
RALEIGH ST COMMUNITY CHILDREN'S CENTRE

Strategic Plan 2022-2025

Overview

‘A home away from home for our children to develop and learn’

Purpose of this document

This plan outlines the key strategic priorities and activities for Raleigh Street Community Children’s Centre (Raleigh Street) over the next three years (to 31 December 2025).

What Raleigh Street stands for

Raleigh Street is a home away from home where our children develop and learn in a supportive, caring, fun and community-based environment.

Raleigh Street has a highly committed and experienced team of educators who are passionate about their careers. They understand the critical role they play in laying the foundations for children who thrive. Through a holistic approach to care and education, children learn in a genuinely supportive and authentic environment through hands-on play and challenging programs that reflect contemporary early childhood theory and research and Australian Government curriculum guidelines, including the Early Years Learning Framework and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

The happiness and wellbeing of children is the guiding focus of management and staff alike. Children develop through play and we nurture and guide their natural curiosity to help them learn in a meaningful and engaging way about the world around them. We encourage children to have an enthusiastic relationship with their food and promote healthy eating habits through our fresh, seasonal and nutritious menu.

Raleigh Street children, from babies to toddlers, through to the children in our highly-regarded kindergarten program, receive the skills and experiences to:

- feel confident about their own sense of identity
- demonstrate care and respect for others and the natural environment
- embrace diversity in all its forms
- show curiosity about the wonders of the world they live in, and
- understand the importance of literacy and numeracy, and to advance from kindergarten well-prepared for school.

Raleigh Street is proud to have been independently assessed by the government as ‘exceeding’ in each of the seven quality areas of the National Quality Framework - an achievement that only 30% of early childhood services across Australia can claim.

The educational team is supported, backed and guided by the centre’s families, through our volunteer Committee of Management (CoM), which is committed to the secure and sustainable operation of this community centre for the benefit of our children.

Raleigh Street is the modern equivalent of ‘The Village’. It provides children and their families with a meaningful and rewarding connection with their community.

This reputation is what keeps families coming to Raleigh Street, and it is what we must work to protect and enhance through careful management over the next three years.

Our operating environment

A small community centre in an increasingly competitive space

Our small size of 37 places each day is a strong drawcard for many families – it is part of what makes us ‘a home away from home’ for the children who attend our centre. However, it also means that operating costs are spread over fewer families and that careful budget management is required to ensure that every dollar is well-spent and that fees are on par with our (often larger) competitors.

A number of large, private childcare facilities have opened in neighbouring areas across Darebin, which is increasing competition for new childcare and kindergarten enrolments. These tend to offer newer facilities and equipment, and longer operating hours without the long closure periods over the summer period.

Local kindergartens struggling with extra capacity, and experimenting with new models

Many kindergartens in the area are struggling to fill all their places and this is leading to increasing competition. As a point of difference, a number of kindergartens have adopted ‘bush kindergarten’, which offers children a day a week within a ‘nature play’ setting and is proving wildly popular with many families.

New Government funding and policy will drive demand for access to early education and care

Although our integrated long-day child care/kindergarten offering gives us a position of relative strength in the local market, some families, particularly those with flexible working arrangements may preference discrete kindergarten programs over the additional child care service. Raleigh Street must ensure that it monitors and responds to the trends in the kindergarten sector, including the roll-out of 3-year old kinder program, whilst also protecting and promoting the quality of its current offering.

The Commonwealth Government will increase the childcare subsidy to 90% for families earning less than \$530,000 per annum in July 2023. In the context where Darebin population statistics indicate there will be more children aged 0-4 in our community over the next few years, this will mean more families will be able to afford long day care, and more will seek it out.

Raleigh Street should ensure it is well-positioned to meet this growing community need.

The challenge of maintaining strong administration and governance

Quality administration is critical to the success of Raleigh Street, in managing its finances and compliance with regulatory frameworks, attracting and retaining quality staff and providing a safe and happy environment for children.

Under our community model, the quality administration is dependent on our ability to form a parent-run CoM each year that can dedicate the time to capably provide the direction and support to the Director and staff that is required.

Where are we now?

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A warm, family feel – very much appreciated by families • High family satisfaction with service • High waiting list • Exceeding NQS • Resilience curriculum • Menu designed by dietician • Committed, professional and stable team of educators • Higher gender-balance on staff than across the sector (15% male compared to just 8% for sector) • High cultural diversity on staff • Reconciliation Action Plan • Good communication with parents • Protected planning time for staff • Skilled, educated committee and family community • Outdoor play spaces featuring natural materials and experiences • Good communication with parents using a digital platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited physical space • Committee is time-poor • Lack of early childhood sector expertise on committee • High committee turnover • Committee has inherent conflict of interest, as parents are both client and employer • Can be difficult to engage parents to help service • Some parents seemingly do not understand that as a community-run service, they need to be more involved in contributing to service operations • Staff fatigue, exacerbated by pandemic and staff shortages • Lack of available casual staff to step-in
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased funding for the roll-out of 3 year old kindergarten • Increased grant opportunities for capital works • 90% subsidy will increase demand for long day care places • High parent skills base could be utilised • Programs like Out & About could create space at the Home Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll-out of 3 year old kindergarten may be a threat given limited physical space • Workforce shortages – can contribute to existing staff burnout, lack of staff continuity can erode quality • Tight financial environment – as an organisation, low pay for staff and families experiencing cost of living pressures • Uncertainty about enrolment numbers

