



Putting Children First

Newsletter of the National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc.

Issue Twenty Four - December 2007

NCAC support for services

NCAC Child Care Advisers are available to assist services participating in the Child Care Quality Assurance (CCQA) systems.

Child Care Advisers are qualified and experienced child care professionals. They have a thorough understanding of all aspects of the CCQA systems, as well as knowledge of current issues and challenges that services may face in day-to-day service delivery.

Anyone working in child care can telephone a Child Care Adviser for information about the requirements and processes of the CCQA systems. Child Care Advisers can provide information about:

- The standards in the CCQA *Quality Practices Guides*
- Undertaking self-study and planning for improvement
- Completing the *Self-study Report*
- Preparing for the Validation Visit
- Accreditation Decisions
- Extension requests
- Spot Checks
- Complaints
- NCAC processes

Child Care Advisers are also contacted by services during a Validation Visit or Spot Check to discuss the interpretation of specific



indicators and practices in the service. However, Child Care Advisers are unable to ask a Validator to alter the observations that they have recorded, either during or after a Validation Visit or Spot Check.

Families can also telephone Child Care Advisers for information about:

- Choosing a child care service
- Understanding CCQA processes
- Quality practices
- Addressing any concerns they may have with a service
- Lodging a complaint with NCAC about a service

To contact a Child Care Adviser, services can call NCAC on 02 8260 1900 or 1300 136 554 ■

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NCAC's Guiding Principle:

Putting Children First.

NCAC's Vision:

Quality experiences and positive
outcomes for all children.

NCAC's Mission:

To set standards to improve the
quality of child care and accredit
services that meet the standards.

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An opportunity for reflection

A message from NCAC's Chairperson, June McLoughlin

December is an excellent time to review the achievements and challenges of the past year. NCAC takes this time as an opportunity to reflect upon our successes and to determine the areas in which we can improve.

NCAC's continuing improvement strategies also involve a commitment to refining NCAC processes to improve outcomes for customers. We are aware that a source of frustration for services participating in Child Care Quality Assurance is the timeframe between submission of the *Self-study Report* and the Validation Visit, as well as the timeframe between the Visit and the Accreditation Decision. To address these issues NCAC has evaluated the source of the delay and has moved to a different staffing arrangement for both Validators and Moderators.

NCAC began directly employing Staff Validators in 2006 to increase the number of Validation Visits that can occur and to provide greater efficiency and consistency in the Visits. One of the myths surrounding this process is that Staff Validators will not have experience in the service type they are visiting. This is not the case, and Validators will only conduct Validation Visits in service types where they have current experience and expertise. It is possible for a Validator to have sufficient skills and experience in more than one service type, but NCAC will not send a Validator to a service type that they are not familiar with.

To reduce the timeframes between the Validation Visit and the Accreditation Decision NCAC has made changes to the staffing of Moderation. The Moderation process remains the same, but the way Moderators are employed and the expectation around the frequency of their work has changed. Moderators will continue to be located in a number of States and Territories. The result of this change will be evident to services in the coming months as this new model is implemented.

To ensure national consistency in Accreditation Decisions, NCAC has also created a Moderation Audit Committee. This Committee will undertake an audit of a recently completed sample of Accreditation Decisions and prepare a report for the NCAC Board on the quality of the Accreditation Decisions included in the audit. NCAC would like to thank all Moderators, past and present, for their feedback and support during the transition toward this new staffing model.

Finally, on behalf of the NCAC Board and staff, I would like to wish you all the best for the coming holiday season. We look forward to working with you in 2008 to promote quality experiences and positive outcomes for all children in child care ■

Ask a Child Care Adviser - Building links with your community

Lauren Boyle spoke with NCAC's Child Care Advisers about the rewards, challenges and strategies for child care services when building links with the local and wider community.

How can my service improve outcomes for children and families through community links?

When children feel connected with the community they live in, their sense of wellbeing is enhanced. Services play an important role in encouraging children to feel part of their community and in supporting families by providing access to community resources. By developing links, sharing information and working collaboratively with others in the community, services have an opportunity to better meet the needs of children and their families. This can improve outcomes for children such as health, learning, safety and lifestyle.

What is meant by the term community?

'Community' can be defined as the connections and relationships that child care services, families and children have with people in their surrounding environment. The immediate community of a service includes the child care professionals who work there and the children and families who use it. This definition can be expanded to include the broader community such as the local greengrocer, schools, health care professionals, child health centres, playgroups and community organisations that support families and children in the local area.

The professional networks and training institutions to which child care professionals have access also form part of the service's community, and they assist child care professionals to keep in touch with current practice.

Community can also be thought of on a national and international level. Services can interact with these communities through activities such as fundraising opportunities, programs that increase community awareness or 'sister city' programs through their local council. These experiences allow children and families to make positive contributions to the

This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles: 1.3 and 6.5

OSHCQA Principles: 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3

QIAS Principle: 2.2

lives of others while learning about diverse lifestyles, cultures, histories and traditions.

Why is forming community partnerships important?

Developing effective and dynamic community links assist a service's stakeholders to access useful resources and can help to create a network of local support.

Children

Building links can help children to develop a sense of ownership, pride and appreciation for their local area. Developing a sense of connection with family, friends and cultural, religious, sporting and activity groups supports children's self-esteem, resilience, safety and sense of belonging.

Families

Collaboration with others in the local community helps to create a coordinated network of family centred services. By developing these partnerships, child care professionals can ensure children and their families have access to a range of services in their local community. Services should ideally be located in surrounding areas, to promote the sharing of resources and to increase the support provided to families. Services that may be accessed include parenting groups, playgroups, social networks, health and wellbeing classes and early childhood intervention and support.

Child Care Professionals

Seeking out and forming links with local community organisations provides child care professionals with opportunities to gain invaluable guidance, skills and knowledge from colleagues, peak bodies, experts, resource agencies, training institutions and



local authorities. The input and assistance of relevant people and organisations will also help to keep child care professionals up to date and informed about recommended practices.

Child care professionals can use their links with the local community to promote their service, and to provide information about their philosophy and practices. Advocating for the service benefits the local community by making it more accessible to families and other professionals, and will assist the service to gain support from the community when necessary.

How can I find out about what is available in my community?

As a first step services can talk to children, families and child care professionals about their lives and interests outside of the service. This offers a valuable insight into the community in which each person lives and interacts. Understanding where families live and work can provide services with ideas about the resources that are available in their local area.

Services can also find out about their neighbourhood community by reading local newspapers, community bulletins and information brochures. Local councils often have information directories and pamphlets with listings of organisations in the local area which can provide inspiration for excursions, special visitors, support networks or opportunities for professional development.

Hosting informal social functions with families and people from the local community can also provide child care professionals with opportunities to gain a genuine understanding of children's, families' and community members' needs and interests outside of the service.

How can my service build links with the community?

The process of building links with the community does not need to be complex and it may be something that services are already doing. Reviewing the partnerships that services already have and identifying how these could be used to forge further links, can provide new opportunities for the service to connect with other community organisations.

Child care services promote the use of community resources and networks most effectively when they are knowledgeable about what is available, and are proactive in referring stakeholders to relevant services and organisations.

Services often find that engaging in one community focused activity opens up further opportunities for connecting with local resources. For example, participating in a fun run for a local charity may lead a service to explore with children the importance of health and fitness, which could then involve local services and businesses such as gyms, recreation centres and health care professionals.

