

## ***Corporate Policy***

<b>Policy:</b>	<b>PSK7.5 Fees and Priority of Access Policy</b>	Version no.:	4.2
<b>Quality area:</b>	<b>Quality Area 7: Leadership and Service Arrangement</b>	Date approved:	Nov 2023
Scope of policy:	Preschools	Next review:	Nov 2025
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## Policy statement

To enable The Shepherd Centre Preschool to provide a high quality early education service, it needs to ensure its financial viability at all times. All families enrolled at the preschool are responsible for paying fees for their child/ren regularly and promptly. The Shepherd Centre is committed to ensuring our preschool fees are as affordable as possible.

## Policy

Requirements for the effective collection of fees.

### *Start Strong Affordable Preschool Funding*

- Starting in 2023 the NSW government is making a landmark investment over 4 years to provide fee relief to families with children in preschool. This investment increases funding to community preschools, enabling preschools to lower fees (for eligible children), making 600 hours of early childhood education more affordable for all families.
- To be eligible for full Start Strong funding, a child will need to be either:
  - at least 4 years old on or before 31<sup>st</sup> July in that preschool year, and not in compulsory schooling; OR
  - at least 3 years old on or before 31<sup>st</sup> July and have a disability or additional needs (as defined in the Disability and Inclusions Program Guidelines); OR
  - at least 3 years old on or before 31<sup>st</sup> July and from a low-income family (ie. The child's family must be holders of a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card where the child is a named dependent on the card) and/or a Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island family;
  - attending The Shepherd Centre for 600 hours per year.
- Also under the 2023 Start Strong Program, a child will be eligible to receive 'Fee Relief' if the family has completed the 'Fee Relief Declaration Form' and nominated TSC Preschool to receive the payment. The child's fees will be reduced up to a maximum of \$4220 per year. In the event of surplus funding, the fee relief payment will be used to reduce other fees and levies, and then be put towards program payment.

### *Fee Setting*

- Fees will be set each year by The Shepherd Centre Finance Team in order to meet budget requirements for the year. Fees will be reviewed each year.
- There will be different fees set for children who are eligible for Start Strong Funding, and those who are not eligible.
- Families will be given a minimum of 14 days notice of any changes to fees.

### *Service's Responsibilities*

- Notify the families as far ahead as possible (not less than 14 days) of any changes to fees or the ways fees are to be collected.
- Ensure that all Preschool fee invoices are sent to parents and carers at the beginning of each term. Emailed invoices are preferred.
- Preschool receipts are sent to families promptly after payment is received.

- Under the Start Strong funding guidelines daily fees for children from low income or Aboriginal families and children with disability and additional needs (equity children) must be lower than the daily fee for non-equity children.
- In the case of additional hardship, inform parents that there is a Shepherd Centre funded '**Access and Equity Fund**' that is available to support families who are assessed as low income. **This is not a government subsidy, and is solely funded by The Shepherd Centre. Eligibility for The Access and Equity Fund is assessed on a case by case basis.** The final decision is at the discretion of The Shepherd Centre, after consultation with the Preschool Director, Director of Operations and the CEO.
- Ensure the appropriate priority access requirements are followed for our preschool enrolments, as defined by the Priority of Access Guidelines, Early Childhood Education Directorate:
  - children who are at least 4 years old on or before the 31 July in that preschool year and not enrolled or registered at a school
  - children who are at least 3 years old on or before 31 July and from low income and/or Aboriginal families
  - children with English Language needs
  - children with disabilities
  - children who are at risk of significant harm (from a child protection perspective).

(NB: There is no order of priority assigned to the list of points above.)

- TSC will review fees regularly. All fees are subject to change.
- Manage fee collection process to minimise the chance of bad debts.
- Advocate for all children to have the right to access early education and care regardless of their family's financial situation.

