

Position Description

Title:	Family Services Practitioner (Advanced)
Business unit:	Early Learning
Location:	22 Church Street, Richmond VIC 3121
Employment type:	Part-time, maximum-term to December 2025, 30.4 hours per fortnight
Reports to:	Centre Director

About Uniting

Uniting Vic.Tas is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church. We've been supporting people and families for over 100 years. We work alongside people of all ages in local communities in Victoria and Tasmania. Our services reach to Albury-Wodonga in the north, Mallacoota in East Gippsland, the Wimmera region in the west, and across Tasmania.

We empower children, young people and families to learn and thrive. We're there for people experiencing homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction or mental illness. We support people with disability to live the life they choose. We assist older people to maintain their independence and enjoy life. We provide opportunities to access training and meaningful employment. We're proud to welcome and support asylum seekers to our community. We work to empower people with the information, skills and tools they need to live a healthy, happy life.

As an organisation, we work in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First Peoples and as the traditional owners and custodians of this land.

We celebrate diversity and value the lived experience of people of every ethnicity, faith, age, disability, culture, language, gender identity, sex and sexual orientation. We welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse and non-binary, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+) people at our services. We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services.

Our purpose: To inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice

Our values: We are imaginative, respectful, compassionate and bold

1. About the program

Cooke Court Uniting was selected by the Department of Education (VIC) as the site for replicating the Early Years Education Program (the model) as part of their safe haven budget initiative. The replication project is being undertaken in partnership with Parkville Institute, a not-for-profit organisation established to operationalise and evaluate the replication project. The Australian government and philanthropy are also funding the replication research project.

The results from the trial of the model were remarkable as children who participated in the intervention had significant improvement in their cognitive (IQ and language) and non-cognitive skills (resilience and social-emotional).

The original trial was initiated and substantially funded by the Children's Protection Society (now trading as Kids First). A multi-disciplinary research team from the University of Melbourne worked with the Children's Protection Society in the design and implementation of the model. The University of Melbourne research team undertook a rigorous evaluation of the model and have established Parkville Institute to continue the work (Research reports can be found at www.eyerp.org).

The objective of the Early Years Education Program model is that children living with significant adversity will experience a stable and enriching early learning and care program and enter school as

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confident and successful learners who are developmentally equal to their peers. The long-term objective of the model is that these children will enjoy the same life trajectories as their peers.

Replicating the model is the next phase of the research with the aim of determining whether children, recruited with the same eligibility criteria as those in the trial project, can achieve the same remarkable learning and development outcomes in three different sites (Richmond, Victoria, and two sites in South East Queensland). A critical aspect of the replication research project is ensuring the replication sites implement the model with fidelity.

1. Position purpose

The Family Support Practitioner in the Cooke Court Uniting replication centre has overall responsibility for leading the implementation of the family engagement and support elements of the program model which is nested within the usual childcare legislative requirements and with a commitment to the mission and values of Uniting Tas/Vic and the Parkville Institute. This is a key leadership and advanced practice role within a multidisciplinary team.

The Family Support Practitioner contributes specialist knowledge and skills in working with family and social systems to the enactment of the model with a particular focus on the family stress and social disadvantage experienced by children and their families. It is a collaborative endeavour involving expertise, inquiry and critical reflection.

2. Scope

Budget:

Nil

People:

Nil

3. Relationships

Internal

- Executive Officer, Early Learning
- Area Manager
- Early Learning Program Manager
- Centre Director
- Pedagogical Leader
- Teachers and Educators
- Family Services Practitioner
- Uniting Support Services as required

External

- Children
- Families and caregivers
- Representatives of The Parkville Institute
- Referring Agencies
- Other community service organisations as required

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Key responsibility areas

With children and families participating in the program at the replication centre:

