

What is a community-based child care centre?

Information for families

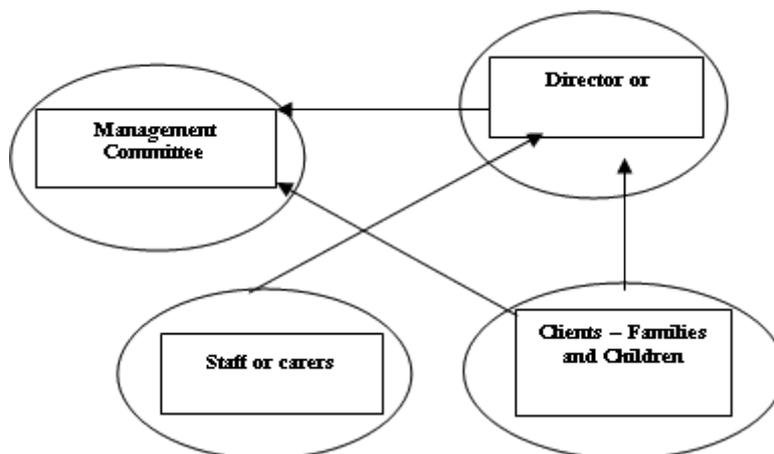
In general, a community-based childcare service is one that is managed by the community and, when constituted, has legal responsibilities under the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012* (Vic) or the *Co-operatives Act, 1996* (Vic). Community management can take many forms, depending on the nature of sponsorship. Sponsors may be local government, church organisations, recreational organisations, or independently incorporated management committees that are predominantly made up of parents.

It is the decision making and control exercised by community members that makes community-based management different from management in other childcare services that are privately owned or are managed by a corporate childcare chain.

A community-based childcare service generally has these features:

- It is managed by an organisation based in the community through a membership made up of community members, most of whom are parents
 - The membership elects the management committee and the committee is accountable to the membership
 - It has a constitution that specifies objectives (aims) and rules.
 - The management committee employs a director or coordinator who is responsible for day-to-day issues including the supervision of staff
 - No profit is distributed to the management committee, and any surplus funds are redirected to the service.
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The typical management structure of a community-based childcare service is shown in this diagram.



What are the advantages of community-based management in a childcare centre?

- The families using the service can have input into the decision-making processes of the organisation.
- Members with a range of skills of use to the centre may be elected to the management committee.
- There is scope to encourage staff and family involvement and input into the centre's organisation and activities.
- The management committee is accountable to the membership of the organisation. The constitution sets out the means by which the membership can require accountability (for example, meetings and elections).
- Because the management is drawn from the community, local issues are understood and can be responded to, making use of local resources.
- As it is a non-profit organisation, any surplus is used to enhance the centre, and not directed to any one person or shareholders (VCOSS, 1991)

FAQS about Community-based Childcare Services

Now you are more familiar with community-based management of a childcare service you may have some queries. Here are some frequently asked questions.

Can we be involved in the management of our child's centre?

As parents of a child attending the centre you are eligible to become a member of the organisation or association. As a member you are entitled to receive information concerning the management



committee's work and you may attend and vote at general meetings as well as the annual general meeting.

If you want to participate more, nominate for a position on the management committee. If you are elected, you will be directly involved in management and decision-making processes. Committees need members who are willing to actively contribute and share their expertise.

Is there a danger that control over decision making will be in the hands of just a few people in community-based management?

No! The centre's constitution and rules, which set out the requirements in terms of the membership of the organisation, and the annual election of members of the management committee, guard against this. It is vital, however, that the management committee meets its responsibilities. These include:

- fulfilling the requirements of the constitution
- working towards the organisation's aims
- maintaining membership and community support
- meeting the needs of families and children who attend
- fulfilling legislative responsibilities and meeting the requirements of any and funding bodies.

I don't have the time to give to a committee but I would like to make comments and suggestions on occasions. How do I do this?

Information on ways to make suggestions or on procedures to follow if you have concerns or a complaint is usually included in a centre handbook along with information about the centre's philosophy, goals and policies. You should receive this handbook when you enrol your child. You can always talk with the director or co-ordinator or put your comments in writing to the management committee. Effective management seeks to work in partnership with families and welcomes comments and suggestions.

How can I be confident that community-based management is providing ethical leadership in the centre?

Most community management committees take their roles and responsibilities very seriously. Ethically all members must ensure that they:

- are aware of their responsibilities under the relevant legislation
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- put the interests of the organisation first
- act with due care and honesty in all instances
- avoid any conflict of interest by being up-front about likely conflicts and withdrawing from any discussions or decisions where this may be an issue
- do not divulge any confidential information.

References and further reading

Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012

Co-operatives Act, 1996 (Vic).

Kaz Mackay, Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), 1991, *Community Management Manual*, Victoria Law Foundation, Melbourne.

Community Child Care www.cccvic.org.au

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