Conducting excursions or inviting visitors to the service can build valuable links between the service and the community, particularly when these are more than 'one-off' experiences. Linking excursions and visits

To learn about local community demographics and needs, services may find it helpful to :

- Contact their local council for information
- Attend community meetings and forums
- Invite community members, including potential clients, to service events and activities such as fetes and social gatherings
- Talk to families about their local communities
- Circulate surveys in the local area to find out about family needs and interests in relation to child care

to other experiences for children reinforces children's learning outcomes and strengthens their connection with, and understanding of, their community.

Services may also consider offering space at their service for non child care hour activities such as meetings, education courses or creating a community garden. Depending on their resources and the needs of families and the local community, child care services may also be able to promote complementary activities to operate in conjunction with their regular program. For example, parenting or language classes.

Child care services can also play a pivotal role in referring families to other services within the local community, such as early intervention and health services.

How can children participate in building links with the community?

For many children, particularly younger children, their house, their street and the places they visit with their families are what they consider to be their community. Children often feel a great deal of pride in where they come from and enjoy sharing their 'personal' community with child care professionals and peers. Child care services can tap into children's sense of community pride by using strategies such as:

- Inviting children to share information about their experiences with extra curricular activities such as scouts, sports or music
- Taking small groups of children to local shops and services such as the post office or library
- Placing children's art and displays in local businesses such as cafés, shop fronts or council noticeboards
- Where appropriate, having a home visit program where children can take turns in 'hosting' morning or afternoon tea in their own home for their peers and child care professionals at the service

Building links with the community - where do I start?

The following reflective questions may be useful for services beginning to build community links:

- What interests and needs do the children have that could be supported by local organisations or professionals in the community?
- What community events are taking place that children could participate in?
- What council services are available that the service could use?
- What are the special features of the surrounding environment which could be used to enhance children's experiences? For example, parks and recreation facilities.
- What professional support groups or organisations are available for child care professionals?

How can the community be involved in my service's operations and plans for improvement?

It is helpful to know what is happening in the community and to be aware of the leaders and representatives of community organisations when seeking community involvement in the service.

Services can obtain useful information and feedback from local community representatives by using both informal and formal communication methods. Through the use of surveys, meetings and informal conversations, valuable information can be gathered to assist services when they are developing or reviewing their policies and procedures, and when they are developing their business plans.

Each service's relationships and interactions with their community will vary. To build effective community links, services need to maintain a good understanding of the needs and interests of stakeholders, as well as a thorough knowledge of what their community offers ■

References and further reading

- Gonzalez-Mena, J., & Stonehouse, A. (2004). *Making Links: A collaborative approach to planning and practice in early childhood services*. New South Wales: Pademelon Press.
- Tansey, S. (2006). *Linking Outside School Hours Care with the Community*. *Outside School Hours Care Factsheet #7*. NSW: National Childcare Accreditation Council.
- National Childcare Accreditation Council. (2004). *Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance Quality Practices Guide (1st ed.)*. NSW: Author.

NCAC resources for child care professionals

NCAC produces a range of resources to assist child care services to provide quality child care. The resources are available for purchase through the NCAC Online store, or by completing a Publications Order Form. Policy Templates and Factsheets are available as a free download from NCAC's website.

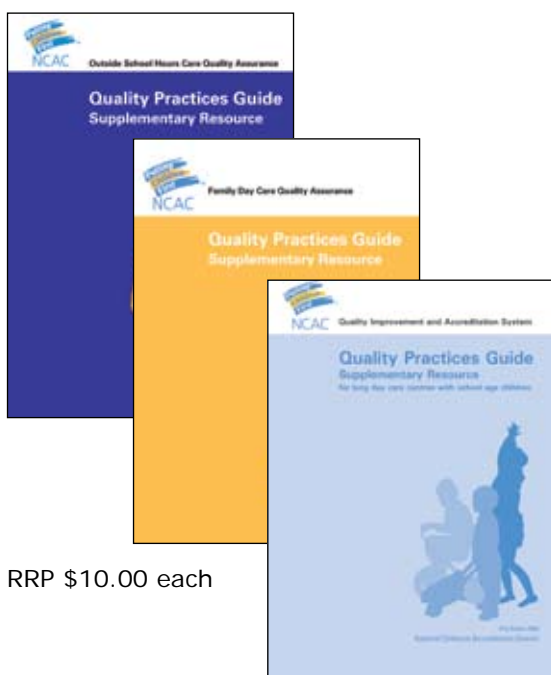
Quality Practices Guide Supplementary Resources

The *Supplementary Resources* for each CCQA system have been developed to assist child care professionals undertaking self-study using the standards outlined in the *Quality Practices Guides*. The *Supplementary Resources* provide information that will help child care professionals to reflect upon their practices and how these can be improved.

The *Supplementary Resources* for Family Day Care Quality Assurance (FDCQA) and Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance (OSHCQA) include reflective questions which can assist child care professionals with self-study.

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) *Quality Practices Guide Supplementary Resource* is specifically aimed at long day care services which provide care for school age children, and includes preambles for each Quality Area and reflective questions for each Principle.

The *Supplementary Resources* are optional working documents. Services are not required to submit them to NCAC or to have them available during the Validation Visit.



Quality Child Care Poster series

The NCAC *Quality Child Care Poster* series is designed to illustrate quality child care. The *Quality Child Care Poster* series addresses quality practices and can assist services to communicate with families about how they are providing quality outcomes for the children in their care. Each Poster is A3 size and can be framed or laminated for display at the service. There is a Poster Series available for each service type, and each set contains 14 individual posters.



QA Communication Poster

The *QA Communication Poster* has been designed to assist child care services to explain the five steps of CCQA to families, and to encourage family involvement in the process. The Poster is dry erase and can be used repeatedly, with a whiteboard marker. All new services registering with NCAC receive a complimentary copy of the Poster to assist them when they commence the CCQA process. The Poster is also available for services to purchase for \$5.00.

Factsheets

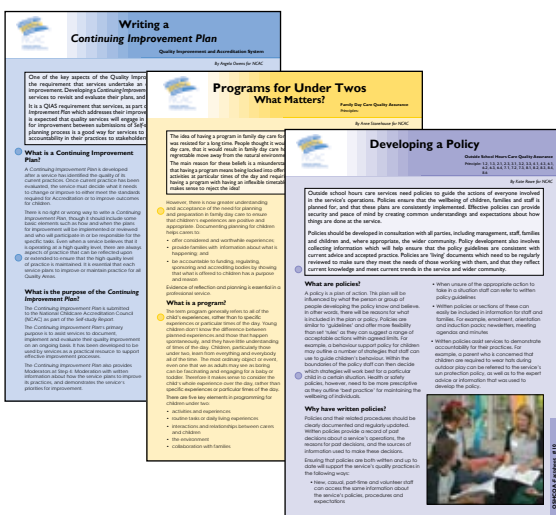
NCAC has developed a range of Quality Assurance *Factsheets* for services. Each *Factsheet* lists the Quality Areas and Principles to which it applies and provides child care professionals with explanations, practical examples, issues to consider, questions to ask and further reading to assist them in providing quality child care.

There are currently 10 *Factsheets* available for outside school hours care and long day care services, and 15 *Factsheets* available for family day care services. The *Factsheets* cover a range of topics that address aspects of quality practice in ways that are relevant to specific service types.

