

Involving families in planning for improvement

by Angela Owens

As key stakeholders in their child's child care service, families have a great deal to offer to the process of self evaluation and planning for improvement. Engaging families in evaluating their service's quality practices, and seeking their participation in planning for quality improvement is a fundamental aspect of both the current Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems, and the draft Child Care Quality Accreditation System (CCQAS).

However, child care professionals can sometimes find it challenging to engage families in quality improvement activities, and at times may feel that families are not interested in taking up the opportunities provided for them to participate.

It is important that child care professionals recognise and accommodate the many ways in which families can contribute their ideas and expertise to their service's quality practices. To cater for the varying levels and styles of family involvement, services need to consider a range of strategies for informing families about their quality improvement processes, as well as providing a range of opportunities for families to contribute.

Keeping Families Informed

It can be valuable for services to plan an ongoing communication strategy for informing families about CCQA in general, as well as for keeping families up to date with the service's individual improvement processes. Useful elements of a communication strategy for families might include:

- providing families with a CCQA information pack during the enrolment and orientation period. This information pack could include general information about CCQA processes, as well as an outline of where the service is currently at in the process.
- holding CCQA information sessions for families once or twice a year
- including a regular CCQA information section in the service's newsletter
- including CCQA as a permanent agenda item for all family and/or management committee meetings

- having a CCQA information noticeboard that is kept up to date with the latest CCQA news and publications

Ensuring that families are provided with regular and current information about CCQA, from the time that they enrol at the service, can assist them to perceive CCQA as a familiar and integral part of the service's ongoing activities, rather than as something that is 'done' at the service periodically. This can be an important step in engaging families in the service's quality improvement planning.

Involving Families

There are many ways in which families can participate in evaluating and planning to improve service practice. The two most important things for services to consider in seeking family involvement is how they can cater for differing levels of family skills, interests and abilities to participate, and how they can make participation opportunities a continuous feature of the service's operations.

Possible family involvement opportunities might include:

- introducing scheduled family surveys. Services may find it helpful to conduct surveys toward the beginning and end of each year to gauge the effectiveness of their practices, and to adjust their practices according to family feedback
- holding meetings where families have opportunities to make suggestions and to provide feedback
- introducing and promoting a suggestion box
- having a feedback notice board where families can write quick notes on either a white board or sheet of paper
- taking note of, and acting upon, feedback received during daily communication between child care professionals and families. Services may find it beneficial to introduce a register where these are recorded, and any action taken noted
- soliciting family participation in the development and review of all policies and procedures ■