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RURAL CARE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

This guideline is applicable to: all DECD employees

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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REVISION RECORD

Date	Version	Revision description
01/08/2012	1	DRAFT Guidelines replace the Rural Care Handbook for discussion at Rural Care Conference in August 2012
23/11/12	2	Final Draft for approval
28/12/12	3	Approved

1. TITLE

RURAL CARE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

2. PURPOSE

This guideline document provides DECD services operating a Rural Care program with the administrative and management operational requirements.

3. BACKGROUND

The DECD Rural Care program is a child care program that is operated in a DECD education and care service facility. The service is offered in smaller rural communities that are unable to sustain viable child care options.

The program offers long day care and after school hours care services for children 0 - 12 years in the general community. Services are established to care for up to seven children of whom no more than four children are of non-school age.

Operational times are to be determined by the site leader (preschool director / school principal) in consultation with the preschool governing council, to best support the needs of the community. Programs will offer at least 10 hours or more of care per day, Monday to Friday and for a minimum of 48 to 50 weeks of the year as approved by the DECD Rural Care Program Manager.

DECD, as the Approved Provider of the program in all services is responsible for establishing practices, processes and guidelines under which a program may operate at a service. Currently, funding for the program is sourced by contributions from:

- DECD State Government (grant and leadership)
- Australian Government (through a funding agreement to DECD and accessibility to Child Care Benefit (CCB) / Child Care Rebate (CCR) if eligible)
- Parent fees.

The program is operated under the auspice of each site DECD governing council operating the education and care service. The site leader (preschool director or school principal) is responsible for the implementation of program guidelines and the operation of the program at the service.

Rural Care educators are employed by DECD to deliver an education and care service alongside and in conjunction with the preschool program.

4. SCOPE

This guideline applies to all DECD employees responsible for the provision of a Rural Care program and their governing councils who oversee the management of the program.

5. OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of these guidelines are to establish the requirements under which a program operates:

- specify the criteria for the establishment and maintenance of a Rural Care program
- outline the intended outcomes of the program
- identify the roles and responsibilities of DECD employees and governing councils
- ensure services are provided for in accordance with government and departmental requirements.

6. GUIDELINE DETAILS

6.1 Definition

A Rural Care program is a long day care program which operates in and alongside a DECD education and care service under the leadership of the site leader. Care is provided for at least 10 hours or more per day 48-50 weeks of the year.

Care for up to seven children with no more than 4 children non-school age.

Reference - Regulation 13, SA Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Regulations 2011

6.2 Criteria for establishment of a Rural Care program

- Consideration will be given to establishing a Rural Care program where the governing preschool council, with the support of DECD regional office demonstrates a need for long day care. This requires collecting supporting information such as 0-4 year demographics of the community for the next projected 4 years
- Numbers of actual children and their care needs demonstrated in FTE equivalents
- Demonstrated waiting lists in other services and/or lack of services within 30km radius including community playgroups, childcare, preschool, school services and children and families' connections to other early childhood services
- Additional factors to be taken into account when considering the establishment of a Rural Care program include:
 - children's anticipated preschool and school pathways
 - community profile including demographic and Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) information
 - transport availability
 - where a licensed long day care program has failed due to there being unsustainable numbers of young children.
 - approval of CE, DECD

6.3 Sustaining a Rural Care program

- Programs are to be financially viable by the end of their first year of operation.
- To remain viable a program must achieve a financially viable utilisation of 4 FTE. Where a program falls below a utilisation of 3 FTE consistently over a 6 month period it will be monitored 3 monthly thereafter for a further 6 months. If a program continues to be underutilised with an FTE of less than 2.8 for a six month period then the Rural Care program will be reviewed and possibly targeted for cessation.

6.4 Cessation of a Rural Care program

On the basis of the criteria outlined in 6.3, the DECD Program Leader will review the program in consultation with the region and prepare a briefing with recommendations on the program's future. Recommendations may include:

- cease the Rural Care program
- extend a review period for a further 3 months

The regional director will be responsible to support the service and to develop and implement a closure/communication strategy or immediate strategies to attract additional enrolments.

6.5 Intended outcomes of operating a Rural Care program

The outcomes of the Rural Care program are to:

- promote children’s learning, development and wellbeing
- support parents to access the workforce in their community
- support rural business
- strengthen rural communities’ capacity to work towards South Australia becoming a child friendly state
- strengthen families and communities who are disadvantaged
- support the Partnership/Whole of Government Approach to the establishment and operation of a Rural Care program
- contribute to early intervention and prevention programs in the community.