All *Factsheets* are available as a free download from NCAC's website.

Complimentary copies of *Factsheets* are sent to services upon registration and to family day care carers who have joined NCAC's mailing list. *Factsheets* are also available to purchase as part of the *Information Packs* available from the Online Store or by completing a *Publications Order Form*.

Family day care carers wishing to join NCAC's mailing list can telephone NCAC on 1300 136 554 or e-mail qualitycare@ncac.gov.au



New Family Factsheets

NCAC is currently developing *Family Factsheets*, for release in 2008. These *Factsheets* are being developed to support families' understanding of quality issues and practices in child care, and why these are important for positive outcomes for children. Topics covered will include preparing for child care and managing transitions from child care to school. The *Family Factsheets* will be available for download from NCAC's website in early 2008.

Policy Development Guide

The NCAC *Policy Development Guide* has been designed to assist child care professionals to develop, source and write policies.

The *Guide* includes a range of NCAC *Policy Templates* that reflect the elements of an effective policy.

The following *Policy Templates* are now available:

- Behaviour Guidance
- Child Protection
- Clothing and Comfort
- Coordination Unit Support Visit
- Diversity and Equity
- Employment of Child Care Professionals
- Food Safety
- Grievance and Complaints Management
- Healthy Eating
- Hygiene and Infection Control
- Illness
- Immunisation and Health Related Exclusion
- Medication
- Planning and Evaluating Children's Experiences
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Rest and Sleep
- Smoke Free Environments
- Sun Protection
- Supporting Children's Individual Needs
- The Role of Carers' Families in Family Day Care

The *Policy Templates* are to be used as a guide only. NCAC recognises and promotes the importance of individualised, service specific policies. Each service provides care and support to children and communities with differing needs, therefore, one service's policies and procedures will be different to another's.

To view and download the *Policy Development Guide* and sample *Policy Templates*, follow the links to the 'Resources' section of NCAC's website ■

Brain development and the life course - the importance of the early caretaking environment

By Professor Frank Oberklaid

In September 2007 the Quality Counts – Responsive and Effective Child Care Conference was held in Melbourne to celebrate 10 years of the Childcare & Children's Health program. Professor Frank Oberklaid, Director of the Centre for Community Child Health, delivered a keynote address entitled Brain development and the life course – the importance of the early caretaking environment. The following article is adapted from Professor Oberklaid's presentation.

Brain development research

In recent years brain development research has been conducted by researchers from varied professional and disciplinary backgrounds. The convergence of research from neurosciences, developmental psychology and economics has led to an understanding that the early years of a child's life impact critically upon a range of outcomes throughout the life course.

The three themes of brain development that research has focussed on are:

- Brain development
- The life course
- The economics of human capital formation

A multitude of studies published by researchers indicate that the environment experienced by a young child literally sculpts the brain, and establishes the trajectory for long term cognitive and social-emotional outcomes. It has become apparent that to improve outcomes in adult life, there needs to be a focus on these critical early years. This has profound implications for public policy, as it indicates that investing in early childhood is an important and sound economic investment for the future.

The neuroscience of brain development

The human brain is not mature at birth. Its development is the result of complex, dynamic transactions between 'nature and nurture', that is, between biology and the environment. Genes (nature) provide the base or foundation for the development of the brain, but after birth nurture is the critical force in how the brain develops. It is clear that the brain is changed by experiences.

Optimal brain development is dependant upon a positive environment, incorporating factors such as: good nutrition, good health and a nourishing and stimulating environment. Relationships in particular play a significant role in the development of the brain's social-emotional function.

Influencing the outcomes for brain development

Currently there is little that can be done to change the biology (nature) of the brain, although it is possible to reduce risks to the foetus, for example, by avoiding substance abuse during pregnancy. However, there is much that can be done to improve the environment (nurture) in which young children grow and develop.

Brains are built over time

The brain is sculpted by a person's early experiences which determine the development of neural circuits, known as 'synapses'. Brain architecture and skills are built in a hierarchical 'bottom-up' sequence. Foundations are therefore important, as higher level circuits are built on lower level circuits. The development of higher order skills is much more difficult if the lower level circuits are not wired properly.

The ability of the brain to be moulded decreases over time, and brain circuits stabilise, meaning that it is much harder to alter brain architecture at a later life stage. It is biologically and economically more efficient to support the optimal development of the brain during a child's early years than to try to resolve problems that may arise later in life due to dysfunctional brain development. There is constant 'pruning' of brain circuits that are not used, which highlights the concept of developmental windows or critical periods during early brain development.



The impact of relationships on brain development

Nurturing and responsive relationships build healthy brain architecture, providing a strong foundation for children's learning, behaviour and health. The relationship a young child has with their caregivers literally sculpts the brain, and determines the development of brain circuits.

It is therefore essential that child care settings promote consistent, nurturing relationships between child care professionals and children in which each child's needs are recognised and responded to sensitively.

Stress and brain development

When children do not experience protective relationships with their caregivers, their stress hormones can increase to high levels. This impairs cell growth, interferes with the formation of healthy neural circuits and disrupts brain architecture.

While some stress is a normal and important aspect of every child's experience and development, high and ongoing levels of stress, where children are not supported by warm and consistent relationships with their caregivers, lead to negative outcomes.

The range of stress responses and their impact upon brain development can be identified as follows.

Positive Stress

A moderate and transient stress response which results in mild increases in stress hormone levels and short lived increases in heart rate. Positive stress responses may occur as the result of encountering new people or situations, dealing with frustration and adult limit setting and the pain of a minor fall or injection. Positive stress is an important part of healthy development, and occurs in the context of stable and supportive relationships.

Tolerable Stress

These are stress responses that can disrupt brain architecture, but are buffered by relationships with caregivers that are supportive and facilitate children's adaptive coping skills. These stress responses may be caused by the death or serious illness of a loved one, parent divorce, witnessing a frightening event, major trauma or illness and natural disaster. Tolerable stress responses are generally limited to a short period of time, giving the brain opportunity to recover from the potentially damaging effects of the stress response.

Problems in childhood

- Child abuse and neglect
- Vulnerable school readiness
- Poor literacy and school achievement
- Mental health problems - Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), conduct disorders, aggressive and anti-social behaviour
- Problems with communication and social interaction
- Obesity



Problems in adult life

- Mental health problems
- Family violence and aggressive/anti-social behaviour
- Crime
- Poor literacy
- Welfare dependency
- Substance abuse
- Obesity and related problems

Toxic Stress

Toxic stress responses occur as the result of strong and prolonged activation of the body's stress response, without the buffering protection of supportive relationships with caregivers. Toxic stress response can be triggered by extreme poverty, physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, severe maternal depression and family violence. Toxic stress disrupts brain architecture and leads to stress management systems that have a lower threshold of activation. This increases the risk of stress related physical and mental illness.

Early brain development impacts later life

The disruption of early brain architecture, resulting in disordered brain circuits, leads to problems in childhood. There is evidence that many problems in adult life share their origins in pathways that begin in childhood.

Implications for policy

There is a need for increased government expenditure to address the challenges of the problems experienced in childhood and adult life. However, in the long term, addressing problems later in life is not sustainable: there will never be sufficient resources available, and treating established problems is often difficult, expensive and ineffective. It is therefore essential that policy focus on prevention, by investing in the most critical brain development period that occurs during a child's early years.

