Involving families in the National Quality Standard

Essentially, early years services implementing the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standard are running a ‘change management’ process. A key component of any successful change program is communicating well with key stakeholders using the services, such as families.

The National Quality Framework has an explicit requirement for services to work in partnership with families. This collaboration affords us all an opportunity to build on established communication routes to enable relevant information about the child to be shared and for us to work with families to build effective partnerships. Working collaboratively with families enables educators to really personalise the experiences they offer to children attending the setting and to encourage each child to reach his or her full potential.

Good two-way communication can be achieved in a number of ways but it is important to remember that, when families are dropping off and collecting their child, they are often already thinking about what they need to do next, either at home or in the office. Services need to be sensitive to the pressures families are under. Families where English is their second language will need special consideration and information; whenever possible, this should be provided in their home language and/or with pictures to demonstrate the point of communication in action. The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website is a valuable resource for this (see www.acecqa.gov.au). Services can also find support from their Professional Support Coordinator.

Communication can take forms such as:

- regular newsletters with a section on how the service is working towards the outcomes required by the National Quality Standard, including photos of what Early Years Learning Framework practices and National Quality Standard Standards and Elements look like in action
- family surveys based on National Quality Standard criteria, which give families a chance to be involved in the process and helps develop their understanding of how the National Quality Standard will impact on their service
- parent evenings with information on the National Quality Standard, including how families and educators can help to progress the Quality Improvement Plan
- using email to gain input from members of a parent review committee to your Quality Improvement Plan

- a meeting between primary carers (or key educators) and a child’s family with a focus on how the Early Years Learning Framework and National Quality Standard apply to that service and that child
- sharing children’s learning stories and photo observations through communication books, daily or weekly summaries and photo stories at the door of each room and service
- photos—these are particularly helpful where English is a second language but also provide a visual demonstration for all families of children’s achievements during a day—remember, we’re not talking about ‘happy snaps’, but real visual representations of learning, usually with an informative caption
- a monthly calendar of events, which can include information about staff appraisals, training and development, national days relevant to the staff and families at the service, local community events and what policies are being reviewed at staff meetings
- using an email distribution list which allows families to access the information at a time that suits them, giving them an opportunity to really be informed and involved in their child’s education and care experience.

As a direct result of the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Framework we have developed a reflective practice prompt sheet for educators to use. This will soon be introduced to families using the service, giving them the opportunity to share their reflections with educators and to contribute to planning around their children’s learning experiences.

Change on the scale of the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard requires adjustment time and services need to provide information to families on a regular basis. We also need to more actively seek information from families about their children. With this in mind we need to review old communication practices and ask: ‘Are our communication routes effective? Is there too much information or not enough? Are we reaching all families?’

This is an exciting time for early childhood educators and, if they involve families and have robust communication that is open and honest, the quality improvement processes will be affirming for all and have a positive impact on the quality of care and children’s learning experiences and outcomes.

Jennifer Kenyon
Director, Subicare Child Care Centre
Perth, WA