

Ask a Child Care Adviser: Preparing for the Validation Visit

Phillip Rowell spoke with Child Care Advisers Karen Swift and Tanya Tregillgas about practical ways that services can prepare for the Validation Visit and reduce the stress often experienced by child care professionals at this time.

Preparing for the Validation Visit actually begins during the self-study and planning for improvement process. As child care professionals work through the Principles and indicators in their *Quality Practices Guide* they need to ask the following key question: Is the required practice occurring in our service?

All services need to consider what new or amended practices they need to implement in order to either improve or maintain the quality of their service. Part of the improvement process should also involve the service thinking about how they can demonstrate to others, including colleagues, families and Validators, what they do. When determining the evidence of quality practice that may be required by the Validator, child care professionals can consider the following questions:

- Does our service meet the requirements of this indicator?
- How does our service do this?
- Will the Validator be able to see how we meet the requirements of this indicator by watching what we do?
- Does the indicator use terms like 'written', 'document' or 'display' which suggests that there needs to be some form of documented evidence to support the practice?
- Do we feel confident about explaining how and why we implement certain practices to someone who does not work in the service, such as a family member or a Validator?

How can we identify what evidence we need?

There are a number of strategies that services can use to decide which practices:

- can be observed
- require written evidence
- can be explained
- can be demonstrated using a combination of the above.

When working through the *Quality Practices Guide* during self-study and prior to the Validation Visit, a practical way to keep track of the documentation the service needs for the Validation Visit is to write an 'O' next to the indicators in the *Quality Practices Guide* that are easily observable and to write a 'D' next to indicators that need to be demonstrated through documentation. Alternatively, they might find it beneficial to develop a list of required documentation that can be used as a checklist during final preparations for the visit.

Words such as 'written', 'documented' or 'recorded' in an indicator usually signify that some form of documentation is required.

While written documentation will be needed to demonstrate the occurrence of some practices, child care professionals should also be prepared to explain to the Validator what they do and why they do it. In long day care and outside school hours care services, staff might practice explaining what they do through discussions during staff and team meetings, as well as with families.

For family day carers, being able to describe their daily practice is particularly important, as each carer essentially operates their own unique service. Carers may be on their own during the Validation Visit, meaning that they are the only person who will be able to tell the Validator about what they do, and why they do it. Having regular conversations with other carers and coordination unit staff about their everyday practice can help both carers and staff feel more confident about explaining to the Validator 'how we do things here'.

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

Everyday practices that can be observed during the visit can include:

- handwashing
- interactions between children, families and child care professionals
- transition between activities
- nappy changes and toileting
- food preparation and mealtimes
- sleep and rest times
- guiding children's behaviour.

It is important to note that observable practices may also have a related documentation requirement. For example, while a Validator may observe nappy change procedures as they occur, they may also need to read the service's written nappy changing procedures.

How should we prepare for the Validation Visit?

The Validator is there to validate the practices that should be occurring every day for every child. So it is important for services to understand that nothing 'special' needs to be planned for or implemented during the visit. It may be easier for services to think about the 'preparation' for their Validation Visit in terms of developing a physical and mental checklist of the things that will be required by the Validator.

The following strategies may assist services to develop a checklist. Ensure that:

- all documentation is current and available at the service. This may include 'working with children checks', children's immunisation records, professional development records, building and equipment safety checks, meeting minutes, fire drill reports and children's program records.
- they check the service's *Quality Practices Guide* to determine whether the service is required to display their most recent *Certificate of Accreditation* and/or composite *Quality Profile*, along with other documentation such as the service's philosophy statement, and evacuation, nappy changing or toileting procedures
- policies are dated and sourced, with the date of the most recent review noted in writing on the policy.

Services may also consider asking a colleague from another service or a family member to observe the service's practices with 'fresh eyes', as they may be able to identify areas that have been overlooked.