What are the answers?

There needs to be a major shift in public policy that focuses not just on treatment, but also on prevention and early intervention as priorities. There is evidence from successful demonstration that early intervention works by pre-empting and resolving problems early on. Investing in the healthy development of children also has long term benefits not only for the individual but for society as a whole. Studies show that early, effective intervention can lead to positive future economic outcomes.

Early childhood education and care is central to policy and initiatives that can make a significant difference to children and their life course, with the primary focus being on the quality of relationships between young children and their caregivers.



Child care

Child care services should be regarded as valuable early learning environments rather than predominantly as 'child minding' services. They need to be universally accessible to everyone and in particular to disadvantaged children and families. The cost and availability of child care should not be a barrier to accessibility, and it is important that families have options and are able to exercise choice in the child care they use.

It is vital that there is a strong focus on the provision of quality child care, particularly in relation to the expertise of caregivers, as well as in relation to physical amenities and the ratios of child care professionals to children. To promote the availability and employment of skilled professionals to work with children, there is a need to radically review the training, pay and conditions, and career structures available to child care professionals.

Rethinking child care

In light of what brain development research suggests, it is important that child care be refocused based on the following three sets of relationships:

- With children - requiring a focus on appropriate training for child care professionals and the provision of quality services
- With parents - requiring a focus on health promotion and early detection of problems
- With community - requiring a focus on child care as a platform or hub for linking families with the community

An overview of what is needed in child care

Macro:

- Public policies which promote accessibility and affordability
- Understanding that child care is more than child minding
- Investment in the training and professional development of child care professionals
- Commitment to the provision of quality child care programs
- Recognising the potential of child care as a 'platform' - that is, a source of information and modelling for parents and a hub of community network of early childhood services, where there are opportunities for early detection and referral of problems and potential risks

Micro:

- Expanded and strengthened quality framework for child care, such as the current Child Care Quality Assurance systems
- Training/education and upskilling of child care professionals
- Effective resources for child care professionals and families
- Establishing genuine partnerships between child care professionals and families in the care and education of children
- Establishing links with other professionals and community agencies

Relationships with children

The relationships that children experience with their caregivers are a key factor in brain development. Experiences in the early years influence each individual's developmental trajectory and life course. It is therefore essential that children have access to quality child care services that provide rich learning environments for developing brains, and that recognise the critical value of child care professionals who possess expertise in early childhood care and education.

Relationships with families

Child care services should play a central role in supporting families to ensure that children

experience positive home environments. This can be achieved through child care professionals providing families with credible advice and guidance on child development, behaviour and health, as well as by child care professionals modelling positive child care practices for parents.

Child care services also have an important role to play in the early detection of risk problems and risk factors for children, as well as in the referral of families to community agencies and other support professionals.

Relationships with the Community

Child care needs to be reconceptualised as an early learning environment, rather than primarily as a care environment, with a focus on the child care setting as a focal point from which families and children can be referred to other services such as medical and education services, as well as making links with other community agencies and resources such as libraries and recreation programs.

Conclusion

The research about the critical importance of the early years cannot be ignored. It is clear that children's early experiences impact significantly on brain development and brain architecture, which in turn has fundamental implications for children both in the short term, as well as throughout the life course. Promoting the healthy development of young children is both an ethical imperative and a sound economic and social investment.

Quality environments, both at home and out of home, where children are supported by positive and responsive relationships with caregivers, are crucial to optimum brain development. Reconceptualising child care to reflect these understandings is one of the most important policy initiatives currently needed in Australia ■

For further information, visit the Childcare and Children's Health website at www.rch.org.au/ccch, or e-mail Professor Oberklaid at frank.oberklaid@rch.org.au

Further reading

- Linke, P. & Fler, M. (2002). *Babies: good beginnings last forever*. ACT: Australian Early Childhood Association.
- Thompson, R.A. . (2001). *Development in the First Years of Life*. Retrieved 13 November, 2007, from http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol_11_no_1_no_photos.pdf

What happens after the Validation Visit?

Preparing for, and engaging in, a Validation Visit is usually a busy time for child care services, and child care professionals generally feel quite relieved when the Visit is over. However, it is important to remember that the Validation Visit is only one part of the continuous, five step CCQA process. While child care professionals should take time to reflect upon and celebrate their achievements during self-study and Validation, it is important that they maintain momentum as they progress through CCQA and continue to provide quality care for children.

Interpreting the completed Validation Report

Even though a service representative has the opportunity to discuss the completed *Validation Report* with the Validator toward the end of the Visit, child care professionals may find that they have further questions or concerns regarding the *Report* when they examine it more thoroughly following the Visit. It is important to remember that:

- The *Validation Report* is only one element of the data that is used to make an Accreditation Decision. Ratings from the *Self-study Report*, the *Validation Surveys* and Moderation also contribute to the Decision. It is therefore important not to make assumptions regarding the Accreditation Decision outcome based solely on information from the *Validation Report*
- Once the Validation Visit has been completed the *Validation Report* cannot be altered. Any additional comments that services wish to provide must be attached to the *Validation Evaluation Form*
- When considering the ratings recorded in the *Validation Report*, it is important to focus on the Satisfactory indicators as a priority. A Satisfactory indicator that has been observed as 'not occurring' is regarded as being Unsatisfactory. Focussing on these indicators first will help services to write relevant comments on the *Validation Evaluation Form* and/or to prioritise their continuing improvement plans

- It may be helpful to seek advice or clarification regarding the intent of indicators in the *Validation Report* that child care professionals have concerns about. This can be done by re-reading the related preamble and indicator information in the relevant *Quality Practices Guide* or discussing the indicator with others. Child care professionals can also contact a NCAC Child Care Adviser for clarification of any aspect of the CCQA standards

Completing the Validation Evaluation Form

Where possible, the service representative should provide clear, relevant comments in the *Validation Report* when they have the opportunity to do so during the Visit. Services are also encouraged to include comments about the Validation Visit and the Validator's conduct on the *Validation Evaluation Form*. This *Form* is given to the service representative during the Visit. It needs to be returned to NCAC within seven working days of the Visit or of the date on the letter included with NCAC's photocopy of the *Validation Report*. Services may attach up to two double sided A4 pages to the *Validation Evaluation Form* for additional comments.

The information that is provided on the *Validation Evaluation Form* assists Moderators to evaluate the overall quality of a service's practice and to identify patterns of quality care. Services that provide clear and detailed comments describing or supporting their practice assist the Moderator to develop a comprehensive understanding of service practice.

The Moderation process

Following the Validation Visit, the service proceeds to Moderation. During this step the Moderator analyses the information about the service's practices, using information from the *Self-study Report*, *Survey ratings*, *Validation Evaluation Form* and the *Validation Report*. The Moderator uses this analysis to:

- provide a rating of the service's practices for each Principle; and
- produce a written report, called the *Continuing Improvement Guide*, to assist services to plan for future quality improvements.

