

YOU'RE

WELCOME

A PROJECT OF THE BARWON NETWORK OF NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSES
TO INCREASE ACCESS FOR CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY AND THEIR
FAMILIES TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF THEIR CHOICE.

TOOL KIT

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A project supported by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

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This project arose from a desire to increase access to neighbourhood houses across the Barwon region for children aged 0 to nine years and their families, where a disability has been a barrier.

A consultation process for the project revealed that parents of these children were often exhausted and acutely aware of being judged. Combined, these barriers were liable to reduce the likelihood of parents reaching out to community services, such as neighbourhood houses.

In addition, neighbourhood houses are generally not aware of the needs of these families. As a universal service, open to all in the community, neighbourhood houses are expected to understand and meet the needs of a diverse range of people within our diverse communities. Little wonder that few neighbourhood houses in our region have extensive experience with the disability community.

The purpose of this project was to explore the opportunities (rather than the barriers) that would bring together neighbourhood houses and families and the services specialising in disability support.

The project has involved four stages:

1. **Scoping the project with neighbourhood houses**, which revealed that several houses had considerable experience in their local community with families in the situation; whereas other houses were unsure of where to start.
2. **Consultation with service providers**, which highlighted the needs of families and some enablers to increasing access.
3. **Publishing this tool kit.**
4. **Convening a major workshop to strengthen relationships between houses and providers**, with a long term view to build partnerships that would generate local initiatives to meet local needs.

A further outcome of the project has been the design, development and trialling of an information system to increase awareness of the needs of these families and the opportunities for neighbourhood houses across the region.

This tool kit is published for houses to explore three approaches to strengthening knowledge, skills and understanding.

This tool kit has three elements:

1. **THE FIVE P'S**

This check list tool can be used by any neighbourhood house as an idea-generator to support access,

The tool might be used in a team planning session, or with students or even as a consultation tool with families.

There are five key concepts that can drive improved access for children, sibling and families. This tool is like an overarching framework.

2. **FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

How can we see what other people see when they first come in contact with our service? What do they think of the building? Our staff? The 'vibe' of the place.

We know that parents of children with a disability are hypervigilant. They rapidly scan their environment to assess the likely safety of the place for their child and the process of being judged.

This tool uses a range of approaches to learning more about those vitally important 'first impressions'.

3. **PICTURE BOOK**

Disability services use a range of communication tools with children, sometimes to overcome the anxiety of being in a new, unfamiliar environment. The approach is simple – develop a book of pictures that can be looked over many times before actually visiting a location.

Pictures of the entrance, the foyer, key rooms, play spaces and so forth can allay fears before they arise. This is a simple but effective tool to support both children and parents.

If we want to improve any aspect of our services we generally ask three questions:

- ▣ What are we already doing really well? KEEP DOING
- ▣ What are some new things we could try? START DOING
- ▣ What else don't we know? GO DIGGING

The Five P's tool focusses these three questions from five different angles:

Perspective – view of the consumer

If we could learn more about what families think and feel when they use our services (go digging) we would understand where we are on track (keep doing) and where we can improve (start doing)

People power – ensure everyone is on board

How can we know that all our programs, volunteers, staff hirers are on board with improving access for families? We need to ask (go digging) before we can understand our next steps.

Physical space – key features for safety, security, access

There are plenty of people who can advise us on the accessibility of our buildings. Improving the buildings is difficult in some services – but we must keep pushing.

Programming – what do these kids and families want to do?

We need to go digging to discover the unmet demand for services and activities in our local communities – then we can review what we are currently doing and what we can build.

Policy environment – policies stating clear expectations of everyone

Don't groan. Policies and procedures drive expectations. We should be prepared to state our values and the key operating principles that may improve access.

Bottom line:

If we can improve on most of the P's most of the time... we are making progress!

INCREASING ACCESS FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY

Using this tool:

Our goal is to increase access for children and families where disability is a barrier to participation.

This tool asks you to consider five aspects of your neighbourhood house by looking at what you should KEEP DOING, START DOING or GO DIGGING for further information.

You could complete this task as a small team of staff and volunteers, or as part of a project with students... or in partnership with another neighbourhood house.