### ***Preschool's Responsibilities***

#### **Preschool Staff will:**

- Ensure families are aware of all fees and payment requirements upon enrolment.
- Provide a copy of the 'Fee Relief Declaration Form' for families to elect TSC as their nominated service, or to notify TSC that they are receiving Fee Relief at another service.
- Provide banking forms for families to complete on the offer of a preschool placement.
- Ensure families are aware that they will be required to pay a holding deposit when an initial Preschool placement is offered. Confirmation of enrolment will not occur until this fee is paid. The holding deposit is non-refundable if the child does not take up the position.
- Ensure families are aware that they will be required to pay an annual non-refundable resource levy, in addition to daily fees which will be itemised separately on enrolment.
- Liaise with Finance staff to ensure there is an effective and efficient invoicing process for all families.
- Ensure adequate records of attendance are kept for each child enrolled.
- NOT keep any banking details on site, and all fee dealings will be directed to our Finance section at TSC Head Office – Phone: 93704474

## ***Families' Responsibilities***

### **Families will:**

- Nominate, via a 'Fee Relief Declaration Form', for TSC Preschool to receive the Start Strong Affordable Preschool Funding, OR identify, via a 'Fee Relief Declaration Form', that they have nominated a different centre to access the funding.
- Ensure that term fees are paid within 4 weeks of receiving the fees notice, if paying in full.
- Pay fees by Direct Debit or Credit Card only, by completing the Credit Card OR Direct Debit Form on 'Offer of Enrolment' and returning these forms to preschool for redirection to our Head Office Finance section.
- Elect the frequency and amount of Direct Debit or Credit Card payment to ensure all fees will be paid for by week 8 of the term.
- Ensure there is adequate monies in elected accounts to cover the cost of the fees, otherwise ALL fees and charges directed to The Shepherd Centre due to lack of funds in your nominated account will be passed on to you for payment as well as the fees owing.
- Pay the full terms 'Resource' Levy each full or part term of enrolment.
- Ensure that weekly or fortnightly instalments are kept two weeks in advance. If fees are outstanding, see 'Fees Process (6 &7)'
- Pay for all days that the child is enrolled for within the term. Sick days and missed days are to be paid for, but public holidays are not paid for.
- The Shepherd Centre Preschool provides NO make-up days for missed or sick days. Any enrolled days that are not attended will need to be paid for.
- Ensure they (or their authorised nominee) sign their child in (noting the time) on each day on arrival (full name required) and sign out again (noting the time) on departure.

## ***Fees Process***

Preschool Director liaises with Finance staff, giving them an updated list of enrolments; names, number of days, start date and daily fee.

1. Finance sends a 'Tax Invoice' to parents at the beginning of each term via email (or post). Any additional days attended will be invoiced separately.
2. Payment cycles for fees will be started by week two.
3. All families are required to pay full fee rates, unless
  - proof is provided that they fall into the Start Strong "Equity" categories of low income, Aboriginal families or children with disability and additional needs. Proof of Equity eligibility must be provided within the first four weeks after enrolment. Low income families must hold a current Government Health Care Card in the families name (not just the child). In circumstances where proof is not provided, families will be required to pay full fees. OR
  - if the family had nominated TSC Preschool to receive the Affordable Preschool Fee Relief.
4. The Shepherd Centre's Finance section will send out a statement or receipt once payment is received. Receipts for payments can only be printed once.
5. Fees need to be kept two weeks in advance, except for full term payments and this will be due by week 4 of term.
6. If fees are outstanding, a reminder email/letter is sent to families, stating the amount outstanding. If the fees remain unpaid after four weeks from the date of the reminder letter, the Preschool Director has the right to refuse the child readmission to the Preschool until all fees are paid.
7. During periods of exclusion, fees will still be charged unless the child is withdrawn from the preschool by the family. An enrolment placement will not be held for children

withdrawn from preschool and they will lose their preschool placement and return to the end of the waiting list and a new child from the waiting list may take the position on a permanent basis.

## Statutory Legislation & Considerations

Education and Care Services Regulations 2018: 168, 172

## Links to National Quality Standard

<b>National Quality Area 6 Collaborative Partnership with Families and Communities</b>	
<b>Area 7 Governance and Leadership</b>	
<b>4.2.2</b>	Professional standards guide practice, interactions and relationships
<b>6.2.2</b>	Effective Partnerships support children's access inclusion, participation in the program
<b>7.1.1</b>	A statement of philosophy guides all aspects of the service operations
<b>7.1.2</b>	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.

## Sources

[Department of Education Start Strong Guidelines for Community Preschools](#)

ACECQA <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/>