Maintaining momentum while awaiting the Accreditation Decision

It is understandable that child care professionals will experience a sense of relief when the Validation Visit has been achieved, as well as a sense of anticipation regarding the impending Accreditation Decision. However, services need to ensure that children continue to experience quality care during this period, and to avoid the temptation to move into a 'lull' period while they await their Decision. Some strategies that services may use to boost their momentum at this time include:

- Taking time as a team to celebrate what has been achieved so far and to 'debrief' about the Validation Visit - this might be done through service meetings or social occasions

- Electing a time soon after the Visit to discuss where the service plans to go next in terms of maintaining or improving practice. Discussing the completed *Validation Report* may assist this process
- Delegating achievable, short term tasks to individuals or small teams as part of the service's improvement plans
- Organising an inspiring or motivational professional development session to occur soon after the Visit has occurred

It is important that child care professionals use the time between their Validation Visit and receiving an Accreditation Decision to continue to reflect upon their strengths while planning and implementing improvement processes ■

Celebrating the holidays

By Angela Owens

As the year draws to a close, many services will be preparing to say goodbye to some children and families, while getting ready to welcome fresh faces in the New Year. This can also be a time when services are thinking about whether they should engage in end of year celebrations, and how they might do this inclusively.

Many celebrations and holidays are intrinsic and important aspects of an individual's cultural background and identity. Understanding and celebrating important events can be a great opportunity for services to enrich the lives and experiences of all stakeholders.

When deciding what and how the service might celebrate, child care professionals may find the following tips useful:

- Invite stakeholders to identify and explain the celebrations that are important in their culture. This information may be sought through enrolment/employment forms, daily informal discussions, meetings or surveys/questionnaires
- When celebrating cultural or religious events, it is important that there is a focus on what is meaningful to individual children and families

- Ask stakeholders about the aspects of specific celebrations they find acceptable. For example, a family may be happy for their child to be involved in Christmas cooking activities, but prefer that they not participate in Christmas music experiences
- Find out about celebrations that are relevant to the wider community and incorporate these, or facets of these into the service's program. It is important that such activities are linked appropriately to children's interests. Services may find out about the cultural and religious celebrations in their community through their local council or media sources, and may be able to use community resources to support their activities
- Child care professionals must ensure that all celebrations take into account the skills and abilities of children. Regardless of the event being celebrated, child care professionals must ensure that the security, safety and wellbeing of all children are overriding considerations
- Maintain ongoing, open communication with families and other service stakeholders to ensure that they are comfortable with the experiences being provided for children ■

Valuing male child care professionals

By Phillip Rowell

We need men in child and youth care work. We need men to serve as strong, positive role models to boys, and to challenge the images of manhood ... [to] send a message, not only to boys, but to girls and to society as a whole, that real men care for others. (Winfield, 2005).

For some children, families and services, the employment of a male child care professional can be a new experience. Sometimes they can be curious or skeptical; why would a man want to care for children? Others will think the opposite and advocate that it is a wonderful affirmation of gender equality, equal opportunity and recognition of the importance of promoting positive role models.

For most services that employ a male child care professional there is a sense of partnership when women and men work together to build positive and trusting relationships with children and their families. The experience is rewarding and adds a new dimension to the provision of quality child care.

In 2001, only four per cent of the 68,000 child care professionals in Australia were men (recent figures suggest two per cent) while approximately 20 per cent of primary school teachers are male (ABS, 2001; Community Child Care, 2006; de Brito, 2007).

Despite these statistics there are dedicated, passionate and committed male child care professionals working with children. They are contributing to the diversity of children's services across a range of child care settings, although it may be more common for men to work in outside school hours care services. This is possibly due to the skills and interests of school age children and qualifications for staff reflecting social work, recreation or leisure requirements.

Valuing male role models

Child care services are representative of their communities and the broader society. Children and their families reflect many aspects of humanity which include culture, religion, language, additional needs and gender. Similarly, child care professionals represent the same diversity and depth of skills and knowledge, which reflects their beliefs, lifestyles and traditions.

Just as it is crucial to consider the cultural needs of children and their families, it is equally vital to recognise the importance of promoting and encouraging positive gender behaviours and modeling to girls and boys. One way this can be achieved is by the inclusion of male child care professionals with skills, practices and behaviours that reflect masculinity that can benefit a service's understanding of diversity.

Furthermore, male child care professionals who build trusting partnerships with children and their families, and work collaboratively with female colleagues, become a valuable resource for services. Male child care professionals can:

- Encourage children to develop their gender identity
- Promote respectful, harmonious relationships
- Initiate play and learning experiences which acknowledge the similarities and differences between genders
- Challenge stereotypes by promoting alternative images of masculinity which are not aggressive or unemotional
- Encourage families, especially fathers, to be more involved in the service's operations and support the role of fathers as important contributors to children's lives
- Advocate child care and education as a valued and worthwhile career path
- Reinforce that caring is a human response of which both men and women are capable

Understanding the challenges faced by men

While everyone needs to be treated equitably and fairly, it is also essential to recognise that how people interact with others, and why they do things in certain ways, is individual and may vary depending on their culture, lifestyle and gender.

Just as women may experience many challenges when entering male dominated professions such as medicine, journalism or law, male child care professionals also face challenges which are unique to them. This is often highlighted when men first choose child care as a career and face skepticism and



questioning, not only from society, but from family and friends.

For some male child care professionals, finding a balance between being perceived as an equal while wondering if their skills are as 'natural' as their female peers can be unsettling, even if the judgement is unintentional. When men are confronted with traditional attitudes or beliefs that question their ability to nurture and educate children it can devalue the importance of children experiencing the diversity of gender roles.

These attitudes often relate to cultural expectations and social norms that define nurturing as a predominantly feminine quality. In some cultures, the care of young children is the primary responsibility and role of women, where men may have little input in child rearing practices until children are much older. There are also many other social and historical influences which have evolved over time that have established beliefs about what are acceptable feminine and masculine practices.

When caring for children, men may encounter and deal with a number of issues daily that challenge their professional decisions and practices, and if not supported and understood by child care services, they can feel isolated and alone. Questioning attitudes or unsupportive strategies can also affect how male child care professionals develop their caregiving practices and influence how they build relationships with children. Men may believe they need to reflect behaviours attributed to male stereotypes to become accepted, such as implementing practices

which promote overtly masculine traits such as handshakes or 'high fives' instead of a hug.

Alternatively, skills such as carpentry or playing sport may automatically be assigned to men because it supports society's perceptions of masculinity. Male child care professionals may also be referred to as an authority figure when dealing with children's inappropriate behaviours, and be consequently perceived by children as a disciplinarian. Such actions reinforce masculine stereotypes of power or control, which contradicts the aim of planning children's experiences which promote gender equity and anti bias concepts.

Supporting men in their role

Children should have a variety of role models when they are growing up. If childcare and early education remain completely female dominated, children lose out on the contribution men can make and men lose out on a fulfilling career. (Jamieson, 2002).

While the inclusion of a male child care professional can be rewarding and positive, the challenge for some services is to understand some of the issues men face, and develop strategies to support and encourage them in their role. Services need to promote a culture that values each individual and embraces diversity and equality, which should be reflected in policies and practices that are developed in collaboration with all stakeholders.

Male child care professionals, along with their female colleagues, need to be supported by services so that children experience positive outcomes from observing men and women working together in harmony and sharing the responsibilities of caregiving. The following strategies may assist services in supporting male child care professionals:

Talk with male child care professionals about their values, goals, expectations, fears and concerns and develop strategies that support and encourage positive learning outcomes.

Network with other services that have had similar experiences and discuss strategies which ensure services remain equitable while meeting individual gender needs.

Consult with other child care professionals and external agencies for support and professional development opportunities or resources, which can assist in understanding the importance of gender equity in the workplace.

