POLICY – The service will promote the principles of sustainability to children and families, actively seek current information on environmental practice, and align day to day activities to reduce impact on our resource and energy reserves.

Rationale

Education for sustainability is an essential element in the early childhood curriculum, and is based on developing an awareness of environmental, economic and social perspectives of sustainability, appropriate to the age of the children.

The goal of education for sustainability is to empower children and adults to think and act in ways which bring about reflection of the real nature of needs and wants, and develop an awareness of how our actions will impact on the potential of future generations.

A sustainable lifestyle promotes intergenerational responsibility and equity ensuring that future generations enjoy an undiminished quality of life. Sustainable practice at the early childhood level is not about a few ad-hoc outdoor experiences with plants and animals, but a holistic approach that integrates all aspects of sustainability into early childhood services.

We aim to give families a proactive and empowered attitude to making a difference for the future, and to encourage a thoughtful and forward looking attitude in all our children.

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Values

Promoting positive attitudes towards the care of the environment is a lifelong learning experience. Only recently has it been acknowledged that for children to develop an awareness of each individual’s responsibility to caring for the planet, every adult must demonstrate and discuss environmental issues as they apply in each of our daily activities.

In practice this may mean:

- All activities are examined for environmental impact, and alternatives considered.
- Educators model equity in all respects.
- Attitudes and behaviours are critically reflected on, by adults and children.

Sustainable Design

Indoor and outdoor playspaces for children should be designed for sustainable living. This may be a challenge when services were established before there were the physical and information resources available but the service can promote sustainable practice by implementing a program of retrofitting existing areas, eg with improved insulation, low energy bulbs etc and also by seeking the most energy efficient method when major changes need to be implemented, eg by using deep eaves to minimise direct sunlight, and putting solar energy panels on the roof.

This should be seen as a community effort, and children should be included in problem solving and suggestions. By discussion and providing age appropriate education children will grow up with a knowledge of how sustainable design measures promote resource conservation and healthier living.

In practice this may mean:

- Building alterations to maximize the use of sunlight, shade and air movement minimize energy consumption for heating and cooling.
- Water tank installation promotes water conservation and exploration of the water cycle.
- Natural outdoor playspaces with indigenous plants that attract native fauna and reflect changing seasons, use less water and provide natural shade for children and buildings.

Continued...
Resource use

Resources are renewable or non-renewable. For the last few hundred years our progress has been made possible by the unsustainable use of non-renewable resources, which are running out, or becoming hard to access.

Sustainable resource use involves maximizing renewable resource use and minimizing non-renewable resource use. Children and educators will be encouraged to rethink, reduce, reuse, and recycle as a useful guide to sustainable resource use, in all activities.

In practice this may mean:

- Waste materials are used for improvised play experiences.
- Food as a play material is generally avoided, and its occasional use eg in playdough is discussed and considered: out of “use by” date materials may be accessed. Children will be encouraged to appreciate food as a precious resource, to be respected.
- Waste management is practiced through paper, plastic or metal recycling and composting, chicken feeding or worm farming.
- Water conservation is a daily practice and supported by the installation of water saving devices and water tanks.

Integration with Frameworks

The EYLF has at its core, a strong relationship with the ideas and intentions that support sustainability. Children are seen to be capable learners and the framework promotes resilience, problem solving and sensitivity to the needs of others and the environment.

Educators should include ideas about the importance of each individual’s contribution to the care of the environment and the promotion of the idea that it can make a difference to everyone’s world.

In practice this may mean:

- Open ended play experiences promoting creativity and problem solving are provided.
- Talking about and exploring alternative solutions to everyday issues is encouraged.
- Ethical dilemmas such as water conservation and waste disposal are openly discussed.

A whole community approach

Children are more likely to take on ideas and principles that appear important to the adults around them and will develop a feeling of agency if they are consulted and included in discussions about issues that affect the life of the community.

It is important to maintain a sense of positivity in children, especially in the light of a prevailing atmosphere of doom and gloom to be found in the media. Seeing community action, eg MASG and being involved in activities like tree planting will help allay fears.

In practice this may mean:

- Parents and staff model and participate in sustainable practices.
- Children’s prior knowledge and expertise is considered a valid and worthwhile contribution, they are viewed as capable and confident learners.
- Children exchange their thoughts and ideas about issues through guided participation, and anxieties and hopes are treated respectfully.
- The community is used as a source of knowledge, skills and values. For example, sustainable issues relating to a beachside or rural community would be enriched by a focus on topics that pertain to these localities and the people who live within them.

Continued...
Connections with the natural world

The natural world is often perceived as something that is external to our everyday lives, something out there. Nature can be a difficult concept for young children to grasp and should be included as a central element in all curriculum planning and not as a separate “subject”.

Developing connections with the natural world involves exploring plants, animals and physical elements with an emphasis on the interrelatedness between humans, plants, animals and the physical elements. Also, a deeper, emotive connection through time to explore and be in a natural space is essential. These explorations are vital to feeling connected with the natural world. If humans feel separated from nature they are less likely to appreciate, respect and therefore, care for the natural world.

Early childhood services that include natural elements encourage a sense of well being, evoke curiosity and generally provide an environment where adults and children are happy to spend time.

In practice this may mean:

- Natural materials are incorporated into play experiences both indoors and outdoors.
- Vegetable, herb or flower gardens and natural ground surfaces such as grass, rocks and tanbark are provided.
- Contact with animals occurs on a regular basis with a focus on knowledge as well as fostering care and respect for all living creatures.
- Human biology is explored with an aim to increase awareness of the links between plants, animals and humans.

Environmental Health

A healthy environment produces healthy people and an awareness of our everyday practices is promoted and discussed with educators, parents and children.

Children are most vulnerable to contaminants and the consequences of environmental hazards may be lifelong. Chemical cleaners, air fresheners, glues and paints along with furnishings and fixtures emit chemical toxins that can be absorbed in many ways.

Both staff and children's health benefit in the short and long term when early childhood service practices are sustainable and non toxic.

In practice this may mean:

- Safe and sustainable cleaning practices and agents are used.
- Non processed ingredients are used where possible and sourced locally whenever possible. Food is prepared daily from simple fresh ingredients and locally made bread is provided.
IMPLEMENTING POLICY

The process of implementing an environmental sustainability policy requires time and consistency. Our service has chosen to incorporate a whole centre approach to change that involves children, staff, families and the community.

We have evaluated all service aspects in relation to sustainable practice. The implementation of the policy will involve ongoing consultation and collaboration with all stakeholders to maintain and improve sustainable values and practices.

Overview of Strategic approach:

- Involve everyone in a consultative and collaborative change process.
- Engage all age groups, to the level of their capability and understanding, with the long term aim of producing a generation of environmentally oriented Australians.
- Implement a holistic and practical approach to sustainability, trialling and reviewing practices and actively seeking new ideas and more sustainable products.
- Review the early childhood educational resources available and prioritise the use of those that support sustainability.
- Visit early childhood services already implementing sustainable practices.
- Participate in early childhood environmental education organizations and other sustainability networks.
- Appoint a sustainability officer from among the educators, and support them to liaise with parents, other services and educators to maintain the impetus to keep sustainability as a fundamental and essential element in the curriculum.
- Advocate and lobby government and non-government organisations at all levels to support early childhood education for sustainability with research, pre-service and in-service training and resources.

Sources: CCC policy
ACECQA National Law and Regulations 2012
ECA information sheets and website
Natural Spaces – Sue Elliott

Reviewed: August 2013

LDC policies & procedures – Provision of Care