

Maintaining Quality - Integrating QA into Daily Life

Some services are only just settling into Quality Assurance (QA) for the first time, while many services have progressed through the QA systems several times. No matter how experienced in QA, the challenge is to find ways to integrate continuous quality improvement into daily life at your service. Below are some suggested ways to keep you focused on QA.

The Calendar Approach

It is essential that all those involved in the quality improvement process know what is to be achieved and timelines for reaching goals. A calendar or time line will help people to keep on track and ensure that the process is ongoing.

Display the Quality Areas/Elements

Displaying the Quality Areas/Elements in locations around your service will help staff, carers and families become familiar with them. Principles relating to families could be displayed near the entrance to the service or the sign-in/out area where families will be likely to see them.

Quality Improvement Involves Everyone

It is important that all staff, carers, families and, where appropriate, children are consulted when monitoring the service's quality. Keeping families up to date is very important for maintaining quality. Information for families about quality issues can be included on display boards, parent handbooks, newsletters and even on the bottom of a child care fees receipt.

Peer Coaching and Mentor System

Coaching and mentor systems amongst staff within the service can guide and raise the standard of practice. They will also help to build a sense of joint effort and achievement, camaraderie and team spirit. You may consider pairing up with another service in your area, or even another service type.

New Staff Induction and Orientation

New staff present an opportunity for the service to outline its quality improvement process and introduce the QA systems. This will help clarify expectations at the very beginning of their employment and will motivate and guide their work with children, families and colleagues. It will also assist new staff to become familiar with the QA systems and service policies and procedures as they relate to each Quality Area/Element.

Ongoing Records of Plans and Improvements

Service records of meetings, improvements and achievements will build confidence amongst the staff team. These may also be useful during your Validation Visit.

Seek Objective Opinions

Consider getting an objective opinion on how the service addresses a Quality Area/Element or an aspect of care in your service. Have a colleague identify areas of strength and areas for improvement and perhaps make suggestions about how this could be achieved.

Target Quality Areas / Elements

Delegate to each staff member a Quality Area/Element to investigate and provide suggestions for ways of improving current practice. Each staff member could then present this information for brainstorming at a staff and carer meeting and/or management meeting. Staff/carer in-service and family information sessions are an important part of ensuring standards of quality are maintained. These discussions can then inform the service's policies and practices.

Case study – St Anthony's Long Day Care Centre (Croydon, NSW)

St Anthony's Long Day Care Centre in Croydon NSW, has been using the 'Calendar Approach' since the introduction of the revised Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) in 2001. St Anthony's was one of the first services to go through the revised QIAS, and upon reviewing the work they needed to do for the new *Continuing Improvement Plan* they knew certain months were going to be extremely busy.

The staff got together to brainstorm and decided the best way to integrate QA and self-study into daily life was to draw up an annual planner, plotting exactly when they needed to concentrate on policy reviews and other events in the centre. They divided a sheet of paper into 12 months, recognising that December was a social month and January a settling in month they were left with 10 months – exactly enough to cover the 10 Quality Areas of the QIAS.

The staff thought about which months would be appropriate to review policies and procedures relating to each of the Quality Areas. For example Quality Area 5 – Planning and Evaluation, was plotted in February as that would be the logical month where staff would be planning for the year ahead.

The staff then looked at how they were working currently with reviews of policies and audits. They knew the food handling policy needed to be reviewed 4 times a year, so that was plotted 4 times on the planner. Anything that needed review every month was also included. OH&S safety audits, evacuations and other policy reviews were plotted. They also included when the next review was scheduled on each entry so when the Validator arrived they could also use the annual planner to establish links and evidence.

The planner was soon introduced to families who suggested social events be included and that it should also be put on display in the locker area. The calendar has proven to be a valuable inclusion tool. Not only do families know exactly what is coming up in the centre, but they also have an opportunity to comment and contribute to the service's self-study process.