



Self Guided Learning Package

Developing Policy For Your Service Outside School Hours Care



PsCTaS is a program of Lady Gowrie Tasmania. The Australian Government through the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA), funds the Professional Support Coordinator initiative as part of the Inclusion and Professional Support Program.

Self Guided Learning Packages

Welcome to the ***Community Child Care Victoria** Self-Guided Learning Package.

Self-Guided Learning Packages offer an alternative to attending training sessions and can be completed at your convenience in your own time. They are also a valuable resource for Directors/Coordinators wishing to undertake staff training in-house. This series of Learning Packages aims to develop skills and knowledge which will be valuable to you in providing quality child care programs.

Self-help Questions

Throughout the Package there are self-help questions. These are designed to enable the reader to reflect on the learning which has taken place and to encourage further exploration of the topic if questions remain unanswered.

Support and Assistance

PsCTas is available to support you/your staff while working through the package. Should you require assistance with any of the tasks within the package, or further information on the topic, please contact PsCTas:

P. **1800 647 718**

F. 62 306 839

E. psctas@gowrie-tas.com.au

W. www.psctas.org.au

***This Learning Package has been made available to PsCTaS by Community Child Care, PSC Victoria. All material is copyright to Community Child Care.**



Produced by
Community Child Care Victoria
funded by the Department of Families
and Community Services under the
In-service Training Project.

PsCTas

Developing Policy for your Service - OSHC

You have chosen to complete the **Developing Policy for Your Service - OSHC** Self-Guided Learning Package (updated 2003). This package provides you with an opportunity to learn about Philosophy, Goals, Policy and Procedures. You will gain some practical information on how to develop a policy document for your service.

A clear and concise policy document can ensure that your service reflects the diversity of needs and interests of the parents, staff and children involved in your service.

Successful completion and assessment of this package contributes to the following competencies from the nationally accredited Community Services Training Package:

CHCPOL2A Contribute to policy development

1.1 Relevant organisational and other policies are identified and assessed for their relevance and effectiveness to the organisation's objectives

CHCPOL4A Develop and implement policy

1.2 Appropriate research and consultation which will contribute to policy development is undertaken and documented in accordance with organisational policies and procedures

And addresses the following learning outcomes

- Identify areas to include in your service's policy
- Develop practical strategies for developing a policy

Introduction

Policy is a set of guidelines, which clearly states what the service will provide and how it will be provided. Policies should reflect the Philosophy of the service and provide clear, agreed and consistent ways of operating the service in order to achieve the stated goals.

Why develop policy?

1. A clear and concise policy document establishes the foundation for decision-making

Policy enables the management body, or those responsible for the operation of the service to make decisions which reflect the needs and interests of parent users, and ensures that decisions are not made on the basis of the personal views or opinions of a few. Policy provides continuity in decision-making.

Policy ensures that your service is able to respond to specific matters in a coordinated and consistent way. It avoids ad hoc responses and promotes sound decision making.

2. Policy communicates clear expectations

It gives parents who may be interested in using the service a clear indication of what they can expect. It also indicates to current and potential staff members what approach will be

expected of them, and gives them clear and concise information about the values and beliefs of the service.

3. Policy is an important monitoring and planning tool for your service.

It provides a benchmark against which service operation can be evaluated and reviewed. It also provides a mechanism for service planning to be put into practice as it determines the direction of your service.

4. Effective policy development should reflect community needs.

This includes all people involved in the service: the children, staff, parents, sponsoring and/or managing body and the local community. Consequently, the development of policy should be a consultative process, and demonstrate that the service is responsive to community need.

5. External requirements impact on the policy needed for your service

Policy development is seen as a central obligation under the Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance*, and is required under National Standards for Outside School Hours Care*. In both documents, policy is regarded as a key ingredient for the establishment of services which meet sector benchmarks of quality, community participation and inclusiveness.

* See References and Resources sheet for further details

What is contained in a policy document?

A policy document contains:

- a philosophy and goals
- key policy areas and statements
- and procedures regarding the operation of the service

Philosophy

A statement of philosophy outlines the purpose and the aims of the service. It is a statement that reflects the beliefs, attitudes and values that a service endeavours to encompass. It is essential to keep referring back to the philosophy and goals when developing policies to ensure that policies complement, and work toward, these agreed values and beliefs.

The Philosophy Statement needs to address the following questions:

- Who is the service there for?
- In a broad sense, what should the service try to offer the children, parents and staff who are involved in the service and the community surrounding it?