Develop and review the service's philosophy, policies and procedures to ensure that they reflect stakeholders' values and beliefs. When people express concern regarding men who care for children, discuss equal opportunity legislation and the procedures the service employs to promote child protection in relation to all adults, regardless of gender. For example, working with children checks and effective supervision.

Learn about the gender models in children's families, especially the role of fathers, and communicate to them the importance of their contribution to the child care experience. Establish a fathers' group to discuss how they can be involved in their children's experiences.

Provide a mentor for male child care professionals and students who can encourage and guide others through concepts of leadership and the importance of continued professional development.

Review caregiving practices which may be perceived as gender stereotyped such as nappy changing or carpentry, and redefine them as nurturing and learning skills and not feminine or masculine attributes.

Plan for professional development opportunities or family forums that discuss issues about the importance of respecting and celebrating gender diversity in the service.

For most male child care professionals, the decision to care for, and work with children is a conscious one. They may face skepticism from family, friends and society; they may face issues based on their gender which challenge them. However, male child care professionals choose the role because, like their female colleagues, they are passionate and committed to making a difference to children's lives, which is an attribute both men and women can share ■

References and further reading

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NCAC news

CCQAS Update

The second round of consultation on the Draft *Guide to Standards* closed on 31 October 2007. Thank you to all the individuals and organisations that provided feedback. This feedback is currently being considered and will inform the development of the Child Care Quality Accreditation System (CCQAS).

Child care professionals are encouraged to regularly visit the following websites for updated information on the development of the CCQAS:

FaCSIA – www.facsia.gov.au

NCAC – www.ncac.gov.au

Services are reminded to continue using the current *Quality Practices Guides* and related documents until further notice.

Putting Children First Reader's survey

The September 2007 issue of *Putting Children First* included a survey inviting feedback about the NCAC newsletter, website, *Policy Templates* and other resources. NCAC is currently compiling the results of this survey and will report on the outcomes early next year. Thank you to everyone who completed the survey. Your feedback will inform the support NCAC provides to services participating in CCQA.

Enrolment information for families

Many services have contacted NCAC requesting information about CCQA to include in enrolment information packages for families. NCAC produces a number of materials that services may wish to insert in information packages. All NCAC materials can be ordered through NCAC's Online Store (www.ncac.gov.au) or by submitting a *Publications Order Form*. See page 6 for more information about NCAC resources.

Office closure

The NCAC office will be closed from **25 December 2007** and will reopen on **2 January 2008**. The NCAC Board and staff would like to extend season's greetings to all child care professionals, children and families.

Changing contact details?

From time-to-time services may need to update their contact details held by NCAC. This usually involves a change of the contact person or phone number of the service.

NCAC is unable to change contact details over the telephone or by e-mail. If you need to change your service's contact details, please forward NCAC this information in writing to NCAC on your service's official letterhead and signed by an authorised person. This information can be sent to NCAC by facsimile (02 8260 1901) or by post.

NCAC records will be updated on receipt of this advice. If you have any further questions, please contact NCAC on 02 8260 1900 or 1300 136 554.

Contribute to *Putting Children First*

NCAC has received positive feedback regarding the service profile and case study articles published in *Putting Children First*.

Many services have found these articles valuable in offering informative insights into how other services implement quality practices and innovative and programs.

If your service is interested in being profiled, or you would like to write an article for *Putting Children First*, please contact us by: e-mail at pcf@ncac.gov.au or telephone: 02 8260 1900 or 1300 136 554.

NCAC also welcomes your suggestions for *Putting Children First* articles.

Resource reviews

By Phillip Rowell

Skilled dialogue: Strategies for responding to cultural diversity in early childhood.

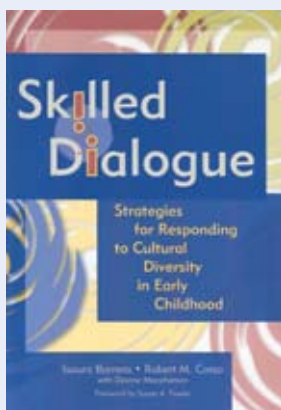
This resource provides child care professionals with the opportunity to engage in discussion and exploration of cultural diversity. The book is divided into three sections which address the:

- challenges of communicating cross culturally with stakeholders;
- process of developing an understanding of skilled dialogue; and
- development of practices and documentation tools which can assist in creating positive responses to cultural diversity.

This resource introduces the concepts of 'anchored understanding of diversity' and '3rd space', which can be broadly understood as thinking about culture from different perspectives.

The authors discuss how people often perceive diversity as a personal or group characteristic of a culture instead of the interactions and relationships which occur between people. They explain how diversity is dependent upon a range of variables, some of which are clearly identifiable such as traditions and customs, while others are more subtle.

Practitioners are encouraged to think 'outside the square' when considering cultural differences and the perceived stereotypes or cultural roles.



This resource is useful for child care professionals who aspire to understand the needs of different stakeholders and improve their understanding of cultures ■

Barrera, I., Corso, R.M., & MacPherson, D. (2003). *Skilled dialogue: Strategies for responding to cultural diversity in early childhood*. Baltimore, Md: P.H. Brookes Publishing.

Just discover! Connecting young children with the natural world.

This 'hands on', easy to read book, discusses the shift towards child care environments that reflect an urbanised society which increasingly uses artificial textures.

The authors discuss how the play that children initiate and their play experiences are affected when the natural world is removed from their learning environments, influencing their perception of the world and their relationship with animals and plants.

The resource also challenges children's understanding of the world and aims to provide children with experiences and opportunities to connect with, explore, and discover their natural environment by developing analytical thinking and cognitive skills.

The chapters include practical experiences for animal and plant science, human growth, and conservation and recycling, which are appropriate for children aged from birth to eight years. However, some older school aged children may be interested in taking part or expanding upon experiences to meet their needs.

The book also discusses several important 'best practice' guidelines, which can assist services when planning environmental experiences. For example, by focussing on children's interests and allocating plenty of time for children to complete a task.

There is an extensive list of references and websites, along with the contact details of organisations such as museums, zoos, aquariums and environmental agencies in each Australian state and territory ■



Young, T., & Elliot, S. (2003) *Just discover! Connecting young children with the natural world*. Croydon, Vic: Tertiary Press.

Website reviews

By Lauren Boyle

Raising Children Network www.raisingchildren.net.au



The Raising Children Network website provides practical tools and up to date information on child health, safety, nutrition and learning for children from newborns to eight years of age.

Commissioned by the Australian government, the website is a non-commercial online parenting resource designed to provide expert information that is impartial. The site is divided into age specific sections, allowing users to form an understanding of children's behaviour; connection and communication; development; health and daily care; nutrition; play and learning; and safety and sleep as they mature.

The website also provides downloadable film clips and 'parenting in pictures' factsheets designed to increase understanding of topics such as changing a nappy, breastfeeding, recognising signs of serious illness and childhood obesity. In addition, the site has a local neighbourhood search function to locate local playgroups, pharmacies and child support services where search results are returned on an interactive map of your neighbourhood.

In the 'grown-ups' section, parents and carers can read about topics such as family matters, pregnancy and work and family. This section recently expanded to include an area on disability, which addresses common issues and concerns that families may face when they have a child with a disability.