- Provide a high quality, empathic, responsive and effective casework response to children and families to support their participation in the program and navigate any potential barriers that might arise.
 - In consultation with the senior leadership team, provide crisis intervention and brief intervention for families who present in distress / with crisis.
 - Work collaboratively with families to assist them to navigate access to specialised services or community supports if required.
 - Within the parameters of the program model and working closely with the IMH consultant, understand and respond to families' emerging needs especially those related to the challenges of family violence, parental mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, disability or complex needs, family violence, infant/child health issues and social isolation.
 - Support the development of reciprocal and equitable partnerships with parents.
 - Support families to meet their ongoing requirements for continued access to CCB and ACCS (Wellbeing).
 - Support children and families in their interactions with Services Australia and other statutory agencies.
 - In collaboration with senior leadership team keep a watching brief on engaging community services to support ACCS (Wellbeing) renewal applications.
 - Contribute to the implementation of the Early Years Education Program model with fidelity using the knowledge and skill base of direct social casework practice with family and social systems.
 - Model and foster respectful relationships with children that reflect the principles of high expectations and inclusion.
 - In consultation with the staff team and the child's family, liaison with the statutory and voluntary services involved with children participating in the program as appropriate.
 - Use a collaborative practice approach with child and family services involved with participating families, ensuring an infant and child centred approach.
 - If indicated, attend the 12-weekly family review and goal setting meetings, and advise about referrals for specialist assistance.
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As a member of the senior leadership team:

- Collaborate with the senior leadership team to support program fidelity to the model and the implementation of infant, child and family sensitive practices.
- Provide a service to children and families consistent with fidelity to the program model.
- Provide regular supervision/consultation to other staff if required.
- Provide a child and family perspective on program implementation and centre operations, to ensure that the program supports the emotional wellbeing of the children and families living with family stress and social disadvantage.
- Be available to provide supervision, mentoring and coaching for staff to support them to respond to parents living with diverse challenges that may impact on their interactions with children, other parents and staff in the centre.
- Provide informal consultations to educators about individual families as needed.
- Participate in the bi-monthly multidisciplinary practice workshops.
- Attend senior leadership team meetings.
- Support teachers and educators in building collaborative partnerships with families.
- Participate in fidelity research and contribute data as required.

With the interface with the community:

- Engage and maintain good working relationships with community agencies with a focus on maintaining their support for children's participation in the program.
- Building and supporting referral relationships and networks.

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- Be available to represent the centre and provide an early years education program model perspective in local community child and family welfare professional networks.
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Quality and managing risk:

- Comply with Workplace Health and Safety procedures.
- Ensure compliance as a mandated reporter in accordance with the service's Child Protection Policy.
- Support the protection of rights and the dignity of all children attending the service.
- Support the environment to facilitate the mental health of children, families and staff.
- In collaboration with the leadership team and staff respond to child safety issues.
- Provide expert opinion on child safety issues, family violence etc maintaining a focus on children's best interests.

People and teams:

- Work with the Parkville Institute staff in supporting the professional learning and development of staff working in the service.
- Collaborate with the senior leadership team in developing and implementing the professional development program within the service.
- Support a culture of reflective practice that supports informed decision making and continuous improvement.
- Collaborate with Parkville Institute staff and the senior leadership team in the induction into the model for staff and their orientation into the centre.
- Collaborate with the senior leadership team in reflection and discussion relating to the inclusion of all children within the program, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, children with a disability and other children experiencing social disadvantage, trauma and in out-of-home care.
- Collaborate with staff from Parkville Institute to review and evaluate the overall quality of the pedagogy and curriculum and its alignment with the early years education program model.
- Undertake regular supervision with Parkville Institute Senior Advisor (family support) and performance review with designated line manager and provide feedback to promote collaborative working relationships.
- Communicate regularly with the Parkville Institute replication team as part of ensuring program fidelity to the model.

Personal accountability:

- Undertake regular supervision and performance review with line manager, providing feedback to promote collaborative working relationships.
- Participate in regular reflective supervision with a member of the senior leadership team as part of the implementation of the program model.
- Compliance with Uniting's values, code of conduct, policies and procedures and relevant government legislation and standards where relevant.
- Collaborate with Parkville Institute and the implementation of the replication research project.
- Demonstrate professional integrity through leadership, showing initiative and being accountable.
- Cooperate with strategies to actively ensure the safety, protection and well-being of children who come into association with us.
- Ensure appropriate use of resources.
- Work collaboratively with Uniting (Victoria Tasmania) employees and external stakeholders in accordance with Uniting's values and professional standards of behaviour.
- Actively participate in initiatives to maintain, build upon and promote a positive and collaborative workplace.
- Identify opportunities to integrate and work collaboratively across teams.
- Take reasonable care for your own health and safety, and health and safety of others (to the extent required).