PERSPECTIVE	List comment below:	Ideas for action:
What are we doing well?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are some new things we could try?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What else don't we know?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

PEOPLE POWER	List comment below:	Ideas for action:
What are we doing well?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are some new things we could try?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What else don't we know?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

PHYSICAL SPACE	List comment below:	Ideas for action:
What are we doing well?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are some new things we could try?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What else don't we know?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

PROGRAMMING	List comment below:	Ideas for action:
What are we doing well?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are some new things we could try?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What else don't we know?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

POLICY ENVIRONMENT	List comment below:	Ideas for action:
What are we doing well?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are some new things we could try?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
What else don't we know?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Parents of children with disability tell us that connecting with new services and facilities can be daunting:

- ▣ There is a fear that people might judge family members – sometimes because of unusual behaviours or even appearance
- ▣ Safety can be a concern: safety can be about the physical environment, but also the cultural / emotional environment – some parents are aware of the risk of abuse, which is a significant problem in the disability community
- ▣ In some situations, just the effort required to get to a new location and service can be challenging... maybe it is easier to stay home.

As a result of these very reasonable concerns, parents are hypervigilant.

This means that parents have their full radar systems working when they first encounter your neighbourhood house. The look, smell, atmosphere, noise level, layout, parking, access, people, reception, posters, signage... EVERYTHING takes on a heightened significance.

Those first few seconds, that first impression is all important.



So... how can we understand the reaction of people attending our neighbourhood house for the first time?

Ideally, we need to collect feedback about that journey from arriving at the place to getting inside and getting information from reception to moving around the facility.

Idea #1:

SQUIGGLY MAP

Draw a squiggly map of the parking, pathways, entrance, foyer and reception. Imagine you were walking through that journey. Now go outside and walk through that journey considering:

- ▣ The first time you came to the service – your first impressions
- ▣ How you imagine hypervigilant parents might feel going through this journey

Keep track of your thinking by making notes on the squiggly map.

Now repeat that journey with a broad mix of people, staff, volunteers, random people from groups, add their thoughts to your notes.

Wherever possible, ask parents of children with a disability!!!!

Are there changes you can make to improve first impressions?

Idea #2:
ASK THE
EXPERTS

Neighbourhood houses are great venues for specialist disability providers to use for local programs.

These programs work with children and families of all shapes and sizes.

If / when you have people from a specialist disability agency visiting / using your facility GRAB THEM.

Get out your squiggly map and ask them for ideas that might help make for a positive first impression.

Of course, the same thing goes for parents themselves – GRAB THEM WHEN YOU CAN!!!

Here are some thought bubbles:

Is the signage to our place helpful?

Is the parking clear and easy to manage?

How easy is it to get from the car to the entrance.... physically easy? OK signage?

Is the 'where do I go next?' clear – can people find reception?

What posters / art work is in your foyer? Anything about kids?

Does your place look like it's for kids or oldies?

Is the reception area OK if you were little and, say, in a wheel chair?

Can the reception person go around the counter thingy to be next to people... or are they stuck in a box?



Now answer those questions imagining you were a parent with a disabled five year old running around and a toddler in a pram... and you weren't even sure this was a good idea.

Many children with a range of disabilities experience challenges relating to communication. Couple that with any anxiety relating to new places and... you can see how it may be difficult for a parent to introduce a new program and a new place to their child.

Communication tools such as picture books are an aid in this situation.

A picture book is simply a series of images (either printed or online) that 'walk someone through' the experience of coming to your neighbourhood house.

It would most likely include:

- ▣ The street / landscape
- ▣ The parking area
- ▣ That big sign out the front
- ▣ The pathway
- ▣ The reception and people at the reception area
- ▣ A few shots of the foyers and reception area
- ▣ Any play spaces / toy library or kid's stuff
- ▣ Other rooms / maybe shots of things going on at the house.

You could use a few words to explain or label things, but overall the idea is to publish a visual guide that could reduce the anxiety of the unfamiliar.

(This could be a great project for students, who could do further research about communication tools with the local specialist disability agencies.)

This cheap and simple idea might be the too that could assist a parent, child and whole family to engage in your house.

This tool kit is one outcome of the Early Years Inclusion Project, conducted by Neighbourhood Houses Barwon.

The goal of the project was to increase access for children with a disability and their families to local communities of their choice, including accessing services and activities in neighbourhood houses across the region.

Other project activities involved a workshop to bring together disability agency staff and neighbourhood house managers, along with an agreement to share information regarding demand for services, using broad information from specialist service providers.

This project acknowledges:

Logos

Any required statements from the Dept

Acknowledgement of country

Whatever you use here, Jill.