

Where are they now? Profiles of some of the first Accredited services

As the Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems wind down NCAC would like to congratulate all the services that have been continuously Accredited since their first Decision and acknowledge the positive difference they have made in the lives of children across Australia.

As each new Quality Assurance (QA) system was introduced, some of the first services to receive their Accreditation Decision shared their stories in Accreditation Update and later in Putting Children First. In this article Jan McFarlane caught up with some of these services as many of them prepare to transition from the Child Care Quality Assurance systems to the National Quality Framework (NQF) in 2012.

Samuel Gilbert Outside School Hours Care

Despite having put in a lot of hard work and being well prepared, the staff, children and families at Samuel Gilbert Outside School Hours Care in New South Wales were 'relieved, excited and proud' when they received their first Accreditation Decision in 2005. Lesley Soper, the centre manager, reports that the photograph of children and staff taken to mark that special occasion is still treasured and proudly displayed at Samuel Gilbert OSHC today.

QA was a very new concept for many outside school hours care services back then and Lesley remembers that everyone was a little apprehensive, especially about the Validation Visit and what the Validator might look for and ask questions about. These days Lesley and the team at Samuel Gilbert find the QA process much less daunting, but believe it is a good way of keeping everyone focussed on quality improvement. "Each Accreditation Decision is public recognition of the good practices we have in place and provides the motivation to continue to strive for excellence," Lesley says.

Like many outside school hours care services, Samuel Gilbert has experienced many changes since 2005. Lesley is the only remaining member of the original team still employed at the service. Each year brings new children and families and often an entirely new management committee. "We are constantly making changes but we thrive on the challenge – there is always something new to learn," she says.



Children at Samuel Gilbert Outside School Hours Care, with a message for NCAC

Lesley believes that the key to maintaining enthusiasm for the Accreditation process is to keep it at the forefront of everyone's mind. QA is an agenda item at every team and committee meeting at Samuel Gilbert, and Lesley provides an Accreditation update in each newsletter and at the Annual General Meeting.

The team at Samuel Gilbert believe that what they have learnt through their participation in the Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance system will help them to make a smooth transition to the NQF in 2012. Lesley's advice to other services during this time of change is to "be proactive, become familiar with the new documents, network with other services and go to any training you can" ■

Ampe Kenhe Apmere Congress Child Care Centre

In July 1999, Ampe Kenhe Apmere Congress Child Care Centre, in Alice Springs, became the first Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS) in Australia to receive three years Accreditation.

Since that time, Ampe Kenhe Apmere (which means 'child's place' in Arrernte, the local Aboriginal language), like many other services in remote locations, has experienced significant difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Current Branch Manager, Margaret Harrison, reports that in her first year alone as many as 80 staff came and went from the service. Despite these setbacks, Margaret and the team have been totally committed to providing a quality service, rich in Aboriginal culture, where children, families, staff and the wider community have a sense of belonging.

In 2011 Ampe Kenhe Apmere is building on their past achievements in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) and preparing for the implementation of the NQF, although budget based funded services like Ampe Kenhe Apmere will not initially be assessed against the National Quality Standard (NQS).

Thanks to what Margaret describes as a "creative" recruitment drive and the support of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress which sponsors the service, the centre now has two early childhood qualified teachers who are great role models and mentors for the rest of the team. Over the last few years there has also been a strong focus on training and support for all staff at Ampe Kenhe Apmere, and the team, 65 per

cent of whom are Aboriginal, can now boast that all of them have either completed or are working towards a formal qualification.

With a more stable staff team in place at Ampe Kenhe Apmere, Margaret is setting some ambitious long term goals in consultation with the centre's sponsor, staff and families. In the future the centre hopes to become a mainstream service and is taking steps to ensure it is ready and able to meet the requirements in the NQS.

Ampe Kenhe Apmere has been successful in securing a grant from the Department of Education, employment and Workplace Relations to fund some much needed improvement to the centres facilities. Educators have also embraced the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) finding the strong focus on partnerships with families and the community particularly relevant for their service ■

Mid Western Family Day Care

QA has become so much a way of life for the educators at Mid Western Family Day Care scheme in New South Wales that when a Validation Visit comes around most of them want the Validator to visit their home and are disappointed if they are not randomly selected.

Scheme coordinator, Christina Caughey remembers that it was not always like that. When Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) first came in, many people could see the positives of the concept, but were apprehensive about how the process was going to work on the ground. However, as Christina also says, "As the years have passed and with the right attitude, QA has become a very useful tool and good reinforcement of the incredible work we do as early childhood educators".

Christina believes that QA provides a way to reflect on all the everyday things that happen in a family day care scheme and encourages everyone to strive for the best practice. "Time can pass by so quickly, so it is a good reminder to review policies, update forms, and evaluate how we are going as individuals and as a Scheme," she observes.

The educators and coordinators at Mid Western Family Day Care are looking forward to the introduction of the NQF. "It is a huge plus for early childhood education – really recognising the early years as an important stage of children's lives. It



Educator Rowena, who is currently studying the Certificate III in Children's Services, interacting with one of the children



Mid Western Family Day Care Coordinator Christina (right) and staff member Anne-Marie, with children (left to right) Chase, Breana, Eboney, Madison and Will

certainly reminds me after 20 years why I chose this profession – because we can really make a big difference in so many ways in so many lives”.