The Raising Children Network website can assist services by improving knowledge and understanding of children's continuing developments and health needs. It is also a useful resource to refer families who have questions about their child's development ■

The Centre for Community Child Health

Early Childhood Connections www.rch.org.au/econnections

(CCCH) Early Childhood Connections website provides links for practitioners who work with young children and their families.

As part of the celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the Childcare and Children's Health program, the Early Childhood Connections website was updated to present information on current policies and practices in a modern and user friendly format.

The website is divided into three resource sections: Links Directory, Publications and Conferences, and a forum section due to become available in late 2007.

The Links Directory provides links to various organisations and documents that are related to child health. The links are grouped under broad categories including: child development, child health, family and community, services for children and families, advocacy, service delivery, government and research and are further catalogued by sub-categories.

The Publications section features the *Childcare and Children's Health* publication, which is produced quarterly in conjunction with Johnson & Johnson and is distributed to long day care and family day care services with *Putting Children First*. Factsheets are also available for families. Both are free to download and the parent factsheets are available in a range of community languages. There are also links to educational material from Johnson & Johnson and publications from the Centre for Community Child Health.

The site is useful for child care professionals and families who are seeking information about current developments in children's health. Professionals will be particularly interested in being able to access current Australian research into early childhood development and behaviour ■

NCAC Annual Report Extract 2006/2007

(For the complete report, please visit the NCAC website)



June McLoughlin

Chair



Denise Taylor

Chief Executive Officer

NCAC faced many new and exciting challenges during 2006/2007, working in collaboration with all stakeholders to support the provision of quality care in Australian children's services.

NCAC worked to implement several important changes to the CCQA systems during 2006/2007, including:

- Unannounced Validation Visits
- Staff Validators
- Spot Checks of Accredited services
- The development of an integrated Child Care Accreditation System

These changes are designed to deliver a more robust and reliable Quality Assurance process and to improve the quality of care provided for every child in child care every day. New processes will ensure greater consistency and efficiency in the conduct of Validation Visits and enhance the validity of Accreditation Decisions for all services.

During 2006/2007, NCAC developed policies and procedures to enable the implementation of unannounced Validation Visits, Spot Checks and the introduction of Staff Validators. NCAC worked with child care services across Australia to ensure a smooth transition as these changes were implemented.

NCAC began the recruitment of staff Validators from 1 July 2006, unannounced Validation Visits commenced in September 2006 and the first Spot Checks were conducted in October 2006. The response of services to these changes has been positive and NCAC would like to thank all services for their ongoing support and commitment to the provision of quality care.

NCAC is currently working to support all services participating in the CCQA systems to understand and prepare for the implementation of the Child Care Quality Accreditation System. NCAC looks forward to working with child care services across Australia as we develop and implement this initiative.

As an organisation, NCAC believes strongly in continuous quality improvement and has been working to evaluate and improve our practices. During 2006, NCAC began working towards achieving AS/NZS ISO 9001:2000 certification and all NCAC staff were involved in the process of identifying opportunities for improvement, assessing risks, documenting procedures and implementing action plans. In January 2007, NCAC became Accredited as a Quality Endorsed Company.

In addition to becoming a Quality Endorsed Company, NCAC was recognised as an Employer of Choice for Women 2007, by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency. We are committed to providing a fair and equitable workplace for all men and women employed at NCAC.

The *NCAC Annual Report 2006/2007* is a summary of the challenges and achievements that NCAC has met during the past twelve months. We thank all stakeholders who have supported and continue to support NCAC and the CCQA systems.

ISO Certification

During 2006, NCAC worked with SAI Global to implement the AS/NZS 9001:2000 quality management standards.



NCAC Management demonstrated its commitment to ISO by allocating resources and planning a schedule for the development and implementation of a Quality Management System. All NCAC staff were involved in the process of identifying opportunities for improvement, assessing risks, documenting procedures and implementing action plans.

All phases were completed on schedule in the 2005/2006 period. At the end of 2006, NCAC undertook a quality audit and achieved Accreditation as a Quality Endorsed Company in January 2007.

NCAC is committed to continuous improvement of our quality management practices and will complete surveillance audits every six months as a requirement of certification. The first audit was successfully completed in May 2007.

NCAC Strategic Plan 2007-2010

During 2006/2007, NCAC began development of a new strategic plan. The *NCAC Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010* outlines a revised Guiding Principle, Vision, Mission as follows:

Guiding Principle:

Putting Children First

Vision:

Quality experiences and positive outcomes for all children

Mission:

To set standards to improve the quality of child care and accredit services that meet the standards

The *Strategic Plan* also details three outcomes which will guide NCAC operations:

Outcome 1:

Successful implementation of Child Care Accreditation System

Outcome 2:

Our business structure and systems are responsive and sustainable

Outcome 3:

NCAC is the recognised leader in quality assurance in child care in Australia

The *NCAC Strategic Plan 2007 - 2010* will be operational from July 2007.

Progress of Services in the CCQA systems 2006/2007

FDCQA Statistics at a Glance

For the period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007:

- 18 new registrations and 19 changes of registration were recorded
- 52 FDCQA *Self-study Reports* were received
- 110 FDCQA Validation Visits took place
- 140 FDCQA reports completed at Moderation

OSHCQA Statistics at a Glance

For the period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007:

- 321 new registrations and 120 changes of registration were recorded
- 1,205 OSHCQA *Self-study Reports* were received
- 1,382 OSHCQA Validation Visits took place
- 1,393 OSHCQA reports completed at Moderation

QIAS Statistics at a Glance

For the period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007:

- 421 new registrations and 463 changes of registration were recorded
- 2,150 QIAS *Self-study Reports* were received
- 2,024 QIAS Validation Visits took place
- 2,156 QIAS reports completed at Moderation

Family Day Care Quality Assurance Progress of Services as at 30 June 2007

Accredited	274	89.3%
Not Accredited	33	10.7%
Total Through 5 Steps	307	
New Services	19	
Total Registered Services	326	

Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance Progress of Services as at 30 June 2007

Accredited	2,080	86.5%
Not Accredited	325	13.5%
Total Through 5 Steps	2,405	
New Services	807	
Total Registered Services	3,212	

Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Progress of Services as at 30 June 2007

Accredited	4,208	92.4%
Not Accredited	348	7.6%
Total Through 5 Steps	4,556	
New Services	804	
Total Registered Services	5,360	

Moderators

Moderators are qualified professionals with considerable experience in child care service delivery and/or in the delivery of training or in research.

Moderator Refresher Training took place in February and March 2007 for each of the CCQA systems. No initial Moderator Training took place during 2006/2007.

The NCAC Moderation and Accreditation Team provides regular support to Moderators. Performance feedback is provided regarding the analysis of Moderation documents and the completion of the *Continuing Improvement Guide* for services.

Endorsed QA Trainers

The NCAC Quality Assurance (QA) Training and Support Program has delivered NCAC QA Trainer Training throughout Australia, and initiated a system for the endorsement and support of QA Trainers. As of 1 April 2007, 133 QA Trainers were endorsed by NCAC.

NCAC endorsement allows a QA Trainer to deliver training on CCQA processes using the NCAC *Endorsed QA Training Kit* to meet the needs of child care professionals working through each of the CCQA systems. Endorsed QA Trainers can use the NCAC Endorsed Trainer logo for advertising purposes and are listed on NCAC's website as an endorsed provider of QA training.

Validators

Validators are qualified and experienced child care professionals with recent child care experience.

