

Mandatory – Quality Area 7

PURPOSE

Goulburn Region Preschool Association (GRPSA) is committed to keeping fees affordable for all families. Fees will be set at an amount that balances:

- The capacity of parents to pay
- The provision of a high quality service
- The financial viability of the service

This policy will provide clear guidelines for:

- the setting, payment and collection of fees
- the equitable and non-discriminatory application of fees across the programs provided by Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc..

POLICY STATEMENT

1. VALUES

Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc. is committed to:

- maintaining confidentiality in relation to the financial circumstances of parents/guardians
- advising users of the service about program funding, including government support and fees to be paid by parents/guardians
- providing equitable access for families eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisors, educators and parents/guardians with an enrolled child, or who wish to enrol a child at a Goulburn Region Preschool Association Inc. Service.

3. PROCEDURES

The Approved Provider is responsible for:

- reviewing the current budget to determine fee income requirements
- developing a fee policy that balances the parent's/guardian's capacity to pay, with providing a high-quality program and maintaining service viability
- implementing and reviewing this policy in consultation with the parents/guardians, the Nominated Supervisors and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET's *Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria (where applicable)* (refer to *Sources*)
- ensuring that this policy is based on the principles of the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy* (refer to *Definitions*)(*where applicable*)
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc. Services and removing those barriers wherever possible

- reviewing the number of families experiencing financial hardship and the effectiveness of the procedures for late payment and support offered
- considering options for payment when affordability is an issue for families
- will endeavour to establish a suitable arrangement for the payment of fees by direct debit authority form (appendix 1) particularly in relation to outstanding accounts.
- clearly communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally-sensitive way, and in the family's first language where possible
- providing all parents/guardians with a copy of the document containing fee information for families (refer to Attachment 1)(funded kindergarten programs only)
- providing all parents/guardians with a statement of fees and charges for each child, and ensure that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible at the service (Regulation 171)
- providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement (as attached to enrolment form)
- collecting and receipting all fees
- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documentation regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- ensuring that all accounts not paid by the due date will be deemed outstanding and the fee collection process will be implemented.
- ensuring that if care is ceased due to non-payment of fees, that the service is under no obligation to resume care unless a vacancy exists. monitoring that all long daycare fees are paid in full by the end of each year. If not, care will not be available in the following year if not paid in full, and the vacancy will be offered to the next family on the waiting list.
- the Service will keep families informed of any changes in regulations regarding fee subsidy and have information on services available that may be of assistance to them.
- notifying parents/guardians within 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected (Regulation 172(2))
- ensuring a notice outlining fees charged by the service is displayed prominently in the main entrance to Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc. Services.

All Early Childhood Staff are responsible for:

- assisting the Approved Provider in developing this policy, and ensuring that this policy is based on the principles of the *Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy* (refer to *Definitions*)
- implementing and reviewing this policy, in consultation with parents/guardians, the Approved Provider and staff, and in line with the requirements of DET *Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria* (refer to *Sources*) or the requirements of childcare funding
- considering any issues regarding fees that may be a barrier to families enrolling at Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc. Services and informing the Approved Provider of those issues
- communicating this policy and payment options to families in a culturally sensitive way and in the family's first language where possible
- ensuring that the *Fees Policy* is readily accessible at the service
- providing all parents/guardians with a fee payment agreement (part of the enrolment form)
- collecting all relevant information and maintaining relevant documents regarding those with entitlement to concessions, where applicable

- assisting a family and applying for ACCS Child (CCS services) at risk on their behalf should it be deemed necessary, where applicable
-
- complying with the service's *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* regarding financial and other information received, including in relation to the payment/non-payment of fees
- notifying parents/guardians within 14 days of any proposed changes to the fees charged or the way in which the fees are collected
- ensuring a notice outlining fees charged by the service is displayed prominently in the main entrance to Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc. Services.
- informing the Approved Provider of any complaints or concerns that have been raised regarding fees at the service
- referring parents'/guardians' questions in relation to this policy to the Approved Provider
- assisting the Approved Provider, as required, in sighting supporting documentation for access to the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy.

Parents/guardians are responsible for:

- signing and complying with the Fee Payment Agreement
- notifying the Approved Provider if experiencing difficulties with the payment of fees
- providing the required documentation to enable the service to claim the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for eligible families (refer to Attachment 1 – Fee information for families).
- contacting Servicelink and applying for assistance under the Financial Hardship provision (CCS families)
- Parents/Guardians are liable for all childcare usage charges regardless of CCS eligibility.
- It is the responsibility of families to apply for CCS assistance, please see www.humanservices.gov.au or contact your nearest Family Assistance Office – 136150.
- It is the responsibility of the families to ensure their records with Servicelink are up to date

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Approved Provider will:

- regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness, particularly in relation to affordability, flexibility of payment options and procedures for the collection of fees
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- monitor the number of families/children excluded from the service because of their inability to pay fees
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures (Regulation 172(2)).

