

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Kindergarten Participation Update

Insights and resources for councils supporting CALD children and their families to engage in kindergarten.

October 2025

In this edition

Welcome to the latest edition of the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Kindergarten Participation Project Update.

This update is designed to support and inspire councils, communities and services to support CALD children and families to access Victoria's world class early childhood education and care system.

In this edition, we cover:

- **updates on the CALD Outreach Initiative** - latest news and insights
- **items of interest** - significant sector updates related to CALD children & families
- **resources** - the latest resources available to support CALD children to participate in kinder
- **CALD Outreach Initiative good practices and case study collection**- learn about how councils are supporting CALD kindergarten participation with practical insights.

Ghulam 'G' Hussain
MAV's CALD Outreach Policy Adviser

Meet MAV CALD Kindergarten Participation Team

The CALD Outreach kindergarten participation team includes Ellie (Program Lead), Carolina (Project Officer), and Ghulam (G) (Policy Adviser). We support councils and CALD Outreach Officers across Victoria to strengthen engagement with CALD families and promote equitable access to kindergarten for every child. Together, we can strengthen connections and support every child's start in kindergarten. Contact the MAV CALD kinder participation team at caldkinderparticipation@mav.asn.au



Ghulam Hussain (G)



Ellie Packham



Carolina del Hierro

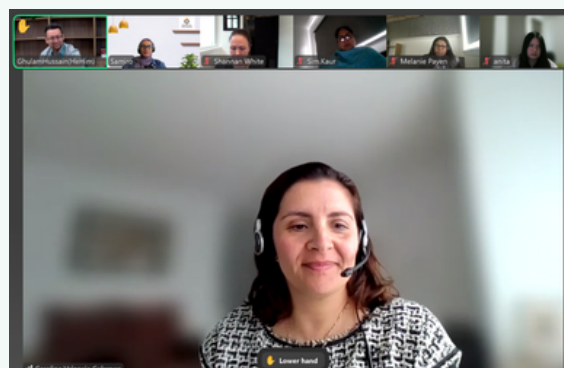
Professional Practice Support: Cross-Cultural Responsiveness Training

Online Session:

In September, MAV introduced Cross-Cultural Responsiveness Training for CALD Outreach Officers to build on their existing strengths in engaging with families from diverse cultural backgrounds. The training focuses on building awareness of cultural values, communication styles, and systemic barriers, equipping workers with practical tools to foster inclusive and respectful interactions in their community engagement efforts.

This work is funded by the Department of Education and will include professional learning and reflective practice to support CALD Outreach Workers in their work with children and families. The supports will include in-person and online events from September 2025-November 2026

The Cross-Cultural Responsiveness Training has been delivered by the Brotherhood of St Laurence.



In-person Learning Circle

October's in-person learning circle, hosted at the Department of Education, brought together CALD Outreach Officers for a day filled with learning, reflection and collaboration. The learning circle offered meaningful insight and hands on strategies to support CALD families engage with kindergarten and other Early Years Services. It was wonderful to see the enthusiasm and shared commitment among everyone in the room.



CALD Kindergarten Participation - Highlights

CALD Outreach Officers at Ethnolink Summit

CALD Outreach Officers attended the Ethnolink Summit in September, a valuable opportunity to connect, share insights, and explore best practices in language services and cultural inclusion. This summit is a chance to strengthen our collective impact and bring back fresh ideas to support CALD families in accessing early childhood education and community services.



Strengthening Collaboration with CALD Outreach Officers in the West

G, CALD Outreach Policy Adviser at MAV, visited CALD Outreach Officers from across Melbourne West, hosted by Hobsons Bay City Council. The visit provided a valuable opportunity to participate in meaningful discussions, gain deeper insights into the barriers faced by culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and better understand the important work Outreach Officers are doing to support families in Melbourne's West.



MAV welcomes new CALD Outreach Officers

MAV conducted one-on-one meetings with CALD Outreach Officers Carla Densley from Moorabool Shire Council, Sim Kaur from Mitchell Shire Council, and Maisa Idris from Darebin City Council, who have recently joined the initiative. These sessions provided tailored support and resources to assist them in starting their work with families in the community and supporting greater engagement of CALD families in kindergarten. **If your council wants to know more about supporting CALD families' access to kindergarten you can reach out to MAV via caldkinderparticipation@maav.asn.au.**

Steppingstone to kinder

In October, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (CFECFW) delivered a series of sessions for professionals from various sectors, focusing on Early Years services available across Victoria.

CALD Outreach Officers Vicky Petinarias, Catherine Foreman and Melanie Payen from the City of Greater Dandenong, City of Greater Geelong and Mildura Rural City Council, respectively, presented their work in the CALD outreach space, highlighting successful strategies to support CALD families' engagement in early childhood education.



Guide on using MAV Teams Sites

Are you a member of an MAV Microsoft Teams Site? The MAV Early Years team has put together a short [video](#) "[Getting started: MAV Early Years Teams Sites](#)" to walk you through how our different Teams sites work - including what each one's for and some handy tips to get the most out of them. Please ensure you watch the video and share it amongst your team.