An Example of a Philosophy Statement.

The Green Valley Out of School Hours Program aims to provide a warm and caring environment for children which recognises the value of play and the importance of middle childhood. We aim to meet children's needs as individuals, and to be supportive of parents by meeting the variety of diverse needs they bring to the service.

Self Help Question 1

Considering the specific needs and features of your local community, write down the beliefs, values and attitudes which you think your service encompasses.

Goals

Once the service has developed a philosophy about their beliefs the next step is to determine what the service wants to achieve.

Some examples of goals that a service might set include:

- To provide a service which is flexible and responsive to community needs, and is supportive of families
- To provide a service which is affordable to families
- To create an environment that reflects the diverse social and cultural backgrounds of our society
- To encourage the development of children's independence, self-esteem and life skills
- To provide opportunities to meet children's individual needs and be responsive to the interests of children and their diverse backgrounds
- To promote non-discriminatory behaviour by providing a non-biased program based on inclusive practices

Self Help Question 2

Considering your local community needs and values, and with reference to the values identified in Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance and National Standards for Outside School Hours Care, develop some key goals which you think your service should aim to achieve.

PSC TaS

Key Policy Areas

A policy document can be divided into a range of broad, or key policy areas. It is recommended that services develop a range of policies to cover the following key policy areas:

- **Access to Care**
- **Administration**
- **Enrolments**
- **Fees**
- **Programming**
- **Behaviour Management**
- **Health and Safety**
- **Working with Families**
- **Staffing and Volunteers**
- **Management**
- **Facilities and Equipment**
- **Finances and Financial Management**

In so doing, you will also need to be aware of legislation and other regulatory and standards frameworks which impact on the policy requirements for your service.

Key documents which your service may need to refer to include:

- *Quality Practices Guide - Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance, National Childcare Accreditation Council, 2003
- *National Standards for Outside School Hours Care - Health and Community Services June 1995
- Department of Education Policy (Government Schools)
- Catholic Education Office and Catholic Education Commission - Policy and Implementation (Catholic Schools)
- Local Government policy (if sponsored /managed by Local Council)
- School Charter – Department of Education
- Schools of the Future document – Department of Education
- Relevant Privacy Legislation
- Food Safety Legislation
- Health Legislation
- Equal Opportunity/Anti-Discrimination Legislation
- Other relevant Local, State and Commonwealth Government Legislation

* See Resources and Reference page for further details

In identifying policy needed for your service, also consider the operational needs of your service, and the needs of the school and/or wider community in which your program operates.

Each key policy should have an encompassing statement that describes the service's attitude to that particular issue as well as reflecting the service philosophy and goals. Policy statements should be expressed simply and concisely. Policy statements need to convey what they mean and what they intend as clearly as possible.

Example key policy statement: Child Care Fees

“The Green Valley Out of School Hours Program provides a fee payment system that is affordable and accessible to all families and ensures the program maintains financial viability.”

These statements form the crucial framework around which procedures are developed.

Self Help Question 3

Choose a key policy area and develop a policy statement for that area.

Procedures

Policy statements can be open to interpretation about how they could be carried out; therefore it is necessary to develop procedures for implementing the policy. Procedures should be developed to support each policy area and to ensure staff and parents know how they will be implemented on a day-to-day basis. For example, with the key policy on fees, it is important to include procedures on such matters as:

- Fee structure
- Payment of fees
- Fees for permanent/casual bookings (some services charge a reduced fee for children who are booked into the program on a permanent basis)
- Late payment of fees
- Fees for late collection of children
- Fees charged for absences
- Collection and receipting of fees
- Administration of Child Care Benefit
- Special arrangements eg: Financial difficulty
- Review of fee structures
- Banking of fees

An example of a procedure for payment of fees:

- *Parents will be invoiced every two weeks for fees*
- *Parents are required to pay their fees within seven days from the date on any invoice*
- *Fees are to be paid to the Coordinator. If the coordinator is unavailable to accept a fee payment, an assistant can take the fee payment*
- *For security reasons, it is preferred that payment of fees be made by cheque, credit card or eftpos*

Whilst a policy statement could be regarded as a statement of values which pertains to that policy area, procedures relate to the practical implementation of that policy – that is, the “how, who and when” of policy. How is it going to be put in place? Who will do it? When or how often?