Our Strategic Priorities

Priority: Building Professional Practice

Goals:

1. Maintain Exceeding Rating by Regulator
2. Maintain positive parent feedback in parent surveys regarding quality of education and care
3. Using a distributive leadership model, enable teachers and educators to trial and implement innovative programs which support children's learning and development outcomes and learn from each other
4. Children experience successful transitions through the service

Strategies:

Child-facing

- Qualified, professional and passionate educators and a strong workplace culture of trust, respect and challenge to facilitate professional growth
- Appropriate educational resources and physical space to deliver programs
- Approachable educational service leadership
- Ensure professional practice is informed by critical reflection process and time for this is given priority in staff meetings and for Quality Improvement Planning.
- Innovative programs are resourced and trialled (eg. The Resilience Project; Out and About; tram trips to library, utilising walk-ways, partnerships with MCH or allied health; trial Early Years Toolbox for assessment; given significant decline in proportion of children 'on track' in Thornbury according to AEDC for emotional and communication domains, identify and implement evidence-based programs to address this.) Build on achievements such as RAP and Resilience Project to embed into educational practice
- Embed the planning capacity in XAP

Non-child facing operations

- Committee of Management provides effective leadership in the maintenance of policies and procedures
- Embed strong staff appraisal processes informed by staff feedback
- Maintain good operational processes, business management, cost control and good governance
- Provide funded training to ensure staff are up-to-date with all obligations – eg. First Aid, anaphylaxis, Child Safe Standards
- Ensure processes run smoothly and meet staff needs (eg. Leave, pay, access to technology, access to educational resources)
- Ensure critical reflection process and Quality Improvement Planning is undertaken regularly
- Run annual parent and staff surveys to measure satisfaction and identify strengths and opportunities for improvement

Priority: Staff retention and wellbeing

Goals:

1. Staff surveys show staff are satisfied with their job and experience high work-life satisfaction
2. Staff surveys show staff find their work challenging and embrace opportunities for professional growth
3. Raleigh Street is an 'employer of choice', welcoming staff from diverse backgrounds
4. Raleigh Street employs seeks to employ a higher than sector average proportion of male educators
5. Strong links maintained between COM and staff

Strategies:

- Growing our pool of casual staff – advertising for casual staff, exploring creative options to grow the pool
- Investigate the possibility of employee benefits to attract and retain staff
- Maintain best practice conditions, such as paid planning time, curriculum
- Identify options to streamline curriculum planning, documentation and assessment to reduce administrative work of educators and teachers
- Celebrating and growing staff strengths (gender-balance, cultural diversity) (Promotion of team members at service, beyond, to contribute to thought leadership?)
- Opportunities for all staff to grow professional capacity (funded professional development, support for educators to trial projects)
- Create opportunities for staff to develop as a team through projects or professional learning

Priority: Ensuring organisational sustainability in a changing social and political environment

Goals:

1. Committee is informed of the options available to better meet community needs for an increased number of places are canvassed by mid-2023, including cost/benefit analysis for each option
2. In recognition of increased complexity of Approved Provider role, committee understands the options available to it to ensure robust governance at a manageable level for volunteers be identified by late 2023
3. Committee has ongoing visibility about the amount of volunteer work it undertakes and the sustainability of continuing to do this on a voluntary basis
4. Raleigh St remains an ongoing and viable concern, and is compliant with business reporting and management obligations
5. Raleigh St reflects the high community expectations of the Thornbury community with regard to environmental sustainability

Strategies:

- Work with City of Darebin to identify options to expand number of places offered at Raleigh St
- Review governance options such as joining an Early Years Manager, mergers, Constitutional changes
- Targeted recruitment of committee members to cover skill gaps
- Exploring options within Constitution to recruit non-parents as committee members
- Collect quarterly data from committee members as to hours served
- Maintain robust business and financial management processes and reporting
- Conducting a sustainability audit and implementing actions arising

Priority: Partnerships with families and community

Goals:

- High proportion of parents participate in activities including the running of the service, events and in supporting the educational program
- Parents report a high degree of engagement in annual parent survey
- High level of engagement with parents and the community in investigating future options for RSCCCC with parents regarding service provision

Strategies:

- Engage Parents in social events, welcoming evenings, transition information nights, fund-raising etc.
- Harness expertise and skills of wider-parent community – as committee members, and maybe as project drivers for specific activities
- Ensuring Raleigh Street is inclusive
- Parents participate in the daily program, eg reading, supporting external programs like Out and About, playing an instrument, talking about their work where appropriate
- Engage members of the community in innovative programs eg RAP or Darebin sustainability parks officers etc