

Gathering evidence of quality practice

By Jan McFarlane

The Validation step in the Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) process provides an opportunity for outside school hours care services to demonstrate their quality practices. The OSHCQA *Validation Report* provides a 'snapshot' of the service and of the practices that occur every day for every child.

There are a variety of ways in which quality practices can be demonstrated. Child care professionals often feel anxious about what information and evidence the Validator will need to see in order to complete the *Validation Report*. As a result there is often a tendency to gather 'evidence' for everything that happens in the service 'just in case'. This can be a time consuming process and places a great deal of pressure on coordinators and staff who are usually already very busy.

As part of their preparation for a Validation Visit services are encouraged to think about the ways in which they demonstrate quality practices and how this information can be presented to the Validator in the most effective and time efficient way.

The role of the Validator

The Validator is required to visit the service and to complete a *Validation Report*. The Validator needs to observe practice with each group of children and ask questions of staff to gather sufficient information to enable them to validate the indicators outlined in the OSHCQA *Quality Practices Guide*.

The Validator understands the importance of gathering sufficient information to obtain a complete picture before making a decision about the validation of an indicator. This may involve determining if what is being observed during the Validation Visit is typical of what happens on other days and whether practices are consistent for all children and their families. The service may be asked to provide additional information to support what staff are doing and saying.

Evidence to support practice

In determining what evidence might be required during a Validation Visit staff are encouraged to carefully read the preamble and indicators for each Principle in the *Quality Practices Guide* and ask themselves the following questions:

Will the Validator be able to clearly see or hear how we meet this Principle?

In a caring environment evidence about quality practice is all around; it can be seen in the way children and families respond to the coordinator and staff, in the materials and activities available to children, and in the environments created for them. Child care professionals' normal everyday practice is often all that is required to demonstrate that the service is meeting many of the indicators outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*.

Can we tell the Validator about what we do to meet this Principle?

Yes. OSHCQA recognises and appreciates that the same positive outcomes can be achieved in many different ways and services may do things in a particular way because it works well for the children in care and their families. Often these practices are taken for granted and staff are not used to telling others about what a great job they do. Having regular conversations with each other about how everyday practice meets the indicators in the *Quality Practices Guide* can help all staff begin to feel more confident about explaining to the Validator 'how we do things here'.

Does this Principle ask for documentation?

Words such as 'written', 'documented' or 'recorded' in an indicator signify that some form of documentation is required. It is important to highlight the indicators that ask for documentation and ensure that this is available during the Validation Visit.

An index for the *Quality Practices Guide* is available for download from the resources section of the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au). It provides a useful guide for determining which Principles require a policy, procedure, record, plan or evaluation.

Will the Validator need more than one source of evidence to decide whether our service is meeting this Principle?

It is important to think about how child care professionals will demonstrate what normally happens in situations when the Validator may be unable to observe a practice as it is occurring. For example, it is unlikely that the Validator will observe the enrolment of a new child during the Visit. Staff can explain the enrolment process to the Validator and provide examples of the written information they exchange with new families as evidence of their practice.

Similarly, documentation alone is not always sufficient to demonstrate that a Principle is being met by the service. For example, the service may have written procedures about controlling the spread of infectious diseases, but on their own these are not sufficient to support the Validator to make a decision about the standard of hygiene at the service. The Validator will also need to observe staff and children consistently washing hands, cleaning food preparation surfaces and excluding sick children and staff.

Making evidence useful and accessible

Child care professionals do not have to develop additional documentation in preparation for a Validation Visit but are encouraged to think about the way the documentation they use every day can also be used to provide the Validator with evidence of quality practice. Examples of this include:

- Information kits used for new families, staff and family handbooks, policy folders, programs, newsletters, menus and noticeboards used to share information with families can easily be made available to the Validator.
- Scrapbooks created by individual and groups of children provide evidence for the Validator that staff respect and value the learning that occurs through children's play experiences. When children have the opportunity to document the activities and projects they enjoy, and the friendships they have made, they are creating a lasting record that can be treasured and shared.
- A newsletter produced by the children, that may include interviews about favourite activities, best afternoon teas, excursions, puzzles and jokes, is a great way to highlight children's involvement in the program for the Validator. It can also be used to advertise what the service has to offer through the school and local community.
- A photographic or video record of excursions, special projects and events, together with children's comments or stories about what was happening, provides lots of opportunities for

children to re-tell and share the experience with their friends and family. It also provides meaningful evidence of quality practice.

- A service journal in which staff record their thoughts and comments can provide a record of the regular things that happen in the service such as the program, meetings, reminders and training attendances, as well as the many special events that only happen once or twice throughout the year. Celebrations, family events, excursions, visitors to the service, special achievements and awards can be documented as they occur and, at the end of each year, the journal provides a useful reminder about the positive outcomes that can be achieved through collaboration and teamwork.

The way in which evidence is organised and presented is a matter of choice, but in order to minimise disruption during the Validation Visit it is strongly recommended that all the required documentation is on site and easily accessible to the Validator. The Validation Visit schedule does not allow time for the Validator to search through filing cabinets, multiple folders or records stored on the computer or in school administration buildings.

Services are encouraged to think ahead and develop strategies to ensure that all staff are able to access the required information. This is particularly important in circumstances where key staff could be away from the service during the Validation Visit timeframe.

Conclusion

While compiling evidence can greatly assist the Validation process it is important to remain focussed on the outcomes for children and their families. Developing positive relationships with children and providing stimulating environments and experiences in ways which can easily be observed by the Validator are the best use of time and service resources ■

Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance

Step 3: Validation

References and further reading

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