From 1 July 2006 NCAC began directly employing Staff Validators on a contract or casual basis to undertake Validation Visits. NCAC continues to work with existing peer Validators while recruiting Staff Validators.

A total of 1 FDCQA, 6 OSHCOA and 9 QIAS Validator Training sessions took place during 2006/2007.

Validators can access support from NCAC's Validation Team during and outside of office hours.

Extensive performance feedback is provided to Validators regarding comments from *Validation Evaluation Forms*, Moderator feedback, and issues relating to comments and ratings provided in *Validation Reports* completed by the Validator.

Feedback received by NCAC suggests that the professionalism and consistency of staff Validators are supported by the field. For more information please refer to the *Validation Evaluation Form Analysis* available on the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au).

Validation Evaluation

Consistent evaluation of the CCQA systems was undertaken by NCAC throughout 2006/2007. Part of this process included the annual analysis of *Validation Evaluation Forms* received from services having received both announced and unannounced Validation Visits during October and November 2006.

NCAC received *Validation Evaluation Forms* from 86% of those services which had a Validation Visit during this period. A total of 535 services returned their *Validation Evaluation Forms*, comprising 18 family day care schemes, 229 outside school hours care services and 288 long day care centres. Over **95%** of services indicating that they were satisfied with their Validation Visit.

Those services which received an announced Validation Visit were asked to rate their Validator across a range of performance measures. On average, services rated the performance of their Validator as follows:

Performance of the Validator	
The Validator was punctual	92%
The Validator was courteous	99%
The Validator was prepared	99%
The Validator was objective	95%

Changes to the CCQA Systems

On 18 May 2006 the Hon Mal Brough MP, Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA), announced several important changes to the CCQA systems as follows:

- Unannounced Validation Visits;
- Staff Validators;
- Spot Checks of Accredited services; and
- The development of the integrated Child Care Accreditation System.

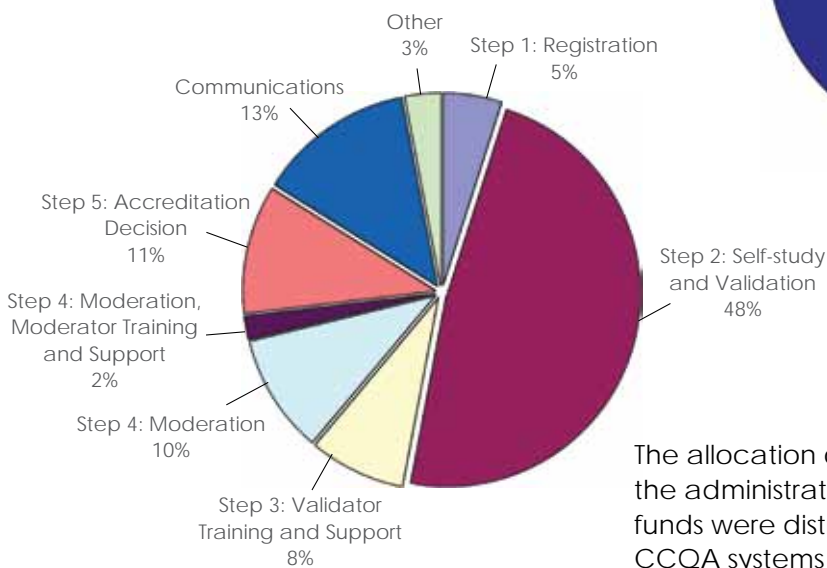
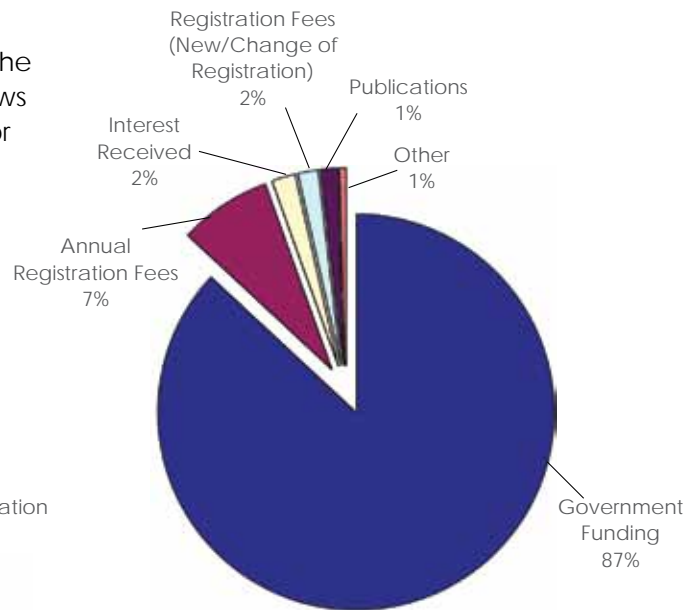
Each of these changes will strengthen the Quality Assurance process, and ensure that all children receive quality child care.

These changes had a significant impact on NCAC operations for the 2006/2007 financial year, as NCAC worked to implement each process and to ensure a smooth transition for services participating in the CCQA systems.

Services were kept informed of the implementation of these changes through written correspondence from NCAC, and through NCAC's quarterly newsletter *Putting Children First*.

Financial Overview

During 2006/ 2007, 87.03% of NCAC's total income came from funding provided by the Australian Government. The following shows a breakdown of NCAC income sources for 2006/2007.



The allocation of these funds goes directly towards the administration of the CCQA systems. These funds were distributed across the 5 steps of the CCQA systems in 2006/2007 as shown.

Factsheet for Families

Starting Child Care

Starting child care is often an exciting and new adventure for children and their families. Although the experience of starting and settling into child care will differ for each individual, there are some general strategies and information that all families may find helpful during this process.

Share information with child care professionals

Each service uses a variety of communication strategies to suit the needs of families using the service. It is important that families and child care professionals seek opportunities to discuss the child's experiences and interests. This can be done through:

- Informal conversations when children arrive and leave
- Daily diaries/communication books
- Telephone conversations
- Communication boards/signs for information about things such as individual children's eating, sleeping, nappy changing/toileting during the day
- Information and activity displays describing the experiences that children have been involved in

Useful information about starting child care

- Many children experience some anxiety about separating from their parents or caregivers when they start care. This is normal, and may take a little time to resolve depending upon the child's age and temperament
- When children first attend care they are often susceptible to illnesses. This is because their immune system has not yet developed to cope with exposure to the large number of other children that they come into contact with in care
- Children may do or eat things that they would not normally at home, as they respond to the new environment and to modelling by other adults and children

Saying goodbye

- Work with the child care professionals at the service, preferably before commencing care, to plan strategies to assist you and your child to manage separation. For example, the child may have a special toy or comfort item, or the service might have a 'waving goodbye' window that can be incorporated into the separation ritual
- Spend some unhurried time with your child at the service, and then say 'goodbye' calmly and confidently, reassuring your child that you will collect them later
- Leave when you say you are going to leave. Continuing to stay for 'one more minute' can increase your and your child's anxiety
- Always say goodbye to your child. While it may be tempting to leave quietly, while your child is happily engaged in play, this can cause children to feel anxious and distrustful

Would you like information about how your child is settling

To find out how your child is settling into our service, please speak to:

Telephone:



* NCAC is currently developing Family *Factsheets*, on a range of topics including preparing for child care. Family *Factsheets* will be available to download from the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au) in early 2008.