ACCESS TO THE CENTRE POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT:

The Nuriootpa Community Children’s Centre will provide equal access to all families and children who request care at the Centre, and will ensure the safety and care of children at the Centre. It will protect the custodial rights of parents &/or guardians. Enrolments will be subject to Commonwealth Government priority of access guidelines. Other members of the community, professionals and students will be provided access to the Centre where it enhances the quality of the program, protects the welfare and rights of children and staff and provides training and experience to members of the children's services field.

PHILOSOPHY:

- Equal access
- Meeting community needs

LEGISLATION:

- Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)
- Legal access - Family & Children's Services/Police/Union Officials
- Children's Protection Act 1993 (SA)
- Child Care Act 1972 (Cth)
- Guidelines for Determination of Eligible Child Care Centres (Childcare Assistance) (Cth)
- Priority of Access Guidelines (Cth)

CHILDREN:

- Need safe, harmonious environment
- Protection
- Access to parents/guardians
- Equal access to the program

PARENTS:

- Need access to their children
- Access to staff re children's participation
- Enrolment for their child/siblings
- Emergency care
- Custodial issues
- Access to child's records
- Confidentiality

STAFF:

- Need safe, harmonious work environment
- Controlled interruptions to ensure children’s program not negatively influenced
- Access to union representative
- Access to equal employment opportunity

MANAGEMENT:

- Need access to records, etc, to fulfil management tasks
- Confidentiality
PROCEDURE:

HOW POLICY WILL BE IMPLEMENTED

Equal Opportunity principles will be observed in relation to access to the Centre for children, parents and staff. (See Equal Opportunity Policy, Staff Selection Policy)

ENROLMENTS

- Enrolments will be accepted according to the Commonwealth Government 'Priority of Access' Guidelines. An enrolment form must be completed by each enrolling family. Where enrolling parents are not fluent in English, the enrolment interview will, wherever possible, be conducted in their primary language. On enrolment, owner parents will be given a "Parent Handbook", advised about access to Centre Policies and asked to complete the enrolment form and fees agreement.

- If a place is not immediately available at the Centre, the family may be put onto a waiting list. Details about priority of access eligibility, age of child and care requirements will be required at this stage. Once entered on to the waiting list, it is desirable for the family to contact the service on a regular basis to confirm their continued wish to remain on the list. When a place becomes available, the family will be contacted by the Director and enrolment may proceed.

- Enrolment forms will be updated annually or when a family's circumstances change, to ensure information is current and correct. Enrolment information will be kept in a confidential file. Access to this information is available only to the Caregiver, Director, Owner, Parent and Commonwealth Department Officers.

- Committee members' children will not be given priority of access, however, if a space is available and the staff:child ratios permit, then Committee members' children can be cared for by the Centre with no fee payable, if the Committee member is engaged on Committee business for the duration of that business only. Placement to be organised at the convenience of the Centre through the Director.

- Exclusion of children from the service will only occur after all other avenues of communication and support have been exhausted and when:
  - professional advice confirms a child is in psychological danger as a result of an unusually prolonged inability to settle into care away from the parent/guardian, or
  - a child puts one or more children at risk through inappropriate/dangerous behaviour (see Policy on Behaviour Management).

(See also exclusion due to infectious diseases under Health Policy.)

AUTHORISATION FOR COLLECTING CHILDREN
ACCESS TO THE CENTRE POLICY

- The names and contact numbers of all persons authorised to collect children from the Centre must be included on the enrolment form. Any changes to these authorities must be advised in writing to the Centre by the custodial parent as soon as possible.

- If the custodial parent arranges for an authorised person to collect their child from the Centre, they must contact the Centre to advise of this arrangement and confirm who will collect the child.

- If the Centre has not been notified and someone other than the custodial parent arrives to collect the child, the Director or senior staff member will contact the custodial parent to obtain their authorisation. Wherever possible, prior notification in writing should be provided by the parent. The child will not be released until the custodial parent’s authorisation has been obtained. If the authorised person is not known to the Centre, the custodial parent will be asked to provide a description of the person concerned, who will also be required to provide proof of their identity.

LATE COLLECTION

- Parents/Guardians who are unavoidably detained and are unable to collect their child at the negotiated collection time must telephone the Centre to advise of their lateness and expected time of arrival. If a parent/guardian is unable to collect their child prior to closing time, they should arrange for another responsible adult to collect the child and advise the Centre of this arrangement if other than on the enrolment form. This advice should be in writing if at all possible.

- If the parent/guardian has not contacted the Centre and the child has not been collected 10 minutes after the negotiated collection time, the Centre will attempt to telephone the parent/guardian or if this is not possible, telephone the emergency contact people listed on the child’s enrolment form to arrange for the child’s immediate collection.