Getting started:
MAV Early Years
Teams Sites



Updates from the Department of Education

New resources to help services connect with Early Childhood Language Services

The Department of Education has developed new resources to help kindergarten services access the free interpreting and translation service and register with the service provider All Graduates Interpreting and Translating. The resources are designed to help services connect with interpreters and support families to participate in conversations and important decisions about their child's wellbeing, learning and development.

All funded kindergarten services in Victoria can access free Early Childhood Language Services. Kindergartens can request an on-site, telephone or video interpreter to help communicate with parents or carers who speak a language other than English or use Auslan. Kindergarten services can also request translations of written information, into languages preferred by parents or carers.

Access to the resource pack and what's included

The resource pack was sent to kindergarten services through Australia Post in September 2025. The pack includes:

- a welcome sign to display at your service and guidance on creating culturally safe and inclusive learning spaces
- information on how to register and create a user account to use the free interpreting and translation services
- a 'speak with us in your language' poster and card inviting families to identify their preferred language
- a quick reference guide for how to request an interpreter
- a guide to working with an interpreter in early childhood settings
- information on fka Children's Services eLearning series to support communication with families about enrolment, orientation and ongoing participation.

There is high demand for interpreters in education and health services across Victoria. When booking an interpreter, please be flexible as an interpreter may not always be available right away.

To enquire about booking an interpreter, contact All Graduates: de.enquiries@allgraduates.com.au or the department's Early Childhood Language Services team: early.years.cald.programs@education.vic.gov.au



When They Speak, and I Don't Understand

The Importance of using an Interpreter - reflection of a refugee-background Mother.

When I moved to Australia from Africa, it felt like the whole world paused. Everything I knew disappeared. We had to start again from nothing. Everything was unfamiliar, the streets, the people, the places. It all looked like stars to me: distant, bright, beautiful yet unreachable.

People spoke English so fast, too fast and I was frozen, not knowing how to respond. I didn't even have the words to say "I don't understand you"; so, I smiled. At the doctor, I smiled. At the dentist, I smiled. At my child's kindergarten, I smiled. Even when I didn't understand a single word they said. I smiled and said yes, even when inside, I was full of fear and confusion.

But after I walked away, I was left wondering, should I have smiled? Was I supposed to say no? Did I just agree to something I don't understand? My head would spin with questions I couldn't answer. It made me feel small, lost and that I didn't belong.

I felt so alone. There were no neighbours to talk to, no family for support, no friends who could listen to me. I had feelings, so many but no way to express them in English. I carried them inside, quietly breaking.

One day, after dropping off my child, the teacher said something to me. Her face was serious. My heart started racing. Is my child sick? Did something happen? But all I could do was smile. I didn't have the words to ask what she meant. I walked home with a heavy heart, not knowing if I should be worried, or if everything was okay.

I carry this loneliness. It doesn't go away. But I find comfort in one thing: we are safe here in Australia. That means something. That means everything.

Learning English is hard. It's taking me so long. I was able to learn another language in three years in Africa, why not English. Why is it taking me so long? I blame myself. I feel angry, frustrated, and tired.

But still, I keep going. I still try. Because even though I feel alone, even though I can't always find the words, I have hope.

This piece has been generously shared by Mildura Rural City Council.



CALD Outreach Initiative Case Study and Best Practice Collection

October 2025

Get inspired by these examples of innovative practice from Victorian councils.

CALD Outreach Initiative - Good Practice Examples

Community Expo - City of Melbourne

The City of Melbourne recently hosted a vibrant Community Expo at the North Melbourne Community Centre, bringing together local residents, organisations, and businesses for an afternoon of connection and celebration. The event showcased a wide range of council services, including Family Services and Libraries, alongside the participation of external organisations such as the North Melbourne Public Housing Residents Association, The Orange Door, and the Multicultural Women's Group, among many others. Neighbouring councils also attended to support residents impacted by the planned demolition of a nearby commission housing tower and their upcoming relocation.

Two local CALD Outreach Officers were present, Samira from Moonee Valley City Council and Emmanuelle from City of Melbourne, offering support and helping attendees engage with local initiatives, connect with families and community organisations, and build stronger networks to better support their respective CALD communities



Kindergarten pop-up information session- Merri-bek City Council

Madeeha Khalil and Tania Sangiorgio, the CALD Outreach Officers at Merri-bek, hosted an information session in the Brunswick area for families living in public housing, aiming to support their understanding of kindergarten and the transition to school. The session focused on building trust and connection between families and the local council, particularly for those with limited knowledge of the local government area and available services. A welcoming environment was created with children's activities such as puzzles, art and craft, baby toys, and building blocks. Five families attended, engaging in informal conversations with staff and learning more about early childhood support in their community. As a result of the session, families were also connected to the local supported playgroup, joined the council-coordinated WhatsApp group for CALD families, and had more knowledge on the supports available. Information about school transition and supports available was also shared.



Sharing Kinder Information with CALD Families - Ararat Rural City Council

Anita San Ba, the CALD Outreach Officer at Ararat Rural City Council, attended Supported Playgroup sessions to connect with families from CALD backgrounds. These sessions provide a welcoming space for children and families to play, learn, and build social connections. This is especially valuable for families who are new to the Ararat community.

