

HARDSHIP POLICY

Policy Number	P-Q7-B005	Version Number	2.00
Drafted by	Executive Officer	Approved Date: Review Date:	March 2025 February 2026
Responsibility	The Board of Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre Association (Inc.)		
Related Service Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fees Payment Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Privacy and Confidentiality Policy 	
Legislation and Standards	Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Quality Standards: Quality Area 6 Collaborative partnerships with families and communities Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Privacy Protection)Act 2012 (Cth) Privacy Regulations 2013 (Cth) Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 (Vic) Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic) 		
Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Human Services Privacy Guide: A guide to compliance with Victorian and Federal privacy laws: http://www.nfplaw.org.au/sites/default/files/Privacy%20Guide.pdf Privacy Victoria: https://ovic.vic.gov.au/ Supporting Children and Families in the Early Years https://www.education.vic.gov.au/ 		

AUTHORISATION

This policy was adopted by the Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre Board of Governance on the 20th of July 2020.

PURPOSE

To ensure families experiencing hardship are aware of options and supports available so that their child has access to childcare opportunities and is not disadvantaged or excluded.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the Approved Provider, Persons with Management or Control, Nominated Supervisor, Persons in day-to-day Charge, staff, students on placement, volunteers, parents/guardians, children and others attending the programs and activities of Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre.

DEFINITIONS

Hardship: Hardship refers to an inability to pay childcare fees due to financial difficulty or circumstance. Hardship refers to a situation where a family is unable, reasonably, because of illness, unemployment or other reasonable cause, to pay all of the scheduled fee obligations and the family reasonably expects to be able to discharge those obligations if payment and/or Service arrangements were changed.

Hardship can arise from a variety of situations that can be either short or long term. Hardship is not necessarily related to the income of the family but can result from contributing stressors which can impact a family's ability to make financial payments.

Hardship can be experienced as a result of a sudden change in circumstances which leads to temporary financial difficulty; as a result of a low and/or fixed income which leads to ongoing financial difficulty; or from a combination of low income and an unanticipated change in circumstances.

While some families may require flexibility and temporary assistance, such as an extension of time to pay or flexible payment arrangements, other families may not expect their situation to improve in the foreseeable future and will instead require ongoing support over a longer period.

PROCEDURES

Early identification is critical in supporting families manage financial hardship and so it is essential that BW FCC employ proactive strategies to help identify families experiencing hardship.

BW FCC should aim to develop and implement strategies to increase engagement and raise awareness on our hardship policy. Considerations should be given to:

- ensuring there is sufficient information available regarding BW FCC's hardship arrangements
- make appropriate staff (such as the Executive Officer and Business Manager) available to discuss the Hardship Policy in a respectful and sensitive manner

Whilst we often may need to rely on parents to self-identify and seek hardship support, Educators and management staff are often the first to see indicators of hardship – whether it be through non payment of fees or through a casual chat with families as a child is being signed in or out where the parent expresses some struggles.

BW FCC staff who have reason to believe that a family may be experiencing hardship should bring this to the attention of the Executive Officer and Business Manager for consideration.

The service may also identify families suffering hardship through other avenues including but not limited to unpaid fees, observations or discussions with educators or Maternal Child Health.

How is Parental Hardship Assessed?

Families who may wish to access of the *Hardship Policy* should contact the Executive Officer or Business Manager.

Hardship arrangements will be considered for families who are experiencing chronic long term financial hardship or short term crises on a case-by-case basis. Assessing hardship and family difficulties on a case by case basis ensures the approach taken provides for a family-centred focus that is individualised and necessarily requires consideration of each and every situation.

There are also a number of circumstances that can impact a family's ability to pay childcare fees. In either the short or long term, such circumstances can include, but are not limited to:

- Death of an immediate family member or friend
- Family breakdown or severe family disruption e.g. divorce/separation of parents; substance dependence and addiction
- Illness, including serious long term illness or mental illness of the parent or family member
- Family violence
- Homelessness, at risk of homelessness or impacted by transitional housing
- Out-of-home care arrangements or temporary foster parents
- Loss of employment
- Financial stress resulting in difficulty paying the bills, providing food or meeting essential costs, such as medical or transport costs.

