanding of what KidsMatter Early Childhood is and how it relates to the other key documents (EYLF and NQS), and the interplay between them and the service philosophy and policies. In addition, a degree of staffing consistency gives each staff member time to understand each other’s personal values and beliefs and how these interact with the service values and beliefs.

One service changed the role of a teaching director to that of non-teaching when they realised the significance of the leadership task and the compromises that were being made when the roles were shared.

Reflection

How are educators employed and rostered in your service? Does this enable relationships to be built and maintained?

Providing children with a primary caregiver

Many centre-based early childhood education and care services advocate for and practice a primary caregiving system, especially for the youngest children (but ideally for all children). This means each child has one staff member who takes main—but not exclusive—responsibility for that child’s experience, who keeps the child in mind and who becomes the ‘go-to person’ about that child’s development, needs and learning.

Primary caregiving supports close relationships between children and staff and between staff and parents. When staff stay with a group of children for as long as possible, relationships can build over time. NQS PLP e-Newsletter 61: ‘Supporting babies’ social and emotional wellbeing’ discusses practical variations on the primary caregiver models to support best practice, especially for infants and toddlers.
Supporting educators

Educators need support and time to create and build a sense of community. This includes time for professional conversations, as well as professional development that helps them to understand the significant role they play in determining outcomes for young children and how to build strategies and structures to achieve these. This role has to be embedded into their position descriptions, with additional time given for key educators to engage fully with the broader ECEC community.

- Quality Area 6 expects educators to build collaborative partnerships not only with family but also with community. The Have you thought about...? video about ‘Professional conversations’ may help staff to determine and reflect on how this happens in their service.

Connections outside of the service

Creating an effective ECEC community may involve building connections with other organisations in the ECEC service’s local area. A ‘community of services’ can better support educators to promote children’s mental health and wellbeing.

Relevant organisations may include local community health services, early intervention services, neighbourhood houses, local libraries, other ECEC services and schools and the broader online ECEC community on platforms such as Facebook, forums, blogs, and Twitter.

All these connections to community and collaboration between agencies play a part in supporting families with young children, enhancing their wellbeing, health and parenting. When ECEC services make an active effort to reach out and establish and maintain relationships with their extended community, a strong network develops where support is both provided and received.

When educators and ECEC services are grounded in their local community and more aware of what is available to support them, this information can be shared with families, increasing their knowledge of resources and supports.

One service found that by regularly attending local interagency meetings, they increased their immediate knowledge of the available services and created personal connections with other professionals. It also changed the view of many of the agencies, who began to see ECEC as an integral part of the family support systems operating in the area.

This promotes the vision of children’s services being an integral part of any community, reaching out to families and children in a number of ways. As families juggle their child’s education and care needs and some children attend more than one ECEC service, it is essential to develop strong links between ECEC services to ensure each child’s experience can be as beneficial and ‘seamless’ as possible.

- This is an expectation in Quality Area 6: ‘Collaborative partnerships with family and community’.
Summary: Community and wellbeing

KidsMatter Early Childhood’s Component 1: Creating a sense of community shows how a positive sense of community promotes the mental health and wellbeing of all its members and offers protection against mental health difficulties.

The KidsMatter Early Childhood Framework considers all aspects of care and education, including relationships, the environment, policies, practices, events and children’s development and learning. It involves all members of the early education and care community, including children, educators, directors, families and external community services.

This part of the KidsMatter Early Childhood Framework suggests planning and acting to build relationships and community in a systematic way—and the EYLF and NQS expect nothing different.

Families and children experience a strong sense of community in a service when educators and staff are clear about the nature and importance of a desirable partnership with families. Understanding the need for a strong sense of wellbeing is central to belonging, being and becoming.

Wellbeing includes good physical health, feelings of happiness, satisfaction and successful relationships and social functioning. It influences the way children interact in their environment. A strong sense of wellbeing provides children with confidence and optimism which maximises their learning potential. It encourages the development of children’s innate exploratory drive, their sense of agency and a desire to interact with responsive others.

Wellbeing is correlated with resilience, providing children with the capacity to cope with day-to-day stress and challenges and contributing to persistence and resilience in the long term. The readiness to persevere when faced with unfamiliar and challenging learning situations awakens the potential for success and achievement, even in the face of obstacles.

Children have a strong sense of wellbeing EYLF Learning Outcome 3 (p. 30), this supports children’s mental health now and into the future.

Understanding the need for a strong sense of wellbeing is central to belonging, being and becoming.
Creating, maintaining and strengthening a sense of community requires effort on the part of individuals and groups. The very nature of ECEC services is often one of constant change. When staff understand that community is about relationships, the challenge is to use all the tools and skills we have to ensure that what we provide does meet the needs of the current community—children, families, educators, staff, management and the wider community.

The KidsMatter Early Childhood Guiding Principles and the NQF Guiding Principles work in harmony to support children, not only in the here and now but as citizens of the future.

**NQF Guiding Principles**
- The rights and best interests of of the child are paramount
- Children are successful, competent and capable learners
- Equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the Framework
- Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued
- The role of parents and families is respected and supported
- Best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services

In particular, the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative enables early childhood education and care services to plan and implement evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies. These strategies aim to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children from birth to school age, reduce mental health difficulties among children; and achieve greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties and their families.

**KidsMatter Early Childhood and the National Quality Agenda**

KidsMatter Early Childhood and the National Quality Framework, including the NQS and EYLF, have much in common. They all have relationships at their core and aim to develop children’s social and emotional wellbeing and competence.

All three initiatives promote a strengths-based approach to working with families and children using a framework of continuous improvement.
This resource is the first in the series of e-books connecting KidsMatter Early Childhood, the EYLF and the NQS. Subsequent titles will address the other three Components:

- developing children’s social and emotional skills
- working with parents and carers
- helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

Read more

*KidsMatter Early Childhood: Connecting with the early childhood education and care National Quality Framework*

*KidsMatter Early Childhood resources to support children’s mental health*

*The National Quality Standard*

*Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*

*Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*

*Social and emotional wellbeing: A guide for children’s services educators*