



Self Guided Learning Package

Partnerships with Families and Community Links (OSHC)



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:

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Partnerships with families and community links

OSHC QA3

You have chosen to complete the **Partnerships with families and community links OSHC QA3** Self-Guided Learning Package. The aim of this package is to support OSHC staff to reflect and review how they strengthen links with families, the school and wider community. An inclusive approach that acknowledges diversity is supported throughout this package.

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

CHCRF11B - Work in partnership with families to care for the child

- Consult family members about the child and the child's needs
- Provide opportunities for family members to participate in the service/program

CHCINF7B - Meet information needs of the community

- Identify information requirements
- Address information requirements

CHCCS405A – Work effectively with culturally diverse clients and co-workers

- Contribute to the development of relationships based on cultural diversity

And addresses the following learning outcomes:

- Identify strategies for developing partnerships with families
- Identify strategies for developing links with the school and wider community
- Describe an inclusive approach to working with families

Introduction

Working with children requires the OSHC professional to actively view the child in association with the family. The child needs to be viewed within the context of their family and the professional needs to be aware and respectful of the culture, values and concerns of the family. In order to be responsive and effective the child's needs, interests and context must be considered by the OSHC professional. This is most effectively achieved when staff utilise a range of strategies that proactively include the family, welcome families and plan programs that both reflect and invite parent input.

The family is part of a wider community that can also provide supports, resources and experiences for families. The OSHC professional must be aware of the wider community context and know how to access additional supports and connect with the local community in order to better meet the needs of children and their families. Working within

a school community is also part of being aware of the wider community and being knowledgeable about the child's daily experience. Knowing elements of the school, the names of teachers, the types of experiences children participate in and any additional considerations or issues also provides the OSHC professional with important information. This helps to create appropriate links for the child between the professional and the range of others who work with the child.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model of the Child and Family
(<http://sesd.sk.ca/psychology/ecological.htm> Retrieved 17th November 2005)

As can be seen in this model, the child and family are at the centre of the circle. Community supports, influences and programs are all part of and influential upon the child and family. The OSHC professional is also part of this model, being one of the first and important influences and a point of contact for families. This model also highlights the importance of the school environment and the OSHC program is an integral part of the school environment.

In addition, school age children themselves are becoming much more aware of the outside world. They are introduced to many different experiences through their school activities, projects and excursions. As Click and Lynch state "school age children are ready and eager to learn about the world outside their immediate environment" (1999). Making links to the wider community also helps children to view the program as being a part of rather than separate from the outside world.

Communicating with families to build partnerships

1. Consult family members about the child and the child's needs

There are a number of strategies that can assist the OSHC professional in finding out about children. Invite parents to share information about their child to communicate a strong message that the care of the child is a partnership between the program staff and the parent. The parent does not cease to have a voice or input once the child is placed into the program. On the contrary, the program must ensure that the parent's ideas, needs and questions are actively sought and responded to.

Ensure that a range of communication strategies are employed such as enrolment forms, newsletters, communication books, notices and daily verbal interactions and provide opportunities for families to give and receive information about their child as an imperative in the program. Parents must always be provided with information and also given the chance to suggest ideas for the program and to express the needs for their child. It is not always easy to access parents; they may be in a rush at the end of the day or may have someone else pick their child up. Strategies need to reflect a range of different approaches, so that parents who are often not able to stay and chat or read a notice board may have the opportunities at times to call in or be a part of the program.

Strategies to encourage communication and build partnerships:

- Create an informal atmosphere to promote communication. For example, a breakfast or early BBQ dinner at the end of the day for parents to eat with their child. This is often popular with busy parents, as they don't have to prepare a meal and can spend some time with their children and staff.
- Encourage parents to join and be involved in decision making through a parent management or advisory committee. This is an opportunity for direct communication between management, staff and families.
- Provide opportunities to communicate with and receive feedback from families via email, websites or suggestion boxes.
- Advertise times for parent/staff member discussion regarding individual children and their specific needs or interests.
- Provide regular communication about individual children between parents and consistent staff members. Often, with different shifts of staff, messages and reports of the day are relayed by staff other than those working for the majority of the day with their child. Ensuring that not only is there a communication book for staff and parents to write in daily, but that each family has a consistent staff member who speaks with the parent at least once a week to share information and build a particular relationship with the family, is strongly recommended.
- Provide a family information package when new families commence in the service. This can communicate the philosophy, policies, procedures as well as the value of on-going communication between families and the service and suggest opportunities for involvement and participation.

