

**Presentation Title:** Supporting a Commitment to Quality

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The National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) is responsible for administering Child Care Quality Assurance for children's services registered to participate across Australia. These services currently include 314 family day care schemes, 3326 outside school hours care services and 5596 long day care services.

As the numbers would suggest with 9236 services registered with NCAC, the administration of Child Care Quality Assurance is a major activity for the organisation. However NCAC is also committed to assisting children's services and child care professionals deliver quality child care and helping families make informed decisions when selecting a child care provider. In this way NCAC hopes to achieve its vision for quality experiences and positive outcomes for all children.

### **Information and Support Pathways**

NCAC uses a number of avenues to provide information about Child Care Quality Assurance and support to families, services and child care professionals:

- Presentations and workshops
- Information booths at Pregnancy, Babies and Children's Expos and conferences
- Printed publications and resources
- Telephone support
- Endorsement program
- Website
- Reports and statistics

### **Support for Children's Services**

NCAC uses each of the pathways described above to deliver information to all registered services to support their quality improvement processes.

As services register to participate in Child Care Quality Assurance they receive copies of the following publications required to undertake the self-study and continuing improvement process:

- The *Handbook* contains background information and an overview of the steps involved in the Quality Assurance process.

- The *Quality Practices Guide* is the primary resource for management, child care professionals participating in the Quality Assurance process. The *Quality Practices Guide* details the Quality Areas and Principles of quality care. Each Quality Area and Principle is summarised in a Preamble which describes its context and intent. Quality Indicators are provided for each standard of practice: Satisfactory, Good Quality and High Quality. Services are responsible for designing their own self-study process against the standards outlined in the *Quality Practices Guide*.
- The *Quality Practices Guide Supplementary Resource* provides reflective questions which can assist child care professionals with self-study by encouraging reflection on practice.
- The *Self-study Report* is the working document to be used by services to rate service practice against each Principle and record evidence of practices across the Quality Areas. The *Self-study Report* is completed by the service and submitted to NCAC at the required time.

As they begin each step of the CCQA process, services also receive the relevant *Support Document* designed to provide information that will assist them in their progression through the five steps of Child Care Quality Assurance.

The NCAC Website ([www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au)) provides children's services with access to additional copies of publications including translated copies of the *Handbook*, and translated Preambles from the FDCQA *Quality Practices Guide*. Services can also use the online store to purchase brochures and other resources that can assist them to explain the CCQA process to families.

An online training module for each of Quality Assurance systems is a useful tool to support child care professionals become familiar with the steps involved in the Quality Assurance process.

NCAC encourages services and child care professionals to telephone and speak with a Child Care Adviser for support as they progress through Quality Assurance. Child Care Advisers are practitioners with many years experience working in children's services and offer practical suggestions about involving stakeholders in the Self-study and Continuing Improvement process and completing the Self-study Report. Child Care Advisers are also available to provide support to services before, during and after their Validation Visit or Spot Check.

With the aim of providing greater consistency and accuracy of information about CCQA to services NCAC introduced an endorsement program in 2005. Since that time NCAC has selected, trained and endorsed more than 100 Quality Assurance (QA) Trainers to deliver training on the processes associated with the 5 Steps of Child Care Quality Assurance. Services can be confident that training provided by QA Trainers using the NCAC *Endorsed QA Training Kit* will be current and accurate. Contact details for NCAC Endorsed QA Trainers are available on the NCAC website.

## **Supporting Quality Practice**

A particular focus of NCAC's work is supporting and strengthening the practice of child care professionals and services in their work with families to bring about the best outcomes for children. NCAC endeavours to assist child care professionals deliver quality child care by providing advice, support and resources. NCAC also encourages services to use the support and training available through the Professional Support Coordinators in each state and territory to enhance their capacity to provide quality programs for children and their families.

As discussed earlier, publications such as the *Quality Practices Guide* and the *Supplementary Resource* have been designed to guide service practice and encourage reflection on child care practice. Child Care Advisers can also assist child care professionals

to understand the intent of particular indicators and to discuss if practices described by the service are meeting what is required.

Additional resources to support quality practice include:

- *Putting Children First*, NCAC's quarterly newsletter, includes articles to support quality practices. For example, recent articles include strategies for including children's perspectives in the program (March 2008), supporting children's literacy skills (June 2008) and their creative expression (September 2008).
- A series of *Factsheets* have been developed for each service type to assist services progressing through CCQA. Each factsheet provides practical examples, explanations, issues to consider, questions to ask and further information that will help services to continue to provide quality child care.
- The NCAC *Policy Development Guide* has been produced to assist services to identify, develop, review and evaluate the policies indicated in the relevant *Quality Practices Guide*.
- Links on NCAC's website provide child care professionals with access to information about child care practice and information from recognised authorities in a number of areas

NCAC produces a number of reports each year which detail services progress through Child Care Quality Assurance. For examples the *Quality Trends Reports* completed in June and December each year identifies key areas in the CCQA systems that services are performing well in and areas that contribute to services receiving a Not Accredited status. Services may find it useful to review the Principles and indicators which most often contribute to services receiving a Not Accredited Decision and reflect on the ways in which their own practices meet the standard required for Accreditation.