While children participate in activities, Anita supported families by sharing helpful information and resources which includes support with kindergarten and pre-prep options, as well as information about local services such as connecting to local services, new playgroups, multicultural events, childcare, and school holiday programs.

Hunny, the therapy dog, also joins the playgroup. She's very popular with the children and adds to the warm, inclusive atmosphere. In addition, Anita utilises the local library to encourage families to access the free educational and recreational resources available for their children.



CALD Early Years Outreach Program in the Alpine Shire

The Alpine Shire Council were successful in the CALD Outreach EOI process held in 2024, and the council began delivering the program in February 2025. A highlight of the activities this term included Shannan White, the CALD Outreach Officer, attending the Supported Playgroups in each of the main towns: Myrtleford, Bright and Mount Beauty, to build connections with families and raise awareness about the CALD Outreach Program and the upcoming kindergarten enrolments.

From these sessions, 10 individual appointments with families were booked. During these appointments interpreters were used to provide information about the local kindergarten programs and complete enrolment forms. Shannan also assisted these families to gather any documents required for enrolment such as immunisations statements. Support was also provided to the families to complete the applications for Child Care Subsidies and referrals completed to support services such as Maternal and Child Health, local GP's and Jo-Ross Jackson Hearing Centre.

Family Fun Day at Wyndham City Council

The event was designed to support and celebrate refugee families within the local community. This gathering brought together community and service providers, creating an inclusive space where families could access vital information about support services available to them.

The event served a dual purpose: while children enjoyed a joyful day filled with games, entertainment, and creative activities; parents and caregivers were able to connect with services focused on early childhood development, health, and education. Beyond the fun and festivities, the Family Fun Days fostered meaningful connections between refugee communities and local organisations, strengthening networks of care and collaboration.

The CALD Outreach Officer Navpreet Kochhar at Wyndham City Council had the opportunity to talk with parents about the kindergarten opportunities, as well as liaise with other service providers to make them aware of the CALD Outreach program.



CALD Outreach Initiative Case Studies

Supporting successful registration and enrolment of CALD children starting in three and four-year-old kindergarten



Mildura Rural City Council - Case Study

Mildura Rural City Council is a regional city located in north-west Victoria with a growing population of multicultural communities as it was declared a Refugee Welcome Zone in 2002 (Mildura Rural City Council, 2025). Mildura has been a place for multicultural communities for many years with more than 80 different nationalities.

- The population of Mildura based on the 2021 Census was 56,972, with a median age of 40 years.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 4.5% of the population, well above the rural Victorian average (ERAP, 2023).
- About 14% of residents were born overseas; around 12-14% speak a language other than English at home (Census, 2021).
- Almost every week Mildura welcomes refugees from Africa, Afghanistan, Burma and the Middle East (AMES, 2023)
- About 13.7% of households use a non-English language at home; top languages include Mandarin, Italian, Turkish, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Arabic, Greek, Samoan, Croatian, Persian, and Dari (Census, 2021).
- There are approximately 27 Early Childhood Education and Care Centers.

Objective

Supporting a family to enroll their child to kindergarten in Mildura Rural City Council. The family was facing family violence and the child was not attending kindergarten.

Challenges

- Mother experiencing stress from perpetrator and not feeling safe dropping child at kindergarten resulting in child not attending the kinder sessions.
- Child having delays in development that were concerning.
- Mental health concerns for mother and child both including PTSD, stress, isolation, and anxiety as a result of family violence.

Case Study - Mildura Rural City Council



Actions

The CALD outreach worker engaged with the mother, and the child's enrolment was transferred to a different kindergarten location, allowing the child to begin attending kindergarten.

Upon starting, the kindergarten teacher expressed her concerns about the child's development. The child was referred to the Early Help program by the Outreach Worker. The child, however, did not qualify for NDIS support due to visa status.

An early help program was implemented, which focused on providing targeted support to the child and the mother, helping address various challenges, including mental health issues, family integration, and child development.

The mother expressed concern about the child's readiness to start school, particularly regarding toilet training. As a result, a second year of 4-year-old kindergarten was applied and approved, allowing the child to attend for an additional year and continue receiving the necessary support.

Results



- The child is attending the kinder session regularly
- The child is now receiving targeted support through the initiative, which includes therapies and assistance
- The early help program provided a range of services including:
 - As the child was not eligible for NDIS due to their visa status, the family was connected with Early Childhood Intervention Services Continuity of Support (ECIS CoS) program.
 - Speech therapy and Occupational Therapy for the child
 - Weekly shopping support
 - Mental health assistance for the mother
- The family is now preparing to reintegrate into the community. The services and support have built their resilience, and the family is better equipped to move forward despite past challenges.

In conclusion, this holistic approach in supporting the family is helping them gradually move towards a healthier and more stable future.

We want to hear from you - have you got an example of work (big or small) to share?

Contact Ghulam Hussain, MAV CALD Outreach Policy Adviser at ghussain@mav.asn.au to share your case study.