Self Help Questions

1. For parents to communicate with staff about the interests, needs and issues related to their children is an important part of the program. List five strategies that could be used to actively encourage parents to regularly communicate.

2. Helping parents to understand the importance of communication and sharing information is an important part of the role. Write a two paragraph statement addressed to parents that highlights the importance of wanting to hear from them and inviting them to share ideas about their child.

3. How might a program organize a consistent staff member to be the main staff contact that communicates and forms a relationship with particular families? What might be the implications for a program and what strategies would need to be put in place?

2. Opportunities for family members to participate in the service/program

There is a difference between involvement and participation in a program. Whilst some parents may have direct involvement in management committees or other administrative or fund raising roles, it is important that all parents have the chance to participate in the program. Participation does not necessarily mean being in the room with the children, although this is strongly encouraged at times, so that parents gain a first hand idea of what happens and how the program works. Participation also provides the opportunity for parents and children to share an experience together from time to time and a point for conversation and reflection between parents and children later at home. This is often not fostered in OSHC, but is one of the important strategies to be actively promoted. Working parents can often finish early or start late or call in at times and this does need to be encouraged.

Additional strategies that can be implemented to encourage parent participation:

- Parents can be invited to share ideas or thoughts about the program itself. They may have ideas for some activities, resources or experiences that reflect particular interests or experiences in their own childhood or culture.
- Parents may be encouraged to send along particular materials or resources from their own culture or interests that their child or other children may wish to use for play. This is often frowned upon, but encouraging parents to provide additional materials is a great way to add resources to the program and also, ensure that the parent and child feel their interests are being valued.
- Some parents may like to write down ideas of what they think will be of interest or value to their child in the program. This doesn't mean that staff are required to implement all ideas, but it provides opportunities for parents to make suggestions and helps reflect the message that their interests and their child are valued. Having the opportunity to contribute ideas to the actual program is an important strategy that helps those parents who wish to, provide input into the program.
- Ask a parent to donate an hour once a term to spend some time sharing with children something of interest. They may be a musician, or have a particular skill that they can share with the children in a special one off project.
- Invite families to provide photographs of their family or take some photographs of the family and child engaged in the program. These could be displayed on a

notice board and regularly updated and/or kept in an album for families and children to refer to over time as new events are documented e.g. new babies, birthdays, holidays, cultural celebrations, excursions/incursions, new program activities.

- Provide a regularly maintained community information board to inform families about local events and happenings. Families may also wish to advertise items via the community information board.

Self Help Questions

1. Identify what you believe are the key strategies that encourage active participation by parents. List three strategies and write one paragraph for each noting what the strategy is and why it is important.
2. Provide a list of five local events or happenings that could be placed on a community information board for your program.
3. Describe how you have invited and supported parent participation in relation to a particular parent.

Building links with the school and wider community

The most important link is between the OSHC service and the immediate school community. Many elements make up a school community e.g. families, teachers, clubs, sports groups, school councils, parent and staff committees, canteens and libraries and an OSHC service is an integral part of the school community. Ensure that policies and procedures of the OSHC service reflect the priorities of the school community and that clear communication links are in place between the OSHC service and the various elements of the school community.

Suggested strategies for building links with the school community:

- OSHC staff have representation on relevant school committees
- skills and or resources are shared between the OSHC service and other groups e.g. library books, sports equipment, music specialists
- regular meetings are held between school management, teachers and OSHC staff
- the OSHC service should provide input to any review or revision of relevant school policies and/or procedures
- the OSHC service actively contributes to the school community e.g. building a vegetable garden, operating a stall at the annual fete, performing music at an assembly or concert, sew cushions for classroom use.

