

Leading Issues Journal

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The Centre for Leadership for Women focuses on an innovative Project that has been developed by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. The Project developed by Senior Project Officer, Judith Gray has culminated in a resource called, Sharing a Picture of Children's Development. The communication framework that underlies the resource aims to improve communication between staff and parents thus promoting children's overall health and wellbeing through strengthening the parent-staff partnership. Having attained a high success rate when implemented in children's centres, the project is gaining national recognition.

Sharing a Picture of Children's Development

Judith Gray, Senior Project Officer in the Early Childhood Unit for the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne found that as a result of research with parent's focus groups, telephone surveys, case studies and consultation with centre co-ordinators, it was evident that there was a need for:

- more effective recording and reporting systems on child development used by both staff and parents in long day care, due to a recognition of the increasing number of hours some children are spending in care as infants through to five or six years of age.
- greater encouragement for parents and staff to be involved in discussions about children's development, behaviour and early literacy.

A Community Development model was developed and piloted in two local government regions in Victoria. The project sought to provide a planned strategy for engaging more parents in discussion with staff at this critical time in young children's development. The communication strategy, in the form of a resource called "Sharing a Picture of Children's Development" was created.

It's aims were:

- to increase the opportunities and the focus of communication with parents
- to identify what is important to parents about their child's development
- to share individual developmental records and child development information with parents
- to increase parents knowledge of their child's development.

When used by staff in long day care services, the preliminary evidence showed that the framework can increase the opportunities and the focus of the communication between staff and parents; identify what is important to parents about their child's development; support the early identification of concerns by parents or staff and promote better linkages between child care and local child health services.

The success of the resource when implemented, resulted in it gaining national recognition. With the support of the Australian Dairy Corporation, the resource was made available free to all long day care centres. To obtain a copy of the resource you can contact the Australian Dairy Corporation on Freecall 1800 817 736.

What are the contents of the resource?

1. A staff resource manual - 'Sharing a Picture of Children's Development,' which describes the framework and case studies of communication strategies that have been trialed in centres; a familiarisation video that can be viewed by staff, management and parents; and master copies to develop an 'Individual Child Folder' for each child.

2. Five parent booklets on parent-staff communication and healthy development.
Sharing a picture of children's development- promoting parent-staff communication
Nurturing your child's healthy development-across four age groups: by 9 months, by 18 months, by 3½ years and by 5 years.

3. Five posters on parent-staff communication and healthy development.
Share a picture of your child's development- promoting parent-staff communication
· ' Pictures' of development-across four age groups: by 9 months, by 18 months, by 3½ years by 5 years.

The National Childcare Accreditation Council supports the use of this material as a resource for child care centres throughout Australia.

Implementing the Communication Strategy

When implementing the communication framework, each centre can use the resource to reflect on their practices in parent-staff communication with a specific focus on the individual child. After some months of initial planning, some centres are holding a mini launch with parents in their service to highlight the new opportunities for two-way communication and to familiarise parents with the parent booklets, posters and individual child folders. Others are using the resource initially to review their current communication strategies and address how they may communicate with harder to reach parents, while others are talking with their primary health care services about developing a closer working relationship in the future.

Implementing the communication strategy can lead to a number of longer term outcomes:

For the child

- Better continuity and consistency of care between home and child care
- Improved planning and programming to support the individual needs of the child
- Early intervention for children if there are behavioural or developmental concerns.

For parents

- New opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress in a formal and informal manner
- Communication focused on the individual child and their development
- Mutual support between parents and child care staff to share a broader overview of the child
- Encouragement to attend Maternal and Child Health – 3 year old visit and to explain the purpose in assisting with screening for pre school, or four year old programs.
- Increased likelihood of parents being comfortable raising concerns about their child's development or behaviour.

For staff

- Better quality of care in line with the need to provide parents with feedback
- Increased numbers of parents who talk with staff about their child's development
- Increased knowledge of individual differences in children and the family and cultural context
- Increased recognition by parents of the professional role and developmental knowledge of staff
- Contact/linkage with the local Child Health nurse and primary health care system for families.

To obtain "Sharing a Picture of Children's Development"

The resource is supplied free to all long day care centres. Other services can purchase a copy. To obtain a copy of the resource contact the Australian Dairy Corporation on Freecall 1800 817 736.

Enquires

Enquires about implementing the program should be directed to: Judith Gray, Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne Ph: 03 9345 6150

This article included information from the resource, "Sharing a Picture of Children's Development" and also Judith Gray's 1999 Conference Paper, "Child Care from a parent's perspective: Staying connected with staff ...staying connected with your child"