

## What is KidsMatter Early Childhood?

*KidsMatter Early Childhood* is a national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative specifically developed for early childhood services. It involves the people who have a significant influence on young children's lives –families, early childhood professionals along with a range of community and health professionals – in making a positive difference for young children's mental health during this important developmental period.

KidsMatter Early Childhood has been developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, Australian Psychological Society and Early Childhood Australia.

The KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative aims to enable preschool and long day care services to implement evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies that will:

- a. improve the mental health and wellbeing of children from birth to school age;
- b. reduce mental health problems amongst children; and
- c. achieve greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties and their families.

KidsMatter Early Childhood acknowledges the critical role that early childhood services can play in enhancing factors that promote children's mental health and wellbeing. It emphasises a sense of shared community responsibility for children's wellbeing and promotes partnerships with families, early childhood professionals and community and health professionals to improve children's mental health. It recognises that early childhood professionals can and do make a significant difference in the lives of children and seeks to enhance their capacity to foster children's social and emotional learning and development and to recognise early signs of mental health difficulties in children and respond effectively.

## Why an early childhood mental health initiative?

Early childhood mental health is about the social, emotional, and behavioural well-being of young children, including the developing capacity to experience, regulate, and express emotion; form close, secure relationships; and explore and discover the environment and world around them.

Children learn early the skills and abilities for sustaining mental health and wellbeing through their positive interactions and relationships with significant people. Research has demonstrated that mental health problems exist and can be identified in early childhood. In a recent Australian study it was reported that between four percent and fourteen percent of children aged from one and a half to three years had externalising problems (e.g. aggression and other acting out behaviours) or internalising problems (e.g. anxious, withdrawn, depressed) (Bayer et al, 2008). Similar rates have been reported worldwide for infants and preschoolers (Egger & Angold, 2006; Skovgaard et al., 2008).

Given the reported statistics for mental health problems in young children and the rapid rate of brain development in the first five years of life, it is crucial to act early to enable healthy development and intervene before problem behaviours become entrenched. However we know that only one third to one half of children who need professional assistance for mental health issues actually access the mental health system and get the help they need (Starr, Campbell & Herrick, 2002). Providing information to the adults in children's lives about mental health and how to access the help available can increase the early identification of children's difficulties and assist in ensuring assistance and support is provided for children and families who are in need.

Given the increasing proportion of children attending long day care (46% of all 3-4 year olds, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008) and kindergarten services (85% of 4 year olds attended preschool, Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). The KidsMatter Early Childhood framework aims to provide an effective platform for supporting children, families, and services in strengthening children's mental health and wellbeing.

### **How does KidsMatter Early Childhood work?**

KidsMatter Early Childhood uses a risk and protective framework to focus on four areas where early childhood services can strengthen the protective factors for children's mental health and minimise the risk factors. These four components make up the core content of KidsMatter Early Childhood.

- 1. *Creating a sense of community*** within the service which promotes feelings of belonging, connectedness and inclusion for all children and families. This kind of environment within an early childhood service has been shown to have a positive effect on children's mental health.
- 2. *Developing children's social and emotional skills.*** Research shows that the development of social and emotional skills is fundamental to children's mental health, ability to learn, moral development and motivation to achieve. Children who develop social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, resolve conflict and feel positive about themselves and the world around them.
- 3. *Working with parents and carers*** to improve children's mental health and wellbeing. By engaging with parents and carers, early childhood services can share important information about the child's life, experiences, preferences, and activities. In addition, early childhood services are an excellent access point to link parents and carers with appropriate information and education about parenting, child development and children's mental health.
- 4. *Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties.*** Effective support during the early stages of a child's difficulty can mean that mental health issues are resolved before they become worse or entrenched, improving the quality of life for children and their families. Due to the significant contact early childhood services have with children and their families, services are in an effective position to identify problems early, implement strategies to assist the child and support their family to seek additional help.

In applying this framework, early childhood services participating in KidsMatter Early Childhood **will be supported to** implement a range of strategies including:

- Fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion
- Providing young children with experiences to develop their social and emotional skills (as well as cognitive and behavioural skills)
- Increasing family engagement and involvement in the early childhood service
- Enhancing positive relationships with families
- Providing opportunities for families to strengthen their support networks
- Providing families with information and strategies for supporting their child's development
- Identifying children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties and implement strategies within the service to assist these children
- Helping families to access information and services that can assist children experiencing mental health difficulties

### **How does KidsMatter Early Childhood support early childhood services?**

Early childhood services implementing the initiative are provided with:

- a guiding framework for the initiative
- supporting resources that provide detailed information on each component of the initiative and implementation tools, suggested strategies, fact sheets for staff
- a KidsMatter Early Childhood Facilitator to work directly with the service to support implementation
- professional development for staff
- information and resources for families

Implementing KidsMatter Early Childhood requires a coordinated approach from directors, staff, management and families. Services will nominate a leadership team that will be assisted by state and territory-based KidsMatter Early Childhood Facilitators to plan and coordinate implementation of the initiative.

The implementation tools provided support the service to deliver the initiative and enable services to assess their strengths and areas for improvement in each of the four components of KidsMatter Early Childhood.