6.6 Roles and Responsibilities

6.6.1 DECD Rural Care Program Leader

- develop a Rural Care program budget annually (by October or as needed)
- develop the program fee schedule and review on an annual basis
- review policies, processes and practices in the delivery of the Rural Care program
- approve the extended hours 2 worker model
- prepare feasibility reports, briefings and recommendations for new programs
- ensure accurate and timely reporting to the Australian Government i.e. DEEWR.

6.6.2 DECD FDC Business and Customer Support Centre (DECD BC&CS) Manager

- manage the processing of booking and attendance data through the Child Care Management System (CCMS)
- comply with the Australian Government regulations and legislation in relation to the administration of Child Care Benefit (CBB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR)
- comply with the Australian Government audit requirements as required
- comply with all reporting requirements in line with the DECD/Australian Government Funding Agreement and forward to the Program Leader.

6.6.3 DECD Regional Early Childhood Consultant (ECC)

- provide support and advice on operational matters to site leaders, staff and governing councils to ensure delivery of a quality program
- support programs to undertake a self-assessment and prepare a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) that reflects the context of the preschool and Rural Care program against the National Quality Standards (NQS)
[Refer: www.decd.sa.gov.au/childrensservices/pages/earlychildhoodreform/](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/childrensservices/pages/earlychildhoodreform/)
- assist in the review of existing and in the assessment of new rural care programs.

6.6.4 The Preschool Governing Council

- provide governance as per the program constitution and other legal requirements including those in accordance with the Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011 and OHS&W requirements
- ensure the governing council includes a dedicated rural care representative
- ensure the service develops a NQF quality improvement plan which reflects the needs of the young children in a Rural Care program
- contribute to the review of the Rural Care program in conjunction with the preschool service, as an integrated education and care program, against the National Quality Framework (NQF)
- ensure targets as set by the preschool and centre based care unit are met
- ensure all DECD policy, procedures and guidelines govern decision making.

In addition the governing council, in partnership with educators and the community shares responsibility for:

- planning & ongoing development of the service
- informing parents and encouraging parent involvement
- accountability for the outcomes of their service priorities and directions
- developing and implementing strategies to appropriately integrate the preschool and Rural Care programs with a view to maximising the outcomes for children
- ensuring the Rural Care program is integrated in a manner appropriate to the service, operating in such a way that enhances the outcomes for all children at the service.

6.6.5 Preschool Site Leader

The overall responsibility for the efficient management and operation of the Rural Care program:

- effective leadership that promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community
- demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement
- implement administrative systems that enable the effective management of a quality service and its viability
- support and monitoring of the ongoing professional development of Rural Care educators in accordance with the DECD Performance Management Policy
- support and lead the pedagogical quality of the programming for children in consultation with all educators
- delegate day to day administrative functions of the Rural Care program to the qualified educator.
- oversee the filling of vacancies including the selection processes for the appointment of Rural Care educators
- provide data as required by the Rural Care program leader
- promote the Rural Care program to parents and the broader community and encourage the involvement of families in all aspects of the service's operations

6.6.6 Rural Care Educators

- are responsible to the site leader for the provision of a quality long day care program
- contribute to the planning and evaluation of the program to meet the needs of individual children, their families and the rural community
- provide a safe and nurturing environment that promotes a sense of belonging and self-worth to children
- communicate positively with parents about their children's involvement in the program
- provide assistance, information, support and encouragement to parents
- undertake relevant administrative activities as delegated within the Rural Care program
- perform first aid duties as necessary
- meet regulatory standards
- work within DECD policies and guidelines.

6.7 Operating Conditions

6.7.1 The Service

All Rural Care programs are to open to the general community. Parents do not have to be Australian residents to use the service. It should be noted that whilst the program is an approved program for the purposes of Australian Government Child Care Benefit (CCB), access to care does not guarantee eligibility for a parent to receive CCB.

6.7.2 Rural Care Program Closures

Parents are to be advised of the end of year closure period at least 4 weeks prior to the closure.

Programs may seek regional approval for pupil free and closure days as per DECD policies which are referenced in Section 9.

6.7.3 Insurance

All DECD rural care programs are covered by the department's public liability insurance.

