

Good relationships are the first step in one service's quality assurance journey

Kim Payne, coordinator at Centipede at Glebe School outside school hours care service, spoke with Lyndsay Mundy about his plans for future improvements at the service.

Centipede at Glebe School has been operating since the 1980s and is located in the grounds of Glebe Public School in the inner west of Sydney, NSW. Although the service has been operating for a long time, it has only recently begun receiving Child Care Benefit funding and the service is Child Care Quality Assurance newly registered with NCAC. Due to Centipede's previous funding arrangement the service was not required to participate in Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA), although previous coordinators chose to register the service for voluntary participation. At the time of writing the service's current coordinator, Kim Payne, (pictured opposite, with children from Centipede), has been at the service for three months.

Centipede provides care for school age children from a very diverse range of cultural, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds. Kim is very enthusiastic and energetic about implementing changes in the service as part of continuing improvement in preparation for the service's participation in CCQA and the National Quality Framework. This article outlines some of the improvements Kim plans to implement in the coming months.

Glebe Public School has approximately 120 children enrolled and Centipede is licensed for 50 children. "We get about 70 children through our doors in a week", Kim says. The service is representative of the school, which, in turn, is representative of the Glebe area where the children come from a very diverse range of



This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles: 1.1-1.3, 1.5, 6.2 and 6.5

OSHCQA Principles: 1.1-1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1-3.3 8.2, 8.3 and 8.5

QIAS Principles: 1.3-1.6, 2.1, 2.2 and 7.4

backgrounds. At the service, 40 to 45 per cent of the children are Indigenous and, for over 50 percent of the children, English is not their first language. "I've never worked anywhere so diverse before. It's fantastic!" Kim says.

Future improvements

In the coming months, Kim is going to try to get to know the children's families better. "Children will come in by themselves and many will go home by themselves", he says. "We don't see a lot of the families". He believes that he needs to get to know the families better for them to be more comfortable around him. "When I approach parents, a lot of them feel it's for something negative. It's not; I'm just trying to get to know them". Once Kim has built up their trust, he will work to encourage their involvement and get their feedback about how they would like the service to improve.

He is also teaching the educators at the service about the importance of paperwork and documentation. Kim says, "They are starting to understand why I'm bringing things in and that I'm not doing it just because I like getting people to sign 50 documents before they go home!". Kim holds a weekly staff meeting where the educators are encouraged to ask questions about what he's implementing. He also has an hour a week with each educator, where he helps with their studies. The assistant coordinator has nearly finished her Diploma of Out of School Care and the other two permanent staff are working towards their Certificate IV in Out of School Hours Care.

Kim is keen to get the nine to twelve year-olds more active in the service. "We want to get the older children involved because they are the children that we want to keep off the streets".



Kim hopes to develop a multimedia centre in the service so that children have the opportunity to be exposed to a range of media, including digital art and film. He believes that this will be good for all of the children, including those from Indigenous backgrounds and those who don't speak English. Kim asserts that "Art is universal".

Good relationships with stakeholders

When Kim started at Centipede he was impressed with the relationships between the educators and the children. "The kids have a lot of trust in the staff", he says. However, he found that while there was trust there wasn't a lot of respect. The children thought of the educators more as friends and so when they were asked to do things, they often resisted. "So I've come in and set high standards of behaviour which has resulted (in) an increased level of respect while maintaining the happy contact. We just need to remind them that we are who we are and we're there for them but still maintain a level of authority".

The relationship with Glebe Public School is the best service-school relationship Kim has ever experienced. "I talk with the Principal and the staff on a daily basis", he says. The school donates money and a dedicated space to the service and Centipede incorporates the same behavioural guidance strategies as the school so that there is continuity in the children's day. The service recently hosted a barbeque and the Principal and staff came along and sat with the children and families. Kim thinks this shows how strong the ties between the school and the service are. "Not all services are based in the school but if you are, you're part of the school community", he says.

Implementing improvements

Kim suggests that services who want to put improvements in place should do so slowly. When trying to increase family involvement, he says that it is important to let trust levels grow between the service and families, rather than trying to make it happen too quickly. "Once families see that you are going to be around for a while and that you are doing the best you can for their children, they will be encouraged to become more involved".

Kim also has a slow but steady implementation plan for educators doing paperwork too. He is going to increase the amount of documentation and accountability bit by bit so that it doesn't become overwhelming and staff can get used to managing their time.

The most important thing about Centipede is the good relationships between the service and the school and between the educators and the children. The service recently had a fundraising stall selling seedlings and raffle tickets at the weekend market held at Glebe Public School. Kim says that "Children came...to help sell all the seedlings and walked around selling raffle tickets to the other stallholders because they just love what we are and what we do".

Kim knows there are improvements that need to be made at Centipede. Being a New Registration with NCAC has given him the opportunity to drive improvements forward. He hopes that the changes he implements will make the service run smoothly and provide the children with an interesting and fun place to go to before and after school and during vacation times ■