



Challenging behaviours: Free help is available

Did you know that your Inclusion Professional can help you to support children exhibiting complex behaviors? Read on to discover how Wendy Blakis, one of our talented team members, brought back a sense of calm at Cire Occasional Care Service.

The background

Located in Melbourne's outer east, Cire Occasional Care Service has children from 12 diverse cultural backgrounds as well as many children who have additional and complex support needs, such as trauma backgrounds, autism spectrum disorder, profound hearing loss and speech and language delays.

The challenge

Run as a multi-aged care environment for children 0–5 years, nine different session times saw children transition in and out of the service at varying times of the day.

Children became frustrated when they were unable to effectively express their needs and wants, make choices, participate in routines, transition between program experiences, and understand what was happening or expected of them.

Their behaviours communicated exasperation and heightened anxiety through physical actions such as pushing and grabbing others, snatching items or toys, having meltdowns, being oppositional or withdrawing.

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Using a visual routine about the day supports children's needs and expectations

Educators were using many different strategies and types of communication tools, sourced from various health professionals and families, to support children's belonging and relationships in the room.

However, the frequency and intensity of the presenting behaviours combined with many 'voices' meant that educators were struggling with consistent implementation.

Educators' wellbeing was affected. Their anxiety was heightened, they were exhausted, feeling depleted and unequipped to manage these behaviours effectively which, in turn, impacted their ability to critically reflect on their pedagogical practices and provide a safe and enjoyable care environment for all children.

The process

Management at Cire wanted to support educators, children and families by accessing help through the Victorian Inclusion Agency. When Wendy began working with this service, support through Immediate Time Limited funding had been requested.

After addressing this initial need, Wendy supported the Educational Leader to begin developing a Strategic Inclusion Plan (SIP). Discussions between Wendy, the Educational Leader and management helped identify that educators were receiving strategies and information from multiple professionals, were feeling pressure from families to implement those strategies and were using lots of different approaches inconsistently.

The next step was to support the team to explore the drivers underpinning children's behaviours and identify the strategies that would address the multi-aged needs of the children, multiple entry times and the diverse needs of the group. An updated SIP drew together pedagogical elements, such as using the same visual cards for the whole group, using wording and gestures, waiting and giving a child time to offer a response, communication with families and professionals to support the delivery of a consistent approach between home and care, and having clear expectations for the environment. It was then possible to take positive steps, such as naming and intentionally teaching about emotions, within a united team environment.

The project

Wendy suggested the service access Innovative Solutions funding to develop a project that would build the team's capacity to use visual communication systems. She posed questions to support the service to work out how this project could be structured to maximise learning and minimise the impact on staffing ratios (a valid service concern) in the care environment.

Wendy was able to tap into her wide-ranging professional network and share a list of several agencies that were equipped to deliver the project. In discussing support needed for the coming year, Wendy was also able to prompt engagement with state-funded Department of Education and Training Victoria systems such as Early Start Kindergarten (ESK), Access to Early Learning and the Kindergarten Inclusion Support Subsidy.

This project has now been approved and will include intense coaching and mentoring in the room for four weeks. It aims to support educators to apply new skills and embed visual communication systems into their pedagogical practice throughout the day.

The results

- ✓ A calm, inclusive care environment where every child can meaningfully participate.
- ✓ Educators are supported by SIP planning and Wendy will continue to work with educators to review and develop actions.

- ✓ Information has been provided to families and support services working with children. All stakeholders can feed into and continue the cycle of planning to support children.
- ✓ The approval of two Immediate/Time Limited Support and one Inclusion Development Fund (IDF) support case applications.
- ✓ Children attached to the IDF case have now progressed into the service's standalone kindergarten program. Strategies have been shared in this new environment to promote consistency and holistic planning.
- ✓ The Innovative Solutions case has recently been approved and plans are underway to commence implementation.
- ✓ Despite there being several staff changes in the care environment, the SIP continues to ensure that strategies are consistent and effective, and that all children experience belonging.



Get in touch with our experienced team on **1800 177 017** to access free inclusion support for your education and care service.