The following is an example of a key policy document on Child Care Fees. It is to be used as a guide only.

Policy Example: Child Care Fees

Policy Statement

"The Green Valley Out of School hours Program provides a fee payment system that is affordable and accessible to all families and ensures the program maintains financial viability."

Procedures

Setting of Fees

- The Management Body/Sponsor will meet annually to determine the required fee level to meet budget predictions for the next year

Fee Structure

- The fee structure for the year at hand will be printed in the parent handbook and updated in line with any changes
- Parents will be given at least two weeks notice of any changes to the fee structure

Payment of Fees

- Parents will be invoiced every two weeks for fees
- Parents are required to pay their fees within seven days from the date on any invoice
- Fees are to be paid to the Coordinator. If the Coordinator is unavailable to accept a fee payment, an assistant can take the fee payment
- For security reasons, it is preferred that payment of fees be made by cheque, credit card or eftpos

Booking

- Families can elect to book a part time, casual or full time place

Invoicing/Receipting Fee Payments

- Fee payments will be recorded according to Commonwealth Guidelines
- Staff will be trained in the implementation of Invoicing/Receipting processes
- A receipt will be provided for each payment, in accordance with Commonwealth Guidelines
- An invoice/statement outlining all attendance at care and payments will be provided to parents every two weeks

Handling of Money

- Fee payments will be placed in an envelope and clearly marked on the outside with the date, the amount enclosed and the parent's name who made the payment
- Fee payment envelopes will be placed in the safe promptly
- The safe will be kept locked at all times
- Fee payments will be entered on the computer and a Statement of Fee Payments printed weekly. Actual fee payments will be acquitted against this statement and counted weekly by the Coordinator and an assigned member of the committee.
- Counted payments and the Statement of Fee Payments will be delivered to the school office for banking on a weekly basis

Late Collection Fees

- Parents are required to inform the service if they believe they will be late in collecting their child
- A late collection fee will be charged at the rate of \$15 for every 15 minutes or part thereof. This fee is to cover the additional staffing costs

Late Payment/Non Payment of Fees

- Parents who are having difficulties paying their fees should contact the Coordinator or a member of the committee as soon as is practical to determine a suitable payment plan.
- Parents who have not attempted to make alternative arrangements or have not paid their invoice within the required two week period will receive a letter from the Coordinator reminding them that the service will not accept their child/ren for care if a payment is not made in the next two week period.
- If a payment has not been made within this time (4 weeks from the date of the initial invoice) the Principal will follow up with the parent and a letter will be sent terminating the care arrangements for the child/ren.
- Children of parents who continue to send them to care after this letter and when no payment has been made will remain at the school office or in the Principal's office until they are collected.
- Further action may be sought through a debt collection agency under the discretion of the school Principal.

Child Care Benefit

- The service will administer Child Care Benefit in line with Commonwealth Government requirements
- It is the responsibility of the parent to lodge their Child Care Benefit application with the Family Assistance Office
- Parents must apply for each type of care (Before, After and Vacation) to receive Child Care Benefit on all their fees
- It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the service of any other children in approved care at another service
- The service will provide accurate and up to date information to families regarding Child Care Benefit and how to apply.

The service will:

- advise new families to apply to the Family Assistance Office for assessment and provide the relevant service CRN numbers
- provide new families with application forms and contact details for the Family Assistance Office
- advise parents of any relevant changes through newsletters and notices at the program

- The service will ensure that Child Care Benefit is administered according to the family's assessment notice and the Commonwealth Handbook
- Child Care Benefit cannot be deducted from fees until the service receives information from the Family Assistance Office about that family
- Families are only eligible for Child Care benefit if attendance records are signed by the parent/guardian
- Families will be eligible for Child Care Benefit when the child is absent and fees are charged, if the absence meets the Allowable Absence guidelines in the Commonwealth Outside School Hours Care Handbook
- Staff will be trained in the implementation of Child Care Benefit

Activities and Excursion Fees

- Additional fees may be charged to cover the cost of excursions during school holiday periods.
- Parents will be advised on the booking form of the amount of the additional charge
- Child Care Benefit is not available on additional excursion fees

Handbooks

Once developed and inserted into a policy document, procedures are typically incorporated into a practical working manual for parents or staff (ie parent, staff and management handbooks). Handbooks draw on information within policy and procedures to provide practical guidance on day-to-day matters.