“We feel very comfortable at the moment just absorbing all the new information,” says Christina and she suggests that other services take the same approach. “Relax and enjoy; it’s not about the documentation. If you are striving everyday to achieve high quality in your service, if you go every day with passion and enthusiasm then whoever is looking at your service (families or assessors) will be able to see and feel it. And remember children are the best judge! They cannot be fooled – how they are acting and responding is how it really is! Children should always be your guide” ▣

API Little Cribb Street Child Care Centre

In September 1994 the first NCAC Review Visit was conducted at API Little Cribb Street Child Care Centre in Brisbane. Director Charlene Munro remembers that all the educators were very nervous. “It felt like it was not just the centre being reviewed, but that you were being looked at individually”.

Since then Charlene and the team at Little Cribb Street have been through the QIAS on five more occasions and attitudes towards the process have changed. “QIAS gives the team direction,” explains Charlene. “It sets a benchmark we continually strive to meet and makes us

accountable for our actions”.

Not that it has been all plain sailing. Charlene remembers one memorable moment when a child had an accident in the middle of a Validation Visit. “It was quite serious; there was lots of blood and an ambulance involved,” says Charlene. “We were all shaken, but the Validator just commented on the calm way we dealt with the situation. In hindsight it was probably quite a good way to demonstrate the effectiveness of the centre’s first aid procedures – but I wouldn’t recommend it!”

Charlene believes that working in a stable team with people who love their job is the key to maintaining enthusiasm for Accreditation. She says, “We motivate each other”. The team continues to seek new challenges, and looks for things they can improve, ensuring that they don’t become stale. “We have a strong commitment to ongoing professional development here,” says Charlene. “We continue to learn from each other by sharing what we have discovered at in-services and conferences and by networking with other services”.

Educators at Little Cribb Street are feeling quite confident about the transition to the NQF. They believe the experience they have gained through QIAS is very transferable. Charlene also has faith in the team’s openness to new ideas and their commitment to quality practice to see them through this period of change. “Ultimately, good practice is good practice, whatever system we have in place” ▣



November 1994: NCAC CEO and Chair, Quentin Bryce (left) with director of API Little Cribb Street Child Care Centre, Charlene Munro, and her newborn daughter, Lucy

Brisbane South Family Day Care

Change is the name of the game for Brisbane South Family Day Care. Since receiving their first Accreditation Decision in 2002 the Scheme has undergone numerous changes; they have experienced a name change (formerly Griffith University Family Day Care), a change of sponsor, relocated the coordination unit and employed a number of new educators and coordination unit staff.

Current Manager, Sue Chapman, says that, despite all this upheaval, educators and coordinators have maintained their enthusiasm for FDCQA. "Of course there is always some tension when your practice is being observed by someone outside the service," she says, "but there are always new things to learn". Sue also believes that improvements made to the FDCQA process itself over time has made it a more positive experience for everyone involved. "We have noticed an improvement in the professionalism of Validators during our most recent Validation Visits and had particularly positive feedback from everyone about Spot Checks".

Sue believes that the experience educators and coordinators have gained from participating in the current FDCQA system on four occasions will help the scheme transition to the NQF. "We are used to working with regulations and standards, and being visited by a Validator". Although there will be new standards and a new process to get used to, Sue thinks that many of the concepts and processes will be familiar for those services that have been participating in the CCQA systems for some time.

Sue's advice to other services contemplating the transition to the NQF is to develop a good relationship with the Regulatory Authority in your state or territory right from the start, and to ask lots of questions. "We did this with NCAC and they have always been very supportive," Sue notes.

The educators and coordinators at Brisbane South Family Day Care are participating in a range of professional development opportunities and working with other services in their area to learn as much as they can about the NQF. Sue's advice to other service managers is to "take the lead and embrace the change – your enthusiasm for what's to come will be infectious" ■

Maryborough After School Care Inc.

When Colleen Eugarde and the team at Maryborough After School Care (ASC) opened the envelope from NCAC and realised they were Accredited for the first time in 2005, they were "excited and proud". The staff, management committee and families and children all celebrated their great result and the *Certificate of Accreditation* was quickly framed and put on display.

"Everyone worked incredibly hard in preparing our first *Self-study Report*," says Colleen. She also said that, "Though we did a lot of ground work before the Validation Visit, the whole process was extremely nerve racking that first time".

Six years on, the QA process has become easier for the team at Maryborough ASC. "We became more relaxed as we went along," Colleen observes. "Now it is just a normal part of what we do. It is a great opportunity to review our policies and practices and ensures we don't become complacent". Educators even enjoy the opportunity to 'show off' the centre to the Validator when a Validation Visit comes around.

Maryborough ASC's educators, families and the management committee all want to ensure the service provides the highest quality care possible. "It is this goal that keeps us motivated," Colleen reports. The team have established a system to regularly review all of the Principles outlined in the *Outside School Hours Care Quality Practices Guide* and ensure that everyone is implementing quality practice all of the time. Colleen notes, "We have even conducted a mock Validation Visit prior to the real event to ensure that new staff knew what to expect".

Colleen believes there are many similarities between the QA process and the proposed requirements under the NQF and that their previous experiences will only assist the team to strengthen the great quality of care Maryborough ASC provides. "The advice I would give to other services regarding the transition," Colleen says, "is to become familiar with the standards and look at the new process as a way to develop the best services we can provide, and for the outside school hours care sector to become something we can be really proud of" ■