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Fee information for funded kindergarten families

Attachment 2: Service based Care Information for families

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc. on 30th July 2012

Reviewed and Approved; 30th June 2017

Reviewed and approved; 11th July 2019

Reviewed: August 2021

REVIEW DATE: AUGUST 2024

ATTACHMENT 1

Fee information for funded kindergarten families

Why fees are necessary:

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides per capita funding as a contribution toward the costs of providing funded kindergarten programs. Services meet the balance of costs through charging fees and fundraising activities.

DET provides a Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (see below) that enables children from eligible families to attend a funded kindergarten program free of charge,

DET also provides funding to assist eligible three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children known to Child Protection, to access kindergarten programs.

Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc. provides a range of support options to parents/guardians experiencing difficulty with payment of fees (see below).

1. How fees are set

As part of the budget development process, Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc Inc sets fees each year for the Kindergarten programs of the service, taking into consideration:

- the financial viability of the service
- the level of government funding provided for the program, including the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy
- the availability of other income sources, such as grants
- the fees charged by similar services in the area
- the capacity of parents/guardians to pay fees
- reasonable expenditure in meeting agreed program quality and standards
- requirements of the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy – Fees Policy (details in the Victorian kindergarten policy, procedures and funding criteria document available at www.education.vic.gov.au/ecprofessionals/kindergarten/)

Fees set for the year are only reviewed in extraordinary circumstances.

2. Other charges

Other charges levied by Goulburn Region Preschool Assoc. Inc. are included on the Statement of Fees and Charges. These include:

- **Late collection charge:**
A late fee of \$15.00 for each 15-minute block is incurred when a child, for any reason, is collected after hours or session. Please refer to the Delivery and Collection of Children policy (available at www.grpsa.com.au or at your service).
- **Overdue Fee:** The board reserves the right to charge a fee on accounts more than 60 days overdue.

3. Statement of fees and charges

A statement of fees and charges will be emailed to families

4. Fundraising

Not all service costs are covered by DET per capita funding and the fees charged. Fundraising is undertaken to meet the balance and/or pay for additional items for the service. While participation in fundraising is voluntary, the support of every family is encouraged. Fundraising activities are also an opportunity for families and communities to come together.

5. Subsidies

5.1 Kindergarten Fee Subsidy

The Kindergarten Fee Subsidy is provided by DET and enables eligible children to attend kindergarten free of charge. Eligibility conditions change from time-to-time – contact the service for further information.

Families who may be eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (funded programs) include those who are:

- Health Care Card holders
- Pensioner Concession Card holders
- Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card holders
- Temporary Protection/Humanitarian Visas 447, 451, 785 or 786
- Asylum seekers on Bridging Visas A–F
- Refugee and Special Humanitarian Visa 200–217
- Resolution of Status (RoS) visa, Class CD, subclass 851
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children
- triplets or quadruplets attending a funded kindergarten program in the same year.

Supporting documentation must be sighted by the service on acceptance of a place or on commencement in the program. Families are eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy for the full term in which their concession is valid. Contact the GRPSA Office for further information.

5.2 Early Start Kindergarten fee subsidy

Three-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children known to Child Protection and children from refugee or asylum seeker background are eligible to attend a funded early childhood program that is planned and delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher free of charge. The service receives funding for children who meet the eligibility criteria. Contact the GRPSA office for further information.

6. Payment of fees

The Board will regularly review payment options and procedures to ensure that they are inclusive and sensitive to families' cultural and financial situations.

Fees will be invoiced to parents/guardians directly and must be paid by the third week of each term. Each invoice will be accompanied by payment instructions.

For children enrolled after the commencement of a term, a pro rata invoice will be issued and must be paid in full within 14 days of the child's commencement at the service. Receipts will be issued on request.

Parents/guardians experiencing difficulty in paying fees are requested to contact the office of GRPSA on 5826 2780 to arrange a suitable alternative payment plan. The *Privacy and Confidentiality Policy* of the service will be complied with at all times in relation to a family's financial/personal circumstances.

7. Unpaid fees

If fees are not paid by the due date, the following steps will be taken.

- An initial reminder letter will be sent to, or phone call made to parents/guardians with a specified payment date; and will include information on a range of support options available for the family.
- Where payment is still not received, families will be invited to establish a payment plan.
- Failure to comply with an agreed payment plan will trigger a letter notifying parents/guardians that the child's place at the service may be withdrawn unless payment is made or the payment plan is entered into within a specified period of time, and that the debt may be referred to a collection agency.
- The Board will continue to offer support and will reserve the right to employ the services of a debt collector.
- If a decision is made to withdraw the child's place at the service, the parents/guardians will be provided with 14 days' notice in writing.

8. Refund of fees

If a family becomes eligible for the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy during a term, a full refund of the applicable term fees will be provided. Fees may still apply for programs offering more than the required minimum hours per week.

In any other case, fees are non-refundable (exceptional circumstances may apply – these are at the discretion of the Board. There will be no refund of fees in the following circumstances:

- a child's short-term illness
- public holidays
- family holiday during operational times
- closure of the service for one or more days when a qualified educator is absent and a qualified reliever is not available
- closure of the service for staff training days
- closure of the service due to extreme and unavoidable circumstances.
- Code Red Day closures

In addition, there will be no refund where a family chooses not to send their child to the program for the maximum number of hours for which they are enrolled.