Handbooks also contain other information in addition to this; for example, a staff handbook may also contain details of staff employment arrangements, rosters, and further detail on tasks and duties.

Typically, different handbooks are needed for staff, parents and management, as some of the information needed for staff, for example, will not be relevant to parents, and to management and vice versa.

Self Help Question 4

Choose a specific policy area and write down a set of procedures for that area.

OR

PSC TaS

Identify the key aspects of policy which might be included in a parent, staff or management handbook (See Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance, section 8.)

Who should be involved in policy development?

Developing policy requires a collaborative approach with everyone who is involved in the service. This will include the parents, children and staff who will be affected by policies and the staff, management body, sponsoring body, school council or people responsible for the operation of the service, who will be implementing policies. It is important that each of these groups be consulted in all stages of policy development and evaluation.

The Sponsoring Body (ie School Council, Parish Priest, Private Operator)

It is difficult for management to make decisions which reflect the broader group of parents, and to monitor the on-going operation of a service, unless it has some from which to operate. Policy ensures that the management acts consistently and therefore enhances the integrity and credibility of the service as a whole.

Policy aids management in its role of monitoring the service and planning for the future. It is the responsibility of management to coordinate and oversee the development and evaluation of policy in the context of consultation with the community, and participation from staff and families using the service. Management is responsible for making final decisions about what policy is adopted.

The Parents

The role of the parents using the service is the most critical given that it is their needs and those of their children which the service is aiming to meet. Written policy assists the users of the service in understanding the goals and common practices of the service.

Policy should not only be based on what the management body and staff think is important but also on what the broader group of parents want. This means that the broader group of parents should be consulted to allow input into what policy is required and how it should be written. Parents can have an opportunity to comment on policy before it is adopted. Once policy needs have been identified, parent input can be invited through notices or newsletters.

The Children

Children can also be involved in some aspects of policy development. For example developing a policy on behaviour guidance could involve collaboration with small groups of children to hear and record their ideas on acceptable behaviour and dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Children may be more willing to accept rules and limits if they are included in developing them.

The Staff

Staff also have a critical role, as they will be responsible for implementing the policies. It is therefore important that they are committed to them. Obviously, the policies which are developed also need to be workable from their point of view. Staff input is crucial in the development of procedures, as procedures are the basis for ensuring that policy is translated into effective practices.

One way to effectively involve staff is to nominate a staff member to a policy working group. In this way staff can provide input into policy development from a staff perspective and take information and draft policies back to the core group of staff for discussion.

Staff are protected by policies which ensure that they have a protocol under which to act (for example, behaviour management policies) Most importantly, policy provides staff with clear expectations about how they are to perform their duties. Staff cannot adequately work with families and meet their needs if the service doesn't have written guidelines and procedures for them to work with. Policy also enables staff to build upon the user-centred approach of the program.

Support Professionals

There may be other personnel who can assist, and should be involved in the development of policy. Visiting counsellors, social workers and medical professionals can have input into developing procedures to suit the children in general as well as policy that needs to be developed to assist with specific children and issues that may arise.

Developing a Policy Working Party

Depending on the size and structure of the service, a working party can be established to work on policy development and report regularly to management. This group should include a representative from management, staff and the broader group of parents.

The role of this working party could include identifying gaps in policy, keeping up to date with policy requirements, and developing draft policy for circulation and comment.

PSCITAS

Self Help Question 5

Write down the people who would be involved in a working party for developing a policy document for your service (eg. the coordinator of the service, a school council member, and a parent) and come up with a brief description of how this group would operate. In doing so, consider outlining:

- its role
- how often it will meet
- how it will liaise with other groups
- its membership
- tasks of individual members
- options for delegation of tasks.

Such a description should have regard to the needs of your service, and the most effective way of ensuring that there is support and involvement so that you can achieve your policy objectives.

PSC TaS

How is policy developed and evaluated?

Most services will have a variety of points from which they start their policy development. Some will have nothing in writing, others will have something written but not very useful and others will have gaps that need to be filled.

Developing policy can be a lengthy process but there are ways of making it easier. One simple and effective approach would be to develop an action plan that clearly states what needs to be done, who has to do it and a time line for completion.

The following considerations are important in the process of developing policy:

- Evaluate existing philosophy, policy and procedures;
- Identify and prioritise areas where philosophy, policy or procedures require development;
- Reflect upon what is happening in the service at present. There are likely to be many practices in place in the service that are working successfully but have not been recorded as policy;
- Create forums for discussing issues and developing procedures.

