

STaR Project Information Sheet

What is the STaR Project?

The STaR Project is jointly managed by Access Macquarie Limited (ACCESS MQ) and the STaR Association. It is modelled on an early intervention program that operated at Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC) for ten years and then as a three-year pilot project within a childcare centre at Meadowbank – the STaR Model.

The Project is funded through the Australian government's "Early Childhood – Invest To Grow" initiative with a contribution from the Integration Support Program, administered by the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET). This funding has enabled the STaR Project to be established in up to 12 centres across the Sydney metropolitan area over three years. The Project, which draws on the expertise of Dr Coral Kemp, Dawn Chadwick and Catherine Brock, aims to provide evidence-based developmental and educational programs for children, 0-5 years, with disabilities or developmental delays in inclusive childcare centres. It also provides parents/carers with support and increased life/work choices and opportunities. Childcare staff, employed by participating centres, are supported by coordinated consultancy, education and training that is provided by highly qualified early intervention staff linked to Macquarie University.

From January 2008 the STaR Association is funding the Project.

The STaR Project supports:

- childcare centres that have enrolled a small group of children with disabilities
- children, 0 to 5 years, with diagnosed disabilities/developmental delays
- families of the children with disabilities/developmental delays

The STaR Model aims to:

- support children with disabilities achieve optimal development in inclusive early childhood settings and to support their families through the provision of education and social support;
- train and support childcare centre staff in developing and implementing appropriate programs and activities for children with disabilities/developmental delays;
- support the families of children with disabilities/developmental delays through the provision of education, respite and the opportunity to access social support from other families of children with disabilities/developmental delays;
- collaborate with other early intervention services that the child is receiving and implement appropriate objectives within the daily routines and activities of the centre; and
- prepare children with disabilities and their families for the child's transition to school.

How does the STaR Project address these aims?

These aims are addressed by:

- identifying children with disabilities, placing them in participating childcare centres and providing them with ongoing support;
- determining individual child objectives that can be implemented through the daily activities of the centre, the home and the broader community;
- providing family support through ongoing information and education;

- training childcare centre staff and other personnel (e.g., students and volunteers) working with the children;
- identifying, through ongoing research, interventions that will assist with improving outcomes for children with disabilities and their families;
- linking research, preparation of professional staff, and service provision to provide a service that is both informed and informing, and ensuring that all staff are aware of the latest research and recommended practice;
- educating the community about children with disabilities through the provision of services within mainstream childcare environments; and
- providing information about, and access to, formal transition programs.

Benefits of involvement with the STaR project

Childcare Centres

In NSW, preschools currently receive SCAN (Supporting Children with Additional Needs) funding but childcare centres do not receive the same level of support. The STaR Project bridges this gap by offering a well-established, highly acknowledged, evidenced-based program, to assist in the development and improved outcomes of children with disabilities in mainstream childcare centres. STaR will assist collaborating childcare centres in the Sydney metropolitan area to include children with disabilities in their centre by:

- identifying and managing each centre's intake of children with disabilities, including enrolment, orientation and transition;
- providing training and assistance in developing and monitoring an individual education program (IEP) for each child;
- providing training for childcare centre staff in the implementation of the child's IEP within each centre's daily routine;
- offering assistance to centres to recruit early intervention-trained, early childhood teachers to work at the centre;
- sharing the latest research-based models of best practice in early intervention;
- providing release staff to enable a centre staff member to liaise with the STaR Project Coordinator, families and other professionals, to undertake programming activities.

STaR will:

- address the needs of children with disabilities and their families;
- ensure a limited and targeted intake of children with disabilities;
- provide ongoing parent support and education;
- liaise with outside services in relation to children with disabilities;
- work to ensure service credibility and accountability;
- provide access to the latest research and information through its association with Macquarie University;
- promote job satisfaction for centre staff; and
- endeavour to recruit and train volunteers for extra centre support.

Children

The STaR Project offers potential benefits for all children in the childcare centre. This includes typically developing children, gifted children, and children with disabilities - as evidence-based research continues to demonstrate that a model of inclusive early childhood practice, benefits children with and without disabilities - promoting inclusion and acceptance in the community. Children with disabilities, between 0-5 years, will benefit from the STaR Project through:

- Assistance and support in a nurturing and inclusive childcare environment;
- Individual educational programs to develop skills across all developmental domains, including self-help, social/play, cognitive, language/communication, fine motor and gross motor;



- The opportunity to be part of a community childcare centre, playing with and learning from others, including typically developing children;
- Access to highly qualified, special education trained teachers; and
- Preparation for transition to school.

Parents and Families

In addition to witnessing the progress their child will make, parents and families of STaR children receive a number of other benefits from the STaR Project including:

- Access to childcare and longer day-care hours - providing increased opportunities and choices in life and work;
- Provision of educational services and an individualised research-based educational program for their child within an inclusive community childcare centre;
- Ongoing parent/carer support and education from early intervention professionals;
- Support from other parents and families of children with disabilities;
- Transition to school support; and
- The opportunity for siblings to be nurtured and educated in the same childcare environment.

Criterion of entry to the STaR Project

The following outlines the requirements for the childcare centre, the child and the parents/carers to become part of the STaR Project.

Childcare Centres

- Commitment to the philosophy of inclusion of the child with disabilities in all aspects of the centre program, where appropriate
- Acceptance of 4-6 children, with varying disabilities, per day
- Employment of a special education trained early childhood teacher to be the special needs manager, or commitment from an existing member of staff to enrol in an early intervention course and to take on the role of special needs manager
- Encouragement of, and support for staff training
- Release of the special needs manager for training, consultation and meetings (relief will be provided)
- Support of ethics approved University research involving the children with disabilities within the centre
- Liaison with the STaR Project Co-coordinator and Director
- Acceptance of volunteers to help support children within the centre
- Acceptance of early intervention postgraduate students (to be supervised by the special needs manager and STaR Project Co-coordinator)
- Acceptance of other professionals working with a child with disabilities within the centre
- Informing the STaR Co-coordinator of all other early intervention strategies/services implemented at the centre

Children

The child must fit the Australian Government's eligibility criteria for ISP (Intervention Support Program) funding. Documentation from a relevant professional (as indicated) must be provided for at least one or more of the following:

- Developmental Delay - Paediatrician or registered psychologist;
- Intellectual Disability - Paediatrician or registered psychologist;
- Language Disorder - Medical specialist or speech pathologist (report must be less than 12 months old and indicate a score of <70 or the 1st or 2nd percentile on either the receptive or expressive language component of a standardised language test e.g., CELF);
- Hearing Impairment - Audiologist supported by a report from Australian Hearing;
- Vision Impairment - Ophthalmologist supported by a report from the Royal Blind Society or the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind;

- Physical Disability - Medical specialist or paediatrician (not an occupational therapist or physiotherapist);
- Social/Emotional and Behavioural Disorder - Paediatrician, specialist psychologist or psychiatrist (report must be < 12 months old); and/or
- Multiple Disabilities - Paediatrician or relevant medical specialist.

Children will be selected for the STaR Program based on,

- the centre's ability to cater for the child's individual needs,
- the level of support required, and
- the mix of disabilities within the group at the centre.

Parents and Families

Parents and families of children seeking to participate in the STaR Project must

- supply the documentation required for funding purposes,
- sign permission for application for ISP funding,
- sign the research agreement
- sign the parental agreement,
- pay the childcare fees applicable for their child's enrolment in the centre, and
- pay a small one-off STaR enrolment fee on acceptance of a place in the STaR Project.

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