ATTACHMENT 2

Service Based Care – Long Day Care- Fee information for families

1. ENROLMENT AND FEE PAYMENT AGREEMENT FORMS

All families must complete and sign a HubWorks iPay Setup Request Form prior to commencement.

2. FEES

Current fees are set out in the Fee Schedule available at your service.

Child Care Subsidy (CCS) is not payable on late pick up fees.

Child care fees are charged for permanent days booked, irrespective of whether the child attends the service.

3. LATE PICKUP FEES

A late pick up fee of \$15.00 for each 15-minute block is incurred when a child, for any reason, is collected after hours or session. Please refer to the Delivery and Collection of Children policy (available at www.grpsa.com.au or at your service).

4. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

- Statements of Entitlement will be issued at least fortnightly for childcare, un-funded pre-kinder where CCS is applicable and OSHC. Payment will be due within 14 days of the date of the statement.
- Statements and invoices will be emailed or placed in the family pocket at the service for collection by the parent/guardian.
- All fees not paid by due dates will be deemed outstanding.
- Any charge or fee incurred as a result of insufficient funds being available for iPay direct debit payments will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian.
- Should an iPay direct debit payment be unsuccessful, 1 further payment attempt will be made. If the second payment attempt is unsuccessful, the account will be deemed to be outstanding and the Fee Collection Process – Outstanding Accounts will apply. See Section 7. FEE COLLECTION PROCESS - OUTSTANDING ACCOUNTS.

5. PAYMENT METHODS

IPAY: THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD AND MUST BE ARRANGED PRIOR TO THE CHILD COMMENCING CARE – written authority is required and must be made on the HubWorks iPay Setup Request Form provided with the enrolment pack.

6. HOLIDAY FEE DISCOUNT

Families are eligible to take holidays with a 50% fee reduction for four weeks pro rata per year. i.e If a child is enrolled in care for five days per week, they are eligible to apply the Holiday Fee Discount up to twenty days per year. If a child is enrolled in care two days per week, they are eligible to apply the Holiday Fee Discount to up to eight days per year.

The discount is only available to families if their account is not in arrears.

The discount is only applied if two weeks written notice is given.

The notice period will be waived and the number of weeks increased in line with Government recommendations in the event of a State of Emergency or a local disaster being declared.

Note: There will be no further reduction of the Holiday Fee Discount should the temporary absence be filled by a casual booking.

7. FEE COLLECTION PROCESS - OUTSTANDING ACCOUNTS

7.1) All fees not paid by due dates will be deemed outstanding.

7.2) Parents/guardians with outstanding fees will be contacted by phone, email or in person and requested to bring fees up to date within 14 days.

7.3) If we are unable to make contact, the Overdue Account Letter will be emailed or posted to the person(s) responsible for the payment of fees, requesting that fees be brought up to date within 14 days, or care will be ceased.

7.4) If the fees remain outstanding in 28 days of the date of contact with the parent/guardian, or date of the Overdue Account Letter, a Cease of Care notice will be emailed or posted to the parent/guardian and the child's booking will be ceased.

7.5) Debts that remain outstanding will be referred to a Debt Collection Agency for further action.

7.6) In the event where the outstanding account is referred to a collection agency and/or law firm, the parents/guardians responsible for the account will be liable for all costs which would be incurred as if the debt is collected in full, including legal demand costs.

CCS Funded Permanent bookings

8. ABSENT DAYS

All fees are charged for each day that the child is enrolled, not on actual attendance. Fees are charged when your child is absent due to sickness or other reasons.

Please note your child is entitled to 42 absences per financial year. Entitled absences means the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) will still be applied for these days, any gap will be the responsibility of the family. Once the child has reached 42 absence days, CCS will no longer apply on the days the child is absent from the service and the full fee rate is applied. Please also note the CCS cannot be claimed on the child's first or last day of care if they are absent; if this is the case families are responsible for paying the full fee rate.

9. NON-ATTENDANCE

Non-attendance at the Service without notification will result in your child being removed from the Service roll. You will also be liable for the following two weeks as your notice period.

10. PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Normal fees will be charged for all statutory public holidays excluding Christmas, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

11. ANNUAL CLOSURE

No fees will be charged when the Service is closed for approximately a fortnight over the Christmas period. The dates for the closure are determined annually by Goulburn Regional Preschool Association Inc.

Goulburn Regional Preschool Association Inc. may review and change the closure date if the financial viability of the service is at risk. Parents will be given 28 days' notice of any change.

12. CHILD EXITING THE SERVICE

Parents must give two weeks written notice cancelling childcare.

A final account for childcare fees will be issued upon receiving a two-week written notice of cancelling childcare and must be paid in full prior to the child terminating the service.

Child Care Subsidy is not applicable on the last day of care, and any absence directly prior, if the child is absent. Full fee applies.

13. CASUAL BOOKINGS

Casual booking will be accepted if there are vacancies. Families utilising casual places will be required to use iPay.

Non-payment of fees will result in care not being available.

14. CODE RED DAY CLOSURES

On Code Red Days where a service closes, there will be no refund or discount on fees.