

The other three Rs – recruiting, recognising and retaining employees

by Lauren Boyle

Turnover in child care services is a significant issue and can notably impact the quality of the care and experiences provided for children. Building an environment that recognises and rewards the efforts and skills of child care professionals can help to reduce turnover and increase morale.

Children rely on ongoing personal relationships with child care professionals they know to feel safe, secure and content. Developing trusting and respectful partnerships between children, families and child care professionals is important to this relationship.

Staff and carer changes result in disruptions to daily routines and the way the program operates, simply because different child care professionals have different ways of doing things. Young children thrive on routine and predictability, and this kind of disruption can cause them confusion or distress.

Planning for recruitment should be revisited regularly, even when the service is not currently hiring new employees. Having a recruitment strategy or plan in place will help to minimise situations where the need to quickly fill a vacancy prevents the service from having time to effectively consider what attributes or skills they require in a new employee. It can be helpful to develop a 'skills register' that outlines the skills that current employees possess, as well as list of skills that may be desirable for future employees.



This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles:	1.5 and 5.1 – 5.3
OSHCQA Principles:	2.1, 8.2, 8.4 and 8.5
QIAS Principles:	1.6, 7.3 and 7.4

Getting it right from the start

The implications to service operation, morale and job satisfaction and, most importantly, families and children make employee retention a major concern for many services. At the same time, establishing and maintaining quality practices requires services to be prepared for staff and carer changes and to have plans to manage these, rather than considering them as a departure from the norm and dealing with them only as they occur.

When advertising to fill positions, services can market their service as a desirable place to work and aim the advertisement at the most appropriate audience. For example, if the service offers particular benefits, such as above regulation staff:child ratios or flexible work options, outline this in any recruitment advertising.

Service stakeholders, including child care professionals, management, families and, where appropriate, children, should reflect upon their values and beliefs during the recruitment process with the aim of attracting applicants who will support the service's overall philosophy.

Involving families and, when possible, children in identifying the skills and qualities that they think a new staff member or carer should have can help to enrich the recruitment process.

A new staff member can add to the pool of skills and strengths of the team. For example, they may provide an additional cultural or language background, diversify the age range, or contribute to a better gender balance.

What matters most for all child care professionals, including current and new employees, is that everyone is welcomed, valued and feels a sense of belonging. Feeling part of a supportive

community where strengths and individuality are acknowledged, nurtured and used, is the first step to creating a cohesive team and retaining employees.

Recognising individual skills

It can be challenging to inspire and guide people while simultaneously maintaining equal peer relationships. When child care professionals are given genuine opportunities to be involved in planning, decision making and are allowed to take on leadership roles, team members are more likely to feel at ease working together. This can assist the team to work as partners when implementing change, providing guidance or offering peer-to-peer professional development.

Delegation is an effective tool for equitably allocating tasks and for valuing and developing the skills and knowledge of all team members. Delegated tasks allow individuals to take responsibility for specific areas of service practice and to gain new areas of expertise. Additionally, acknowledging and supporting child care professionals to take on tasks in which they have an interest or a desire to excel, will motivate and inspire them to implement quality practice.

Professional development

Recognising individual preferences for excellence can strengthen relationships and promote a

level of trust leading to higher staff morale. Child care professionals should be actively involved in making decisions about the direction of their career and professional development. This includes regular casual staff members who are interested in building a particular skill area.

An evaluation of each individual's strengths, interests and needs will help to identify specific areas in which child care professionals could be offered opportunities for development. For it to be relevant and effective, each individual's preferred goals and abilities should be catered to in a way that is meaningful to them. These goals allow child care professionals to align their individual needs and interests with the overall needs of the service. It is also advantageous in promoting child care professionals' sense of job satisfaction and perception of their role as being valued and requiring professional expertise.

Creating cohesive teams

Effective teamwork contributes to stability in child care services by improving the self-esteem, job satisfaction and morale of child care professionals. It can also reduce stress and burnout and is crucial to achieving goals and accomplishing tasks. Effective communication is a key to successful teamwork.

Cost-effective ways of recognising and rewarding employee performance

Thoughtful, personal and sincere appreciation can inspire child care professionals to achieve high levels of performance. Recognition is powerful, inexpensive and effective and is often used too little. Recognising effort, involvement, ethical behaviour and commitment can be done in several ways. Some examples include:

- The manager, director or coordinator speaking directly to the team or team member to thank them for a job well done
- Providing regular constructive feedback and consistent performance appraisals
- Giving credit when discussing an employee's or a group's ideas with families, peers or management
- Acknowledging individuals' achievements when preparing newsletters and meeting reports
- Recognising an individual's accomplishments in front of peers and at service meetings including team, family and committee/management meetings
- Providing opportunities for team members to develop leadership skills and to take some responsibility for occupying leadership or mentoring roles. For example, a team member with an interest in children's books could be in charge of organising and maintaining the children's library resources.
- Providing a lunch or other reward for teams when they have made significant achievements or progress on a specific project or practice
- Supporting individuals to devise professional development plans that are focussed on their interests, or areas where they would like to improve their skills or knowledge
- Encouraging and enabling individuals to seek support and guidance from external child care professionals and mentors.



To communicate well within teams, individuals need to:

- Engage in active listening
- Seek to understand each other's feelings and points of view
- Share information
- Respect and appreciate the values and knowledge of colleagues
- Solve problems collaboratively
- Resolve conflicts positively.

As teams develop, they will experience different levels of success in working equally and closely together to achieve goals. When child care professionals function well as a team, they are respectful and supportive of each other. These positive relationships in the workplace are crucial to creating an environment where children feel safe, secure and happy.

Creating an enjoyable workplace

There are other ways services can enhance the workplace atmosphere for child care professionals and make their service an enjoyable and happy workplace. This can be done by:

- Acknowledging and celebrating special events and achievements in individual's lives
- Providing opportunities for social and networking activities
- Making common areas such as coordination units, play session venues and staff rooms comfortable and welcoming for child care professionals
- Where possible, making shifts and breaks flexible to accommodate child care professionals' relationships with each other and their commitments or interests outside of the work place.

Conclusion

By valuing the input of others and using good communication, team development and management skills, child care professionals are able to be involved in developing goals and direction for the service that will create an enjoyable and rewarding workplace.

When some of the above practices are implemented, disruption to continuity of care can be minimised and an increase in a commitment to child care professionals can be observed. This will aid child care professionals to provide high quality care and motivate them to do their best for children and families ■

References and further reading

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