- the OSHC service has a regular item in the school newsletter
- OSHC staff actively liaise with teaching staff with respect to the needs of individual children
- the OSHC service invites the whole school community to participate in fund raising initiatives e.g. a raffle for purchase of a new resource

Beyond the immediate school community staff need to be aware of the range of services and programs that exist in the immediate neighbourhood and wider community. Such services or programs may be utilized to support staff and families when particular needs or requirements are identified and building links with them is essential.

It is important to avoid working in isolation or viewing the OSHC service as an entire entity unto itself. All professionals in all fields of work need to work in what is known as a cross disciplinary manner. This means that each OSHC service staff member needs to know a little about other local programs and services and what they offer. This means staff can inform and support parents as they move from one program/service to another, or if they have one family member in one program and another in a different program. For example, one child may attend a child care centre, another child may attend the local school and OSHC program and another child may participate in a sports club. Supporting parents and working with them in partnership requires the OSHC professional to both understand and make links with their local community. It is not appropriate to say, "I don't work in that area, so I don't need to know anything." It requires more than simply having a range of brochures about programs, although this is one of the strategies that can support communication about programs and services within a community.

Some links within the local community that may be important:

- maternal and child health centres
- local councils
- sports clubs and gyms
- parks, playgrounds and gardens
- cultural groups
- child care centres
- kindergartens
- counselling services
- disability services
- public transport
- arts and music facilities
- health services e.g. doctors, hospitals, dentists
- schools

Providing some time for staff to meet with and share ideas with the wider community is now viewed as an integral part of working in partnerships with families and community.

Some suggested strategies include:

- OSHC programs may attempt to meet up once a term with the teachers from nearby kindergartens and schools, so that a local community culture develops between the professionals. Often at these times, valuable information can be shared between different programs that are helpful to each other and the children and families within programs.
- Children and families all have particular cultural identities. These need to be supported, encouraged and acknowledged as an integral part of the child's identity. Accessing supports within the community that reflect awareness of the particular cultural issues can strengthen the program and what is offered to children and families. For example, a newly arrived child and family may need some initial bilingual support to access information about the cultural groups in the service.
- Also, children and families may have additional needs that require accessing further support. For example, a child may develop a speech problem, a particular family health problem may impact upon the child, and unemployment or family issues may all require additional awareness and support. Working in isolation and not knowing about local supports places great strain upon staff working within a program and in addition, does not help support the child and family.

Listing additional supports or services and accessing specialist professionals is an integral part of the role of the OSHC professional. It is also important to remember that the OSHC professional cannot be expected to know all the services within a community. Local government children's services and the major state and federal government children's services departments are helpful starting points to access further information.

Let's bring the community to the program!!!

In many instances, it is helpful to staff and beneficial to the children, if the program is viewed almost like a club or a place with many clubs that make up the program. Being able to utilize external resources, people and activities can be a bonus for programming and helps to engage the local community in the OSHC program.

Some programs have actively engaged people from the local community such as:

- A local vet attends the OSHC program once a fortnight and brings different animals to discuss with the children
- A local retired carpenter attends once a week to help on particular projects including building a billy cart and a shed
- A tutor is available for some of the older children who may require help with their school work
- A local person with gardening skills and interests works with the children to maintain a vegetable plot
- Local sporting club representatives visit the program to share skills and expertise or introduce a new game

- A local wildlife group works with the service to build nest boxes, identify local wildlife or advise on appropriate planting for wildlife
- Guides or scouts from local troops visit to share some of their skills e.g. setting up tents, ropework

For people who are retired or who have time to donate becoming part of the program may assist them to feel assured that their role in the community is valued. The additional help they provide is valuable for both staff and children. Also, the relationships that other adults from the community build with the children can provide a wide range of age and social interaction experience for children. This social interaction may have unique benefits, particularly for children who do not have grandparents or limited contact with grandparents.

Let's take the children to the community!!!

It can be challenging to provide opportunities for children to attend excursions during OSHC programs. However, it is important, especially in vacation care programs, that children have a wide range of experiences outside the actual building where the program is being conducted. Children need exposure to a range of activities including museums, skate parks, farms, performances, fire stations, libraries, movies and picnics in the park. Organise at least one or two major excursions during the term so children have something significant to look forward to and plan. The children can be involved in organising, researching and arranging some of the excursions themselves with staff support and guidance.