Other factors resulting in unforeseen change in the parent's capacity to make payments, whether through a reduction in income or through an increase in non-discretionary expenditure.

For families in these circumstances it's important that every support is provided to ensure they can access and participate in learning experiences at BW FCC.

Options available

BWFCC aims to deliver payment options oriented specifically to financially vulnerable families in a way which continues to be responsive to their needs after the initial contact and is flexible enough to be modified upon changing circumstances.

Once a family is identified as suffering hardship, the Centre representative will meet with the family to gather information about the family's circumstances and capacity to pay and discuss the support options available to them.

We will then agree with the family on an approach measure (payment plan) to adopt, suitable for that families needs and circumstances. This may include:

- fee reduction
- fee waiver (as a once off or for a finite period)
- deferred payment

The payment plan adopted needs to be documented in writing and approved by both the Business Manager, Treasurer and Executive Officer.

Next steps

The Business Manager is responsible for monitoring and reviewing payment plans on an ongoing basis and to determine whether the payment plan has been successful or is not being met. Again, this will be undertaken with the utmost respect and sensitivity and in accordance with the *Privacy & Confidentiality Policy*.

When a family is in the position where their accounts have no outstanding debt they will be returned to standard fee payment process. – see *Fees Payment Policy*.

Where a family is unable to meet the payment plan, then the service is entitled to withdraw the payment plan arrangement and revert to standard late payment of fees collection – see *Late Payment of Fees*.

Rights of the Family

Parents experiencing hardship who approach BW FCC can expect to:

- Be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement
- Have their circumstances individually considered
- Have their identity and circumstances kept confidential to the relevant personnel
- Receive prompt information on the support options available
- Discuss the amount they can afford and negotiate the terms of payment

Parents who engage with the BW FCC to discuss hardship should be encouraged to:

- Advise BW FCC of their financial difficulties as soon as practicable
- Act reasonably in their negotiations with the Executive Officer and Business Manager in pursuit of a mutually acceptable outcome
- Be honest and realistic in their assessment of their capacity to contribute to their child's fees.
- Advise the Executive Officer and Business Manager if their circumstances change as soon as practicable

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the Nominated Supervisor of Bubup Womindjeka Family and Children's Centre will:

- Regularly seek feedback from everyone affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- Monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- Keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- Revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- Notify parents/guardians at least 14 days before making any changes to this policy or its procedures.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1: Hardship Provision – Application Form

Relevant Forms/Documents
Hardship Provision – Application Form

Version History			
Date	Version	Author/s	Details
July 2014	1.00	Chief Executive Officer	New Policy
July 2020	2.00	Executive Officer	Policy reviewed and updated.
August 2021	2.00	Executive Officer	Policy reviewed, minimal editorial amendments made.
February 2022	2.00	Director of Education	Policy reviewed and no changes made.
February 2023	2.00	Director of Education	Policy reviewed and links updated.
February 2024	2.00	Director of Education	Policy reviewed and no changes made.
March 2025	2.00	Director of Education	Policy reviewed and link updated.

HARDSHIP PROVISION - APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION DETAILS

All information provided as part of this application will be treated confidentially. You should complete this form at a meeting with the Business Manager (or their delegate).

Following submission, your application will be considered by Centre management (including the Board Treasurer or their delegate) and you will be advised in writing of the outcome.

Date of application:	
Name of applicant:	
Name of child/children at Centre:	
Service attending: (e.g. early years program or sessional kindergarten)	
Number of days per week attending:	
Confirm current Fees/subsidies:	
Provide details of hardship:	
Provide details of mitigation steps discussed in meeting (payment schedule, part payment):	

APPLICANT TO SIGN

I confirm that the information detailed in this document is true and correct. I consent to the information set out in this form being used and disclosed to Centre management (including the Board Treasurer or their delegate) for the sole purpose of considering my application under the hardship provision of the fees policy.

Applicant's signature

CENTRE STAFF TO COMPLETE

Name of staff member authorising application: _____

Position of staff member authorising application: _____

Date agreement ceased: _____

Outcome of agreement: _____