

The first years of life are crucial to lifelong learning, wellbeing and success – we are making Victoria the Education State by strengthening early childhood services for children and families.

The Preschool Field Officer (PSFO) program contributes to the provision of a quality kindergarten program that is able to meet the diverse needs of all children.

What is the PSFO program?

The PSFO program is designed to provide support and professional services to Victorian government funded kindergartens to build their capacity to provide for the access and participation of children with additional needs in inclusive kindergarten programs. The PSFO program helps educators to build their confidence, knowledge and skills to provide an inclusive program that is responsive to the needs of all children.

Who is eligible for the PSFO service?

All Victorian state funded kindergarten services are eligible to receive PSFO services.

Who is the target group for the PSFO service?

Children with additional needs attending a government funded kindergarten program are the target group for PSFOs.

The target group is also inclusive of children in receipt of Early Start Kindergarten funding who are attending a three-year-old kindergarten program delivered by a degree qualified early childhood educator.

Who are Children with Additional Needs?

The PSFO program defines children with additional needs as children in a funded kindergarten program presenting with developmental concerns. Developmental concerns may be associated with any area of children's development, from language delays or challenging behaviours through to children with multiple disabilities. Children must be attending or about to commence a funded kindergarten program for the kindergarten to receive PSFO support.

If a child's development is already supported by an early childhood intervention service, it is expected that the kindergarten educator will seek inclusion support from this provider, not the PSFO.

Is there a cost for the PSFO service?

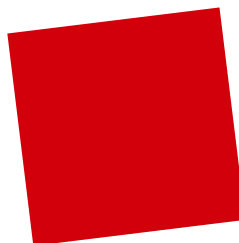
There is no cost to the kindergarten program or families for the PSFO service and it is accessible within the universal service system.

Who provides the program?

The Department of Education and Training funds community service organisations and local councils to provide PSFO services across the state. The service utilises an outreach model, enabling the PSFO to provide services within the kindergarten program and environment.

What are the qualifications of a PSFO?

As the role of the PSFO is to build the capacity of kindergarten educators, a PSFO should be a degree qualified early childhood educator with experience in planning and delivering high quality inclusive kindergarten programs.



Do PSFOs work with families?

PSFOs work within the context of the kindergarten program. The PSFO does not directly deliver intervention to a child within the kindergarten setting, but acts as a consultant and coach to the early childhood educator.

This approach may involve direct contact with the child and family in the kindergarten setting, however, this work is done in collaboration with and through the kindergarten educator in a manner that respects the educator's ongoing relationship with the child and family, as opposed to the short term nature of the PSFO engagement with the child and family.

With parent/carer consent, the PSFO can directly observe a child in the kindergarten environment and contribute to the educator's assessment of the child's capabilities as well as their learning and development needs. This information assists educators and families to make informed decisions regarding referral pathways for specialised assessment or support services. PSFOs also assist the educator to identify and link families to a range of supports available and assist the educator's program planning for the child in the kindergarten.

Where a kindergarten seeks the PSFO service in relation to a child, the early childhood educator is required to obtain informed consent from parents/guardians/carers for PSFO involvement with their child, prior to requesting PSFO assistance.

Can parents contact the PSFO program?

Parents of children in funded kindergarten programs who have concerns regarding their child's development are encouraged to discuss these with their child's kindergarten educator in the first instance. Where a parent directly contacts the PSFO program, the PSFO will liaise with the relevant kindergarten educator to progress the referral.

What does capacity building of early childhood educators mean?

The PSFO capacity building approach recognises and respects the expertise and ongoing role of the early childhood educator in supporting children's learning and development by supporting kindergarten educators to:

- gain the knowledge and skills to confidently implement practices and provide programs that are responsive to the individual abilities, interests and needs of children with additional needs in an inclusive kindergarten environment
- see themselves as having both the responsibility and capability to plan for all children in the

kindergarten program and that it is not only experts with specialist skills who can provide support for the learning and development of children with additional needs

- respond to parents' concerns regarding their child's development.

PSFOs provide a range of supports including: information, resources, program strategies, contributing to the educator's identification of a child's additional needs, coaching of the educator, modelling specific strategies and identification of referral pathways.

What is the difference between consultancy offered through the PSFO program and KIS specialist consultancy?

The PSFO service is available to any funded kindergarten program to support the inclusion of children with additional needs.

KIS specialist consultancy is a component of the Kindergarten Inclusion Support (KIS) packages program. Access to the KIS specialist consultancy is informed by review of the outcomes of the Inclusion Support Plan that supported the application. For further information regarding KIS specialist consultancy see:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/parents/needs/Pages/kinderinclusion.aspx>

Other supports available to kindergarten programs

The PSFO role complements a range of assistance provided by other specialist services and kindergarten supports including:

- case coordination for vulnerable children and families
- professional development of early childhood educators
- early childhood intervention services
- parenting and family support services
- quality and regulatory early childhood education and care supports
- kindergarten cluster management
- kindergarten inclusion support (KIS) packages program.