NCAC has also developed a number of resources to support services to provide information about quality childcare and CCQA to families. The resources are available from the online store and include:

- The *Quality Assurance (QA) Communication Poster* which can assist services to communicate about the five steps of QA and encourage family involvement in the QA process. The poster is dry erase, allowing it to be used repeatedly providing a whiteboard marker is used to write on it.
- Quality Care Poster Sets for each system which contain 14 - A3 size posters that address quality practices in long day care, family day care and outside school hours care services. They can be used to assist communication with families about what the service is doing everyday to provide quality outcomes for the children in their care.
- Brochures which explain NCAC's role, outline the CCQA process and describe the ways in which families can contribute
- Each issue of *Putting Children First* includes a one-page Factsheet for Families. The Factsheet can be photocopied and used by services to communicate with families about quality practices at the service.

## Supporting Families

Families are often anxious about leaving their children in care and confused about the criteria they should use to make a decision about which service is right for them and their children. Families' anxieties can be reduced when they are provided with comprehensive information about the types of children's services that are available in their local area and have an understanding about what they should expect to find in a quality children's service.

NCAC is keen to help families learn more about quality child care and maintains a register of long day care centres, outside school hours care services and family day care schemes on its website. Families are able to find the contact details and Accreditation status of child care services throughout Australia.

NCAC also provides information on the role of families in quality child care and points to consider when looking for a child care service. A brochure is available in English and 24 community languages and similar information is provided in English only as a pocket guide.

*Family Factsheets* provide families with information about aspects of child care, including advice and tips that will assist families to prepare for child care and to recognise quality child care practice. *Family Factsheets* are available for download from the NCAC website in both English and 13 community languages.

Parents, grandparents and other family members regularly telephone NCAC to ask questions about child care. NCAC has compiled the most frequently asked questions from families and NCAC's Child Care Advisers have prepared responses on the website.

Families with concerns about the quality of care provided by a long day care, family day care or outside school hours care service are encouraged to discuss these issues with the service. Because NCAC recognises that most complaints or concerns are best dealt with and resolved directly with the service.

If families have raised concerns about a quality issue with a service, but their concerns remain unresolved NCAC will provide information about formally lodging a complaint.

Families often telephone NCAC with questions about regulations for children's services, fees or child care benefit entitlements. While NCAC is not able to offer advice about these issues, Child Care Advisers are able to provide contact details for the relevant government agencies that can. Similar information is available through links on the NCAC website.

## **Future Strategies to Support Children's Services and Families**

In 2007 the *Putting Children First Reader Survey* was conducted to gain feedback from stakeholders on *Putting Children First*, *Factsheets*, NCAC resources and publications and the NCAC website, to assist with future improvement and development of resources.

An analysis of the feedback gathered from the survey will inform the development of new Support Documents, future articles in *Putting Children First*, new *Factsheets* for services and families, and a number of enhancements to the website to improve usability.

From the comments made by services on the phone to Child Care Advisers, at meetings and conferences and on *Validation Evaluation Forms* NCAC has also identified a need to provide further assistance to services with the self-study process on an individual basis. This need is particularly strong in relation to new services, Not Accredited services and services that have changed ownership or management or have few or no staff with any experience of the Child Care Quality Assurance process.

In response NCAC has been working on the following projects which will be implemented over the next few months:

### **Telephone Support for New and Not Accredited Services**

Child Care Advisers will contact newly registered services to establish a positive relationship with the child care professionals working there and to provide guidance about how to begin the self-study and continuous improvement process.

Not Accredited services will also be contacted and offered support and guidance in understanding the standards and requirements for Accreditation. NCAC would also refer the service to the relevant agencies, such as their Professional Support Coordinator to assist them in implementing improved practices.

### **Endorsed Facilitator Program**

NCAC will extend its endorsement program to include training and endorsing suitably qualified child care professionals to provide support and guidance to children's services registered with NCAC and progressing through the self-study and continuing improvement process.

The underlying intent of the Self-study Support Facilitator Program is to assist children's services to develop strategies to help them reflect on and evaluate their child care practices, policies and activities.

It is NCAC's aim that the Self-study Support Facilitator would:

- assist the service to identify the existing strengths of the service and facilitate a continuing improvement process to build on these strengths;
- facilitate a process with the service that considers its uniqueness;
- guide and assist services to develop strategies to conduct a self-evaluation and continuing improvement process using NCAC publications and resources;
- assist the service to develop strategies to involve all stakeholders in its self evaluation and continuous improvement processes; and
- assist the service to develop a culture of learning and continuous improvement that incorporates self reflection strategies into daily practice.

### **Resource Kit for Educators and Students**

NCAC receives numerous requests from child care professionals, students and educators for information and resources to support their understanding of the CCQA systems. A large number of these requests come from students completing nationally recognised qualification through universities, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges or other Registered Training Organisations (RTO).

NCAC intends to develop resource kits that would instruct educators and students regarding standards for quality child care, the processes of CCQA and NCAC's role in administering the CCQA systems. They would also provide information about the ways in which NCAC can resource and support educators, students and the children's services field to understand and participate in the CCQA.

The development of resource kits for the educators and students in training institutions supports NCAC's goal to provide consistent and accurate information about the CCQA systems and would ensure that graduating students enter employment in children's services armed with a comprehensive understanding of CCQA.

## Contacting NCAC

Child care professionals and families who wish to contact a Child Care Adviser, or would like to be added to NCAC mailing list for *Putting Children First* can telephone NCAC on (02) 8260 1900 or 1300 136 554 or email at [qualitycare@ncac.gov.au](mailto:qualitycare@ncac.gov.au).

Publications and resources for family day care, long day care and outside school hours care services are available through the on-line store. Translated copies of NCAC publications can be downloaded from the website, [www.ncac.gov.au](http://www.ncac.gov.au).

Information about becoming an NCAC Endorsed QA Trainer and the contact details for QA Trainers in each state and territory are listed on NCAC's website.