- If no-one can be contacted and the child has not been collected 30 minutes after the Centre’s normal closing time, Crisis Care will be contacted and asked to take responsibility for the child. A notice to this effect will be posted on the Centre’s entrance with the relevant telephone contact numbers. (Centres in isolated areas who do not have access to either Crisis Care or a Local Police Station should make provisional arrangements for the care of children after hours - an option may be to use a licensed family day carer who is prepared to assist in an emergency situation.)

FAMILY CONTACT

- Staff will communicate with parents/guardians in a positive and supportive manner that encourages the parent/child relationship. Information with regard to family issues and personal lives will be handled confidentially. Every effort will be made to treat both parents/guardians equally. Without legal documentation, staff cannot act as though one parent is more fit than another to the legal rights of their child.
ACCESS TO THE CENTRE POLICY

- Parents/guardians will have access to qualified staff or the Director to enable them to discuss any concerns they may have at any reasonable time regarding their child. This may be spontaneous, by telephone or by appointment. Staff will not discuss information of a confidential nature regarding any other child or family within the Centre.

- Parents/guardians may visit the centre at any reasonable time whilst their child is in care. However, they are requested to give due consideration to the time of day in relation to the children's program i.e. rest time would be inconvenient and could disturb other children.

- Parents/guardians may bring other relatives to visit at convenient times that have been organised through the Director.

- Where a child attending the centre is not living with both parents/guardians, or where disputes arise in relation to responsibility of the child, the following will apply:
  - Parental responsibility remains with both parents/guardians jointly and individually except where it is altered by a Parenting Order. In the absence of a Parenting Order, the child will be released to either parent/guardian.
  - A Parenting Order may determine where the child will reside (Residence Order), which parent/guardian will have contact with the child and how this contact will happen (Contact Order), which parent/guardian has maintenance liabilities for the child (Maintenance Order) and where there are specific aspects of parental responsibility given to one parent/guardian (Specific Issues Order).
  - Where a non-enrolling parent cites a Parenting Order giving him/herself lawful access to the child, the Parenting Order needs to be produced for inspection by the Director.
  - The enrolling parent will be telephoned both to check the existence of the Parenting Order and to be informed about the situation.
  - In the case of a parent/guardian with parental responsibility for the child arriving at the Centre to collect their child in a visibly intoxicated or unfit state to drive, the parent/guardian will be encouraged to contact an alternative adult to drive them and their child home or the Centre will offer to call a taxi. If the parent/guardian insists on taking their child, the police may be informed. (Where human life is at risk, any part of the above may not be able to be complied with. In such circumstances, the police will be immediately informed.)

VISITORS
ACCESS TO THE CENTRE POLICY

- Visitors may be invited into the Centre as part of the children's program i.e. members of the Fire Brigade, Police Department, medical or nursing profession, community people with a skill, talent or experience from which the children will gain experience or enjoyment.

- The Centre will offer student placements to:
  - high school students who wish to gain work experience as part of their school program provided that the school has initiated the placement and the students are studying early childhood or family studies,
  - students attending early childhood or child care training at college or university or high school students who desire a work experience placement.
  All placements will be negotiated through the Director. Students will be provided with clear guidelines in relation to their responsibilities and code of conduct whilst at the Centre.
  - Volunteers may be accepted for work experience where there is evidence of a genuine interest in the work involved. Potential volunteers will be interviewed by the Director to determine their suitability. All volunteers will be given clear guidelines in relation to their responsibilities and code of conduct whilst at the Centre. (See Centre Volunteer Guidelines)

- Volunteers and students are supplementary to staff requirements and will not be used to replace absent staff unless they are on the Centre's payroll.

- All other visitors to the Centre must make an appointment with the Director.

- Any unwelcome visitor will be calmly asked to leave the Centre. Refusal to leave will necessitate the Director or Senior Staff calling the local police for the removal of the unwelcome visitor. Staff will not at any time try to physically remove an unwelcome visitor.

- Professional access to the Centre will be at the discretion of the Director or Committee. If involving the children, the parent's written consent will be required.

- The only exception to this would be in the case of children at risk (Refer to Policy on Child Abuse or Neglect). The types of professionals or officials that may require access include:
  - Union representatives - have the right to access workplaces for the purposes of investigating whether industrial awards or agreements are being complied with. Such rights are usually found in the Award or industrial agreement that applies to that workplace.
  - Family and Community Services Officers - Children's Protection Act 1993 (SA) Section 19.
  - Police Officers (with warrant).
  - OHS Inspectors - have the right of entry under Occupational Health Safety and Welfare Act 1986 (SA) Section 38.
ACCESS TO THE CENTRE POLICY

- Officers of Licensing and Standards Unit (DECS) - have the right of entry under the Children's Services Act 1985 (SA) Section 29.

- H&FS Officers - have the right of entry to inspect Centre records for accountability requirements under the Child Care Act 1972 (Cth).

- Child and Youth Health Nurse.

- Department for Education and Children's Services (DECS).