Early Childhood
Flexibility Practices and Patterns

Case Study: Dorothy Waide Early Learning Centre, NSW

Dorothy Waide Early Learning Centre in Griffith provides flexible sessions for families.

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Dorothy Waide Early Learning Centre in the regional town of Griffith, NSW has implemented flexible sessions of care for families. Previously, the centre operated on an 11 hour session per day which meant that parents had to pay for the full session of care, even if they used less hours.

Centre Director, Neville Dwyer, says that that the centre then decided to offer parents the ability to pay for the time that they use.

‘So we actually divide the day into technically three time zones, a six hour day, an eight hour day and an eight hours plus day, and that gave parents the ability to choose what pattern suits them,’ Neville says.

The trigger for the change was that parents were moving away from using the centre’s preschool program, because children were in care for the full 11 hour day, and parents’ wanted shorter hours which were being delivered at other services.

The key to implementing the flexible sessions is the centre’s ability to tailor the roster around the busy periods of the day, based on parents’ preferences.

‘So I have the base level of staff across the opening and closing part of the day, then I bring all my staff in as the children come in,’ Neville says.

‘That reduces my costs, which essentially reduces the cost for the parent, otherwise I have to staff the place with the potential that everyone could turn up.’

This method does not adversely affect utilisation as the overall hours available are reduced as well as the total hours paid for each child.

The roster was developed from a spreadsheet which automatically works out how many staff are needed during different times of the day, based on the sessions the parents have chosen for their child.

‘It’s about tracking your day and actually understanding where all the costs are,’ says Neville.

The service is now trialling a new smartphone app which is linked to programming and planning documentation. The app allows parents to notify of absences, additional casual days and also provides a forum for other communication. This feeds into each playroom and is monitored throughout the day. This provides parents with the ability to make flexible choices around enrolment. At the service end, this can quickly be reflected in revised staffing rosters.
Tips

- Understand where your costs are, especially wage costs which drive child care prices.

- Look at what rostering technologies can help to reduce wage costs and provide extra flexibility for families.

For more information and resources on flexibility in early childhood services, please visit www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-work/early-childhood-flexibility-practices-patterns/.