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- Promote a positive safety culture by contributing to health and safety consultation and communication.
 - Promptly respond to and report health and safety hazards, incidents and near misses to line management
 - Attend mandatory training sessions (i.e. equal employment opportunity, health, and safety) and mandatory training specific to position.
 - Declare anything that you become aware of through the course of your engagement which may impede your suitability to work with children and/or young people.
 - Declare any potential or actual conflict of interest that you become aware of through the course of your engagement:
 - based on a relationship with a current member of Uniting's workforce; or
 - based on my ongoing work with another organisation.
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4. Person specification

Qualifications

- Tertiary degree in Social Work or alternatively post graduate qualification in a related discipline (e.g. Psychology) with experience in working with children and families living with social adversity.
- Eligibility for membership of relevant professional body and/or applicable registration /licence depending on professional qualifications.
- Victorian Working with Children Check.
- National Police Criminal History Check.

Experience / knowledge and skills

- An understanding of relevant regulations and legislation including the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.
- Senior practitioner with at least seven years professional direct practice experience with infants and young children in the child and family welfare sector or similar.
- Advanced skills in infant, child and family direct practice.
- Previous experience in providing formal supervision and mentoring support to colleagues.
- Experience providing secondary consultation to other agencies or professionals from another discipline.
- Demonstrated ability to work collaboratively with other services, agencies and professionals to achieve successful client outcomes.
- A good understanding of child protection and out-of-home care service system and the issues involved in providing services to statutory clients.
- Knowledge of impact of trauma abuse and neglect on infants, young children and their families
- Sound grasp of systems theory especially as it applies to inter organisational practice.
- Understanding of and experience providing direct practice services to children and families living with trauma and toxic stress responses.
- Highly developed assessment and analytical skills.
- Highly developed problem-solving skills.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills.
- Commitment to working in an evidence-based program with fidelity to the program model.
- Commitment to developing ethical reciprocal relationships with children and families.
- Capacity for reflective practice.
- Awareness of the impact of racism and other challenges faced by children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.
- Awareness of the impact of the challenges of migration and refugee experience children and families.
- Commitment to, and understanding of working with marginalised groups including indigenous and CALD clients.

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- Experience working in multidisciplinary practice setting where social work is not the main profession.
- Ability to work effectively and respectfully in a leadership role within a multidisciplinary team.
- Ability to identify and utilise people's strengths and build relationships.

Core selection criteria

- **Values alignment:** ability to demonstrate and authentically promote Uniting's values respect the uniqueness and value of every individual; establish and maintain ethical relationships that enable people to be influential in their own support arrangement and ensure they are treated with dignity and respect; build on strengths and abilities of all; demonstrate transparency and accountability.
- **Child safety:** demonstrated ability to provide safe environments for children and young people and protect them from abuse and neglect.
- **Leadership** – Strong leadership skills and knowledge; ability to support and lead program planning in collaboration with the pedagogical leader and ensure the achievement of goals; ability to build strong, high functioning teams and align teams with the organisational values and goals, particularly those related to consumer-centricity; role modelling expected behaviour; strong ability to establish credibility with staff and inspire a shared vision.
- **Communication:** Strong and clear communication skills with the ability to build positive professional relationships with families, children, teachers, educators and other professionals; excellent interpersonal skills; high level written and verbal communication skills.
- **Teamwork:** cooperates and works well with others in pursuit of team goals; collaborates and shares information; shows consideration, concern and respect for others feelings and ideas; accommodates and works well with the different working styles of others; encourages and supports respectful resolution of conflict within the group; willingness to be actively supporting others; contributes to the continuous improvement of an ethical, positive, collaborative and effective work environment.
- **Quality Assurance:** ability to support the development and implementation of a high quality education and care program for children; committed to continuity of individual learning and development and building multi-disciplinary professional practice; ability to operate in an inclusive and supportive learning environment.
- **Problem Solving:** demonstrates creativity and innovation; can be flexible and resilient and quickly adapt to the work environment; have developed skills in engaging children and families in different ways.
- **Research:** Understand the importance of research in early education and the implications for evidence informed practice; be committed to supporting the research component of the Early Years Education Program model replication project and to supporting fidelity to the model in partnership with the Parkville Institute, DET and Uniting (Victoria/ Tasmania).

5. We are a child safe organisation

Uniting is a child safe organisation and is committed in everyday practice to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children, at all times. As a child safe organisation, employment with Uniting is subject to a satisfactory national (and international where relevant) police check and relevant Working With Children Check to your State prior to commencement of any paid or unpaid work and/or participation in any service or undertaking.

This position description is subject to review and may change in accordance with Uniting's operational, service and consumer requirements.

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6. Acknowledgement

I have read, understood, and accepted the above Position Description

	Employee	Manager
Name:		
Signature:		
Date:		