Also, the OSHC service may participate in local events such as fun runs, concerts, fetes or gardening days, thus raising the profile of the service and at the same time making a valid contribution to the wider community. It is important for staff to make use of local links, media and networks to find out what is happening locally and determine the appropriateness or level of interest in specific events.

Self Help Questions

1. Identify five services or programs in your community, other than child care centres or kindergartens, that families may access or need to access.
2. List three strategies that would assist OSHC staff to find out about the local community.
3. How could staff access adults in the local community who may be interested in contributing their time or skills to the program?

Acknowledging diversity and supporting families with additional needs

For many people Australia is a rich and broad cultural experience. Whilst some areas of Australia may not actually have children or families from other countries, all families reflect a diversity of values and cultures of their own. To foster positive relationships between programs and parents, and between staff working within the same program, it is important that culture is acknowledged, understood, celebrated and accepted as being integral to each individual's identity. A narrow view of culture is defined simply by ethnic origin or a particular language spoken by a family. Culture is much more complex than this. Religion, dress style, artistic expression, child rearing practices, language, songs and stories, food and dietary patterns, beliefs and interests are all part of each of us.

These need to be viewed as the essence of what helps to make each child, parent and staff member unique and worthy of respect. Misunderstandings can occur and may be the result of a lack of understanding or acknowledgement of a particular cultural aspect of an individual.

It is important that the diversity of culture and values in any OSHC service are actively embraced. This active engagement is not just about displaying different implements or celebrating different festivals although this may be part of demonstrating and reflecting an interest. Embracing diversity is more involved and should include a range of strategies. Also, respecting and embracing diversity in an inclusive way requires all staff to revisit their own values, prejudices and ensure that their own stereotyped images of culture or religion are considered carefully. The OSHC service should have a policy of inclusion to inform and support staff and on-going discussion or training may assist in clarifying staff values.

Getting to know families as individuals and not rely on assumptions that all families from one particular country or religion will reflect the same belief systems or interests is important. For example, just because some people live in Victoria, doesn't mean they all follow Australian Rules football or that everyone eats a roast dinner on Sunday evening. These are stereotyped ideas that lock people into particular expectations and often show great disregard for actually knowing a child and family in their own right.

Strategies to promote an awareness and acceptance of the richness and diversity of culture include:

- Ensure staff know what languages the families speak (not being general such as "Asian")
- Check that staff are respectful and do not make superficial or stereotypical assumptions or comments about particular cultures
- Ensure respect for particular celebrations, religious customs or ways of conduct
- Provide a range of different sports, interests, activities that are not stereotyped by either culture or gender
- Ensure staff promote equity and respect for all children irrespective of culture

- Learn to say the child and family name correctly, rather than anglicising it for convenience
- Provide food that is culturally diverse
- Provide information in community languages and/or access bilingual workers to support children and parents where possible

Self Help Questions

1. Consider some of your own perceptions about particular cultures. What are those ideas based on? What do you really know about people from a particular culture? Why do you think stereotyped images become part of a community's thinking?
2. List three strategies that you think could help staff within a program to accept and respect each other more consistently.
3. List five strategies to promote a proactive approach to cultural inclusion.

Conclusion

Ensuring that the child is viewed as part of the family first and part of the OSHC program second, is an important starting point for the OSHC professional. Promoting effective partnerships with families and the community requires a professional approach and awareness that working with families is not just about helping children to settle into the program. An OSHC professional's role extends to consideration of the child in relation to the family and the family in relation to the community. Consideration of family and child partnerships also recognises that the each child and family will at times present with additional needs, concerns or ideas that require responsive and supportive staff. Active promotion of the program and an invitation to parents to become part of the OSHC program is an important part of the OSHC professional's role.

It is also vital to recognise that links with the school and local community are an integral part of the OSHC program. Staff should work actively to promote connections with the school and wider community, invite others to share their interests and expertise and demonstrate inclusive practice in all respects.

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References and Resources

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