

# Child Care Adviser Q & A - Keeping Records of Children's Progress

*NCAC Child Care Advisers answer frequently asked questions about the importance of maintaining and updating records of children's progress*

## Q: Why do we need to keep records?

**A:** All children develop and communicate in different ways. To plan effectively for all children, it is necessary that staff keep a range of documentation that helps them to:

- further their understanding of children's thinking, ideas, interests and patterns of learning
- reflect on the ways in which they develop relationships with, work with and interact with children
- share and discuss ideas with others

Records provide the basis for planning and help to ensure that children's natural desires to discover, explore and learn are supported and encouraged.

Keeping good records helps staff and carers to see a picture of the whole child over a period of time and to understand children as part of a family and as a member of the community.

## Q: What is considered a 'record'?

**A:** A record is a documented account of something that happened. For children's programs, records may include written entries such as anecdotal observations, running records, stories about events that occurred, written analyses of events, photos, examples of children's work, or jottings of children's questions and conversations.

It is important that records are kept for purposes of accountability and to support communication and shared decision making between staff, families and other professionals.

## Q: What kind of information should we be keeping?

**A:** In States and Territories with licensing regulations services are required to maintain certain records for specified periods of time. These may include records such as children's progress records and program plans and records of excursions, accidents and medications that are given.



Records can help to guide a service during its self-study and continuing improvement process. They can provide a basis for reflecting on practices and help to see what is working and what may need to be developed further. Important information would include children's achievements, competencies, interests, ideas, questions, problem solving and interactions with others. It would also include staff interactions with children and reflections on their own practice. This type of information can help us to evaluate practice and inform planning.

## Q: Do we need to keep records for all children?

**A:** Every family has a right to have access to records of their child's achievements over time. While it is critical to keep progress records for every child, it is to be expected that those records kept on children attending the service full time, will be more detailed and more regularly updated than for those children attending part time.

## Q: Why isn't observing the child enough?

**A:** Observing children without keeping records does not allow information to be shared and

discussed or to go back to events that happened in the past. Records of children's progress:

- help staff to share information with others including children, families and colleagues
- provide a tool for discussing information and reflecting on events
- provide a story that shows children's involvement in the program over time
- allow for multiple perspectives to be documented, discussed and analysed
- help staff to make decisions about the program

### Q: Can we involve children in record keeping?

**A:** It is important to involve children in record keeping quite simply because the records are about them. To talk with children about what is contained in the records and to involve them in the documentation process helps them remember the experiences that they have been involved in and the ideas they have explored in the past. Another benefit of involving children can be that it encourages children to continue with an idea over time. Even very young children like to look back at photos and hear stories about things they have done in the past.

Ideas for involving children in the process of documentation could include:

- including children in writing the story of what happened and choosing the photos to include in the record

#### Useful methods for organising progress records and information include:

- **maintaining personal message books for two-way** exchange of information with families
- **keeping diaries** of incidental and anecdotal records
- **recording the particular ways children have participated in experiences**, over time
- keeping samples of children's expressions from the service and from home, for example drawings, writing, photographs of dramatic play, constructions or dancing. It is important to label and date each sample so that families and carers can note the child's progress over time
- **creating a folder or scrap book** for each child. The child can be involved in selecting what is included
- **using developmental indicators** to track major milestones reached by children
- **reflective notes kept by staff on their observations of children's progress**

- asking school age children to be a 'roving reporter' and taping other children's opinions and ideas about what experiences they would like to do in the program

### Q: Why do families need access to their child's records?

**A:** By documenting the things that children can do as opposed to what they cannot do, staff can provide families and children with a record they will be proud to share with others. It also shows families and children that you value their achievements.

Encouraging families to regularly read their child's progress records, to contribute to the records and to offer ideas for the program helps to keep families informed and reassured about their child's progress. Family contributions also provide staff and carers with information about how to best support the families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and interests.

### Q: How can we show links between our records and our programming?

**A:** It can sometimes be challenging to explain to others the way in which child progress records have been used to plan experiences and environments for children. However, services should be aware that to meet the standards for quality assurance they do not need to have a vast amount of records. Some records such as enrolment information and family profiles are used to gain background information. Other records will have more specific links with the program.

The program involves observing, planning, doing and evaluating. In order to show others how you make the links between child progress records and the daily program, staff and carers could ask themselves the following questions:

- What is the purpose of child progress records and what sort of things are we documenting that help us with this purpose?
- How are the records helping us to better understand the children and the ways in which we work with the children?
- How can we use this information to inform what we do next in the environment, in the experiences that we provide and in the interactions we have with children?

Being able to clearly articulate the ways in which child progress records inform the program is helpful for Step 3 Validation but much more importantly on a daily basis it helps staff, carers

and families to discuss the program with families and with other colleagues.

### **Q: When a Validator visits our service, what will they be looking for?**

**A:** Validators will be observing care practices that occur during the Validation Visit and will also be looking for evidence of how the service's policies and procedures are being managed. For a Validator, this evidence can be most easily viewed in the form of the service's documented records.

Validators will be looking for evidence that all children's needs are being met, and that there are defined links between observations and the planned program. Ideally, Validators will need to see evidence that the children's programs are being regularly evaluated and that all staff and carers have had input.

A service whose records are incomplete, hard to access or out of date will find it difficult to demonstrate and support their quality practices and will have less supporting evidence for the Validator to observe during the Validation Visit.

### **Q: How should we be storing our records?**

**A:** Regardless of what type of record keeping system is utilised, services should ensure that information can be readily accessed, that sensitive and confidential information is kept secure and that there are procedures in place to ensure that records are kept current and up to date.

#### **FDCQA Principle 3.1**

Carers respond to the interests and abilities of all children in ways that support learning in a home environment

#### **OSHCQA Principle 4.2**

Programming caters for the needs, interests and abilities of all children

#### **QIAS Principle 3.2**

Each child's learning is documented and is used in planning the program

### **Q: How important is confidentiality?**

**A:** As a child care professional, it is always important to be constantly aware of confidentiality. Staff and carers should maintain respect for the rights of families who may not wish to provide background information about their children, or if staff and carers receive sensitive information about a particular child or their family member, they may decide not to record it, to protect their privacy.

Services should also be aware of relevant State/Territory licensing requirements for keeping documents and records. Services should ensure that all information related to children's development, their families and staff personal information is kept confidential and is not inappropriately disposed of.

Most importantly, children's progress records are not the property of staff and carers and should remain with the service and be available to families. This is especially important in terms of continuity of care when a staff member leaves. The service should also have a policy on confidentiality for maintaining and keeping records, and storing them securely at all times ■

### **Further reading**

- Helm, J. H. and Katz, L. (2001). *Young Investigators. The Project Approach in the Early Years*. Teachers College Press: New York
- Koralek, D. (ed) (2004). *Spotlight on Young Children and Assessment*. National Association for the Education of Young Children: Washington
- National Childcare Accreditation Council (2002). 'Keeping records as evidence of quality practices' *Putting Children First*, Issue 2
- Patterson, C. & Fleet, A. (2003). *Meaningful Planning: Rethinking Teaching and Learning Relationships*. AECA Research in Practice Series: Australian Capital Territory
- Tarrant, S. & Jones, A. (1996). *Before 9 After 3 – A Handbook for Outside School Hours Care*. Pademelon Press: New South Wales
- University of Melbourne (1992). *The How and Why of Program Planning for Outside School Hours Care Programs*. The Lady Gowrie Child Centre (Melbourne) Inc: Victoria