With the assistance of the provided tools and resources, services are supported to develop their capacity for promoting children's mental health and wellbeing and to respond effectively to the mental health concerns of the children in their care.

## **The KidsMatter Early Childhood Pilot**

KidsMatter Early Childhood will be piloted in 110 preschools and long day care centres across Australia in 2010 and 2011. Centres will be asked to submit an expression of interest in August 2009 to participate in the pilot. For further information and to register your interest in this initiative please contact [enquiries@kidsmatter.edu.au](mailto:enquiries@kidsmatter.edu.au).

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## KidsMatter Early Childhood Facilitator Position Description

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<b>Title of Position:</b>	KidsMatter Early Childhood Facilitator
<b>Term of Appointment:</b>	February 2010 to December 2011
<b>Classification:</b>	Full time position within Victoria
<b>Employment Location:</b>	Docklands Melbourne
<b>Salary:</b>	\$80,256 Full-time (includes superannuation)
<b>Closing Date:</b>	10am AEDST Monday 22 February 2010

This position offers individuals the opportunity to work with a high level of independence and as a member of a dedicated team to provide support to early childhood services involved in the KidsMatter Early Childhood Initiative.

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### Job Specification

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#### 1. Background Information

*KidsMatter Early Childhood* is a national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative specifically developed for early childhood services. KidsMatter Early Childhood has been developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, the Australian Psychological Society and Early Childhood Australia.

The KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative aims to enable preschool and long day care services to implement evidence based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies that will:

- d. improve the mental health and wellbeing of children from birth to school age, and
- e. reduce mental health problems amongst children, and
- f. achieve greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties, and their families.

The successful applicants will be employed by Early Childhood Australia (ECA). ECA works in partnership with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue: the national depression initiative* and the Australian Psychological Society (APS) on the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative.

For more information visit the KidsMatter website [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au)

## 2. Summary of the broad purpose of the position

The successful applicant will work with leadership teams (management, staff and family representatives) within early childhood services to support the implementation of the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative. Facilitators are not expected to be an additional “hands-on” resource within the service.

The state/territory based facilitators will work directly with the national team to provide consistent information to early childhood services in their state/territory.

## 3. Reporting / Working relationships

The successful applicant will:

- report to the ECA National Project Manager, KidsMatter Early Childhood with supervision by the ECA National Project Officer
- represent the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative
- work collaboratively with early childhood service’s leadership teams, staff and families to implement KidsMatter Early Childhood
- work with the KidsMatter Early Childhood evaluators to support the evaluation process
- work with other Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*, Australian Psychological Society (APS) and ECA representatives

## 4. Special Conditions

Out-of-hours work and interstate/country travel will be required.

## 5. Statement of Key Responsibilities / Duties

1. Establish links between the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative and the early childhood sector
2. Facilitate professional learning in pilot services to address components of the initiative and build capacity of sites
3. Facilitate implementation of the initiative in pilot services, including mapping existing practice and resources along with relevant health and community agencies
4. Monitor and support pilot services with the implementation of the 4 key components of the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative
5. Advise and support services to find solutions to problems
6. Promote the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative with relevant stakeholders and the broader community
7. Facilitate linking or clustering of services by encouraging networking between services and establishing and maintaining feedback mechanisms

8. Facilitate evaluation of the initiative, including supporting data collection
9. Link the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative with other initiatives
10. Participate in national meetings as required
11. Participate in training of facilitators and pilot services personnel
12. Engage with the hosting organisation as appropriate to support and facilitate professional conversation and linkages with the broader early childhood community

## 6. Police Check

- All applicants will be required to sign a Statutory Declaration stating that they are not a prohibited person to work with children and complete the necessary Working with Children Checks for the state/territory in which they are located.

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## Key Selection Criteria

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- Knowledge and understanding of the operation and work of preschool and long day care services.
- Demonstrated leadership in working within and across early childhood service development and change.
- Knowledge and experience in the areas of children's mental health and child development.
- Knowledge and experience in implementing mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention.
- High level written and oral communication skills.
- Experience in provision of effective professional development and training for early childhood, health professionals and community members.
- Ability to work independently, and as part of a team.
- Ability to plan and manage time effectively, meet deadlines.
- Computer literacy including experience in using Microsoft Word, Excel and Powerpoint.
- Commitment to social justice including an understanding of diversity and inclusion in the context of early childhood services and their communities.

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## Qualifications

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### Essential

Tertiary qualifications and experience in working with early childhood education and care sector including children's mental health and child development

Tertiary qualifications in psychology or social work including mental health and child development

Preference will be given to applicants with both qualifications but applicants with either qualification will be considered

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**Please Note:**

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- Interviews will be held in Melbourne.
- Applications must be submitted electronically in Word or pdf format to [employment@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:employment@earlychildhood.org.au). Questions about the position can also be sent to this address or contact Judy Kynaston ECA National Project Manager on (02) 6242-1802.
- Applications must be presented in one document including resume with 2 recent referees and responses to the selection criteria and indicating which state/territory you are applying for. The name of the document must include your name and the state/territory for which you are applying. Applications not addressing the selection criteria will not be considered.
- Closing date for application is 10am AEDST Monday 22 February 2010.