The more public this process is, the more successful it will be. Inform parents of what is happening and encourage their input. Collaboration encourages all people involved in the service to express their views and needs, and enhances the sense of ownership of the policy.

Consider ways of getting more people involved, and of getting support for the process. Look for sources of support both within, and outside of your immediate services eg., your local OSHC network, other local services, your local Children's Services Resource and Development Officer (CSRDO), resource and training agencies, local council, school council or parish. Make the task more manageable by identifying the gaps first, and by developing policy in stages, instead of trying to tackle everything at once.

Once the decision to develop, review or update policy has been made the action plan on the following page might be useful.

PSC TaS

Action Plan for Developing Policy

What needs to be done	Who is responsible for doing it?	Time line for completion
1 Establish a policy working group and invite input		
2 Review or develop philosophy statement and goals		
3 Have philosophy statement and goals adopted		
4 Identify key areas for the development of policy, ensuring consistency with your philosophy and goals		
5 Identify specific policies required under each key policy heading		
6 Develop policy statements for the specific policy areas and have these formally adopted		
7 Develop the procedures, in consultation with relevant persons, and in the context of the requirements of your service		
8 Develop parent, staff and management handbook, based on service policy and procedures		
9 Develop and implement strategies for communicating and publicising policies effectively		
10 Establish a process for the regular review and evaluation of policy and procedures		

Getting policy known and understood

A policy document, no matter how well produced, will be of minimal value if those within the service are not familiar with it, and do not know how to access it. Consider ways of ensuring that parents, staff, children and the local community are aware of, and understand the service policy.

Some effective strategies could include:

- Displaying the policy document in a prominent place where everyone knows it is available for reference at any time
- Including relevant policy overviews and explanations in the parent, staff and management handbooks;
- Highlighting certain policies by displaying them in and around the program (for example, excursion policy provided when excursions are being planned. SunSmart policy promoted in newsletter during the hotter months of the year):
- Providing a copy of the policy to all parents upon enrolment, and to all staff as part of their induction process and ensuring that they have indicated that they have read and understood the document.
- Ensuring that staff and management are adequately trained where needed to effectively implement policy and procedures.
- Include a policy area in the service's newsletter to remind parents of policies in place, to gather feedback on a new policy before implementation or to include any new policies that have been developed.

The Final Document

A clear policy document that has been developed through the cooperation of parents, children, staff and management raises the professional profile of the service for all those involved. Documenting the policy and procedures into handbooks for staff and parents and management ensures a clear communication process, provides a central tool for evaluating and developing future policy, is a useful and professional orientation kit for new parents, staff and management.

Don't forget to have all your philosophy, goals, policies and procedures formally approved and adopted by the Sponsor of your service, and to have these recorded and communicated at appropriate forums (eg management meetings, staff meetings, annual general meetings, or meetings of parents.)

PSC TaS

References and Resources

Community Child Care Association, (Updated 2003) **Managing an Outside School Hours Care Program**, Community Child Care Association, Victoria

Community Child Care Association Resource Sheets, **Policy for Children's Services, Policy: What to Include, Policy: Parent Handbook**

Community Services Ministers' Conference, (1995) **National Standards for Outside School Hours Care**

The Standards represent baseline standards for the provision of child care for primary school age children across all states and territories in Australia.

Health and Community Services, (1996) **Implementation Guidelines for National Standards for Outside School Hours Care**

The Implementation Guidelines have been developed to clarify the standards and provide information which is relevant to all outside school hours care services in Victoria.

National Childcare Accreditation Council, (2003) **Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance: Quality Practices Guide**

Quality Assurance aims to provide school age children in outside school hours care throughout Australia with high quality care that promotes learning and development with particular emphasis on play, social interactions and recreation. OSHCOA is a Commonwealth Government initiative linked to Child Care Benefit funding approval.

Sue Tarrant & Alison Jones, (1996) **Before 9 After 3: A Handbook for Outside School Hours Care**, Pademelon Press, NSW

PSCaTas

Now that you have completed
this Learning Package you may like to try :

Building A Winning Team (OSHC)

Partnerships with Families and Community Links (OSHC)

Orientation to Vacation Care

also available on this website. PsCTas welcomes your

feedback by email to psctas@gowrie-tas.com.au

by phone on 1800 647 718 or through the

request page on this website.

PsCTas