Queens View and Darling View Early Learning Centres in Sydney provide workplace/on-site early childhood education and care.

Darling View Early Learning Centre and Queen’s View Early Learning Centre, owned by Guardian Early Learning Group, are a separately licensed co-located early education centres operating from a large commercial office block in the centre of Sydney’s CBD.

Darling View Early Learning Centre and Queen’s View Early Learning Centre both have corporate partners and the centres form part of wider corporate strategies to promote work/life balance and flexibility for their staff. The services’ philosophy focuses on an understanding of the support working families require by providing families with information sessions, opportunities to engage in events and excursions and building and maintaining meaningful and collaborative relationships.

Parents working with these companies benefit from priority of access to places at the service which are quarantined for the corporate partner. This guarantee reduces the level of stress that families who are returning work feel, they have the assurance that their child will be allocated a space in an environment that is well regarded by their place of employment. Both the services are in high demand and currently operate at full occupancy.

The services also provide access to families enrolling from the community. A large majority of these families work in organisations that are within walking distance to the services. A free 20 minute drop off zone is also provided for families who travel by car into the CBD.

The service regards the ongoing relationship with the corporate partners as equally as important as the relationships with children, families and educators. The relationship is one based on openness and honesty, the centre managers and senior management meet with the corporate client on a quarterly basis. This meeting is generally structured with agenda items covering a range of topics.

Nadia Kemister, General Manager NSW, says that there are often meetings, events and conversations that are held on a more informal and sporadic basis.

‘If we’ve got a family concern or a family coming in from overseas or something that they actually need they will pick up [the phone] and talk to us just as freely. So it is a very open relationship and it needs to be through every level of the service, from the corporate right down’, Nadia says.

NSW Operations Manager, Kristie Wilson, says families have responded well to the flexibility of having early childhood services located next to where they work.

‘This provides them with a confidence and level of security that they can always pop down to visit their children throughout the day. Mothers that are still nursing their babies are very grateful for our open door policy and location as this means they can easily walk down at the times their baby needs to be fed. The educators and families have great relationships and often educators...’
will ring the families when their child is becoming a little unsettled, and due for their feed.’

Rather than the central location posing a challenge, the centres have thrived in the CBD environment. Both the services have outdoor play areas located safely on the terrace of the second floor, and the centre’s proximity to Sydney’s CBD means that there are wealth of institutions and environments for children to visit within walking distance. The educators take children on regular excursions, where they are able to interact and engage with the local community and they are never short of family volunteers. The services are careful to comply with the excursion guidelines.

Staffing at the services has not been a huge challenge. The central location makes the services an attractive place to work, with adequate public transport meaning that educators can travel from anywhere to go to work.

As most families with children attending the centre are working in office roles, a large majority of children are in the service for long periods of the day. The centre operates from 7.30 am to 6.00 pm. While the service is always talking to families about whether the opening hours are meeting their needs, according to the centres’ managers, there isn’t the demand to extend opening hours. The benefit of having a co-located centre is that families don’t need the extra time to commute to get their child.

In the mornings this also means that families are not as rushed, giving the educators an opportunity to develop and maintain strong partnerships with families during this time. The services run a breakfast service where the families can come in and interact with other families, have breakfast with their child before heading off to work. This is a time where families and educators can interact, raise concerns, provide feedback or discuss recent successes, relationships are fundamental and embracing every opportunity to strengthen these is a priority.

‘So it’s a really nice time for families to get to know each other, to build relationships, to talk with the educators, spend time with their family and their child,’ Nadia says.

Tips

- Research your area, understand who your families are and their needs.
- Look at the opportunities that centrally located services can provide for promoting children’s learning and collaboration with families.
- Be careful to understand the corporate ‘control’ requirements onsite early childhood services under Fringe Benefits Tax law.
- Build strong relationships with corporate clients and meet regularly to discuss employee needs.
- Become conversant in technical requirements for onsite ECEC, including the building code, and re-check these requirements.

For more information and resources on flexibility in early childhood services, please visit