6.7.4 Rural Care Enrolment and Fee Payments

This policy is to be adhered to by all programs Refer 8.1. The Rural Care Enrolment and Fee Payment Policy is to be provided and discussed with families prior to enrolment. A parent / guardian is required to sign the policy to acknowledge and agree to fee payment responsibility, and return it together with the Rural Care Enrolment Form (Refer 8.2). The site leader must retain the original signed cover page of the policy and attach a copy of the page to the remainder of the document and return it to the parent / guardian.

The Enrolment and Fee Payment policy must also be displayed in a prominent position at each service and will be published on the DECD Rural Care Website.

Refer: <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/childrenservices/pages/earlychildhood/ruralcare/>

Rural Care Bond

A bond payment equivalent to **one week's full fee** of booked care is required to be paid prior to the provision of regular care commencing. The site leader is to issue the family with a *Rural Care Bond Payment Request* on enrolment confirmation (Refer Form 10.1).

If full payment is not achievable prior to care commencing, a family may apply to the site leader to enter into a signed *Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Bond Payment Plan* to pay the bond in instalments, together with the ongoing weekly charge. (Refer Form 10.2)

(Note:) Bond payments are to be receipted in a separate receipt book. Payment details are to be recorded on the *Rural Care Family Payments Register* (Refer Form 10.5).

Payment Due Date

Payments for care provided are due and payable on receipt of invoice.

If families prefer, they may apply to the site leader to enter into a signed *Rural Care Payment Plan* to make regular payments or at specified times as agreed with the site leader (Refer Form 10.3)

Overdue Fees

In the short term if a family is unable to meet fee payments they may apply to the site leader to enter into a signed *Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Payment Plan*. This plan will focus on clearing the outstanding debt, together with meeting payment for ongoing care and therefore allow care to continue to be provided. (Refer Form 10.4)

If a family is in need of additional assistance to meet fee payments, they are encouraged to speak with the site leader in relation to accessing Special Child Care Benefit (SCB), i.e. Australian Government subsidy. Refer:

[Claim for Special Child Care Benefit and/or increased weekly limit of hours form \(FA023\)](#)

Final Notice

Fees which are greater than 30 days in arrears without a *Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Payment Plan* in place will be subject to follow up from the DECD BS&CS. Following consultation with the site leader and the Program Leader, a final notice will be issued seeking payment within 7 days or care will be ceased and the debt referred for debt collection.

6.8 Family Payments Register / Banking Fees

- On a weekly basis services are to forward to the DECD B&CSC, a *Rural Care Family Payments Register* (Refer Form 10.5) recording details of:
 - care payments receipted
 - payments made by electronic funds transfer
 - bond payments receipted
- Fees received from families are to be receipted and banked into the preschool account
- Each month the service will forward to the Program Leader a payment of the total money received for Rural Care fees together with a reconciliation statement
- **Note: Bond payments received from families are not to be forwarded to the Program Leader but should remain in the preschool account.**

6.9 Program Funding

- A yearly Rural Care budget will be prepared by the DECD Program Leader (by October or as needed) for the following calendar year. Services will be notified of any changes to funding that will impact on services. The budget will be forwarded to the Australian Government for funding approval.
- An operational grant will be provided to each service to assist the program pay non-salary ongoing costs associated with the Rural Care program, including:

CURRICULUM	ADMINISTRATION	UTILITIES (to be portioned between preschool and rural care)
Materials (e.g. paint, paper)	Office Supplies	To be determined by the Preschool Governing Council
Learning Resources	Postage & Freight	
Equipment	Utility Costs	
Subsidy for Excursions	Advertising	
	Training and Development	

6.10 Staffing

- Additional staffing is allocated for 3 hours per week at ECW2 rate for processing general administration. This allocation will be reviewed annually by the program manager
- For 2012/13 site leaders will receive an additional 0.1 FTE to support the implementation of the National Quality Standards. This allocation will be reviewed annually by the program manager
- Costs associated with taking of sick leave are to be allocated to project code 230
- Direct staffing related matters are to be referred to the Senior Human Resources Consultant for the preschool service.

7. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Term	Meaning
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority
DECD	Department for Education and Child Development
DECD B&CSC	DECD FDC Business and Customer Support Centre
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICE	School Based Preschool or Stand Alone Preschool
NQA	National Quality Agenda
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standards
PROGRAM LEADER	Policy Officer Preschool and Centre Based Care
PROGRAM MANAGER	Manager Preschool and Centre Based Care
SITE LEADER	Preschool Director / School Principal

8. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

8.1 DECD Rural Care Enrolment and Fee Payment Policy

Refer: **INSERT SHORTCUT**

8.2 DECD Rural Care Enrolment Form (Form I, Integrated Services)

Refer : SSONet

https://ssonet.central.sa.edu.au/it_support/pages/csc/6291/

8.3 Supporting Site Policy Exemplars Available

Refer : SSONet

<https://ssonet.central.sa.edu.au/pages/default/earlychildhood/>

9. REFERENCES

Preschool Pupil Free and Closure Days (Stand Alone Preschools)

Refer: www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/PreschoolPupilFreeandClos.pdf

Pupil Free and Closure Days (School Based Preschools)

Refer: www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/SchoolTermsVacationsClosu.doc

DECD NQS Policy Web Page

Refer: www.decd.sa.gov.au/policiesreg168

Rural Care Website

Refer: <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/childrensservices/pages/earlychildhood/ruralcare/>

10. RURAL CARE PAYMENT RELATED FORMS

10.1 Rural Care Bond Payment Request

10.2 Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Bond Payment Plan

10.3 Rural Care Payment Plan

10.4 Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Fee Payment Plan

10.5 Rural Care Family Payments Register

DECD Rural Care Bond Payment Request

Rural Care Program
(Program name)

A bond payment equivalent to **one week's full fee** of booked care is required to be paid prior to the provision of regular care commencing.

Child's Name:

1.
(Christian name) (Surname)

2.
(Christian name) (Surname)

The total bond payment required for your child(ren) is \$

If full payment is not achievable prior to care commencing, a signed *Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Bond Payment Plan* may be entered into to pay the bond in instalments, together with the ongoing weekly charge.

Please speak to the site leader if required.

Please Note:

1. The bond payment is not eligible to attract Australian Government Child Care assistance.
2. The bond monies will be returned on completion of care services being provided and after all fee payments are made.
3. The bond payment may be used to finalise an outstanding balance for care provided.

DECD Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Bond Payment Plan

Rural Care Program
(Program name)

I, acknowledge a bond payment equivalent to **one**
(Full name)
week's full fee of booked care is required to be paid prior to regular care commencing.

Outstanding Bond

I understand I have an outstanding Bond payment of \$.....

I wish to apply to make regular payments of \$.....

on a basis, with the first payment due on
(e.g. weekly/fortnightly) (Date)

I acknowledge that these payment arrangements are in **addition** to my weekly charge and if payments are not made as per this arrangement provision of care will cease.

Signed:
(Parent / Guardian)

Date:

Approved:
(Site Leader)

Date:

Site Leader Notes:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

DECD Rural Care Payment Plan

Rural Care Program
(Program name)

I, acknowledge that payments for child care provided
(Full name)

are due and payable on receipt of invoice.

I wish to apply to vary this arrangement and make regular payments of:

\$..... on a basis.
(amount) (e.g. fortnightly)

The first payment due on:
(Date)

I acknowledge that if payments are not made as per this arrangement that further payments will
revert back to being due on receipt of invoice.

Signed: **Date:**
(Parent / Guardian)

Approved: **Date:**
(Site Leader)

DECD Rural Care Negotiated Outstanding Fee Payment Plan

Rural Care Program
(Program name)

I
(Full name), acknowledge that payments for child care provided,
are due and payable on receipt of invoice.

Outstanding Fees

I understand I have an outstanding fee debt of \$.....

I wish to apply to make regular payments of \$.....

on a basis, with the first payment due on
(e.g. weekly/fortnightly) (Date)

I acknowledge that these payment arrangements are in **addition** to my weekly charge and if payments are not made as per this arrangement provision of care will cease.

Signed:
(Parent / Guardian)

Date:

Approved:
(Site Leader)

Date:

Site Leader Notes:

.....
.....
.....
.....

DECD Rural Care Family Payments Register

Program Name: _____ Week Ending: _____

DATE	RECEIPT NUMBER	ACCOUNT NAME	AMOUNT	PAYMENT METHOD	CHEQUE NUMBER	BSB NUMBER	NOTES
			TOTAL CASH/CHEQUES	\$			Fax to Rural Administration Officer 8343 6534
			TOTAL INTERNET PAYMENTS	\$			
			TOTAL BOND PAYMENTS	\$			
			Note: Bond payments are not to be forwarded but should remain in the preschool account				