Health and safety checklist

The following are examples of practices which should be occurring every day in services, including during the Validation Visit:

- electrical cords are secured and inaccessible to children
- safety plugs are in electrical sockets
- dangerous areas, such as kitchens and storage areas, are secure and inaccessible to children
- dangerous products are labeled and stored out of reach of children
- daily safety checks of the premises are completed and documented
- any animals at the service are not accessible to children unless under direct adult supervision
- hats and sunscreen are available to children and child care professionals
- safe sleeping procedures are based on current information and are implemented consistently.

If documentation is usually stored at another location, it is essential that it be available at the service during the Validation Visit. It is also important for all services to ensure that their documentation is ready and easily accessible for the visit. While some services may find it helpful to place all required documentation such as policies, meeting minutes and examples of newsletters in one file or folder, others may find it easier to simply ensure that child care professionals know exactly where all written documentation is stored or displayed in the service.

Services should ensure that their policies reflect their practices, and vice versa. Reviewing and evaluating documentation should be occurring consistently and periodically as part of everyday practice, regardless of Child Care Quality Assurance processes.

What should we do if someone is away during the Validation Visit?

The service representative should ensure that several child care professionals know where the documented evidence is located and that they are confident in explaining what happens at the service. Indicators that are concerned with management practices such as compliance with legislation and staff records may be difficult for some members of the child care professional team to discuss with a Validator, as this is normally the role of the service's director,



coordinator or manager. In the event that the service representative is unexpectedly absent on the day/s of the Validation Visit, it is important that at least one other person is available who knows and understands the procedures and documentation that relate to the service's management practices.

The service representative may also decide to delegate some Principles to key individuals to discuss with the Validator during the Visit. For example, a child care professional who is particularly knowledgeable about programming may lead the discussion about how the service meets children's play and development needs. Another person may be able to talk about the service's Occupational Health and Safety practices. In family day care schemes, staff in the coordination unit may similarly be able to share responsibilities for discussing specific aspects of the scheme's practices with the Validator.

If child care professionals are unsure of a Validator's question, it is helpful to ask the Validator which indicator they are validating and to then refer to the *Quality Practices Guide* and the preamble associated with the indicator. Reading the preamble can assist the service to identify what they are able to provide to the Validator to demonstrate how they meet the indicator. Services can also telephone a NCAC

Child Care Adviser during the Visit if they are unsure of how best to demonstrate their practices to the Validator.

What support and information is available from NCAC?

- **Quality Practices Guides:** read through the preambles as well as the indicators in the service's *Quality Practices Guide*. The preambles provide important background information about the indicators which will help the service to prepare for their visit. The indexes for each of the *Quality Practices Guides* are useful for determining which Principles require a written policy, procedure, record or plan. The index for the *OSHCQA Quality Practices Guide* is available to download from the NCAC website, while the indexes for *FDCQA* and the *QIAS* are available in the relevant *Quality Practices Guide*.
- **Child Care Quality Assurance Support Document for Validation Visits:** this provides clear information about what will happen during the Validation Visit, and is available on the NCAC website.
- **NCAC Child Care Advisers:** they can provide information about the Validation process, what to expect when the Validator arrives at the service and strategies for preparing for the Visit.
- **NCAC resources and publications:** these can be accessed from NCAC's website. All *Service Factsheets* are available, as well as extracts of past articles from the *Putting Children First* magazine. New *Service Factsheets* available on the NCAC website include one for each service type on *Gathering evidence of quality practice*.
- **'Required Policies' list:** this is now available from the 'NCAC Policy Development Guide' section of NCAC's website. This resource consists of a table outlining the policies required for each Child Care Quality Assurance system, and will assist services when developing and reviewing their policies ■

References and further reading:

- Giugni, M. (2007). Quality assurance without folders. *Putting Children First*, 22, 22-23.
- Hamilton, N. (2005). Gathering evidence in outside school hours care. *Putting Children First*, 13, 12-13.
- McFarlane, J. (2007). Typical practice in child care services. *Putting Children First*, 22, 3-5.
- NCAC. (2007). Ask a Child Care Adviser: Strategies to assist services preparing for and during Validation Visits. *Putting Children First*, 21, 8-9.