

I have been involved in the children services sector for 28 years and worked in LDC, kindergarten, casual care, Tafe lecturer and an OSHC Co-ordinator for the past 17 years.

Over this time I have seen many changes and improvements to now be a sector that really values families and children and their individual needs and not just a service to allow both parents to work.

As the OSHC co-ordinator at Wheelers Hill Primary School we have embraced the NQF and seen the benefits for children and families alike. The following is our view on the impacts on OSHC programs if the recommendations are to be taken on.

## **Recommendations of concern:**

### **SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITY FOR OSHC PROGRAMS**

I strongly agree with schools taking the responsibility for organising OSHC services. What I have concerns about is that OSHC services better provide for families, children and the school community when they are owned and provided by the school rather than an external provider. Belonging to the school community is integral in providing a holistic approach to the care and education of children with the school and the OSHC program working together to enhance a children's experience and support both their academic and social learning together.

Some of the benefits for school & families where the OSHC program is owned and run by the school:

- Stronger connections with families – face to face contact each day
- Consistent environments especially for children with additional needs
- Follow on support for families that may be dealing with difficult situations
- Partnerships with teachers in supporting children and families where there may be learning difficulties or other concerns for the child. Ensuring that important information is passed on.
- Professional teams/relationships within the school with OSHC educators working with Teachers to build respectful conversations that acknowledges our differences in knowledge and skills with children and uses this to support all children's growth.
- Employment of skilled educators that can assist within the school community where needed
- Entire income generated can support the school community and not benefitting a private company.
- A program that includes children that the school have concerns about and knows the quality of the program and gain regular feedback to ensure the support of the child and family.
- No barriers between the school and the OSHC program. Working together to ensure an all-inclusive approach. OSHC co-ordinator on site every day during the day to ensure regular contact and discussions, a professional relationship with equal partners.
- Professional Development and curriculum days as a whole school team with OSHC educators included.

- The OSHC program works with school staff on balancing activities/excursions/programs within the school curriculum. Reducing crossover of activities and ensuring extensive programs for all.

## RATIOS AND QUALIFICATIONS

### **RATIOS**

OSHC can be a difficult setting for children and educators with the coming and going of children during the session and the large age range that it accommodates each day.

For children these times for the days are the hardest, getting up early before school to allow parents to work and having to be rushed to get dressed, eat breakfast and get ready for school or the time after a hard day at school where there may have been friendship or bullying issues or just tired from a busy day of learning. These situations make working in OSHC a juggle to know how and what to provide and often there are many children who need some extra help to make these transitions smooth and stress free. These situations can't be compared to the class room where they are all of the same age and focussed on similar activities. Children stay in the class group for the day with families collecting at the same time before or after class.

The key factors of difference are:

- The multipliable ages from 5 – 12 yrs in the same groups or programs and their varied needs and interests
- The face to face contact with families that happens every day in OSHC and the relationships being built
- Following up on school information and notices
- Assistance with homework that would normally being done at home
- Support with many children with social concerns particularly emotional, physical and medical now being dealt with in care settings.
- The drop off and collecting of children at various times during the sessions
- The various staff that work within an OSHC program and their frequency
- The dealing with inquiring of bookings and financial/invoice matters that the program staff will assist with during a session
- The supervision of children in venues that are not always designed for children's play and recreation

To ensure the safety of all children attending OSHC services a ratio of no more than 1:15 is needed to enable all of the other issues to be addressed and the supervision of all children at all time.

## **REMOVAL OF STANDARDS AND ELEMENTS FOR OSHC**

We have embraced the new framework and believe it has been a big step forward for children attending OSHC programs to acknowledge that learning does happen outside of a classroom and that through well planned programs children can practise and extend their learnings.

Although in the past we felt we knew our children well there were many that had slipped between the cracks because they were happy and didn't cause any problems to the running of the program. With the implementation of the framework we have reviewed our processes as a team and found ways to document lots of children regularly and have found many children with issues. Some of our concerns were around friendships that weren't being made and children that weren't engaging with the program. Through providing a more enriched program that extends children's interest and curiosity through play we have been able to spend more time on building friendships and helping children to improve their social skills, and prepare them to be effective citizens in our community.

The framework has also given us a professional standing and respect within our school and a stakeholder within the schools overall curriculum and wellbeing of children. Teachers have been interested in what we have been doing and what we do to incorporate the framework into our program. We feel we are more respected and valued as having vital information about children and families that teachers want to know. An example of this is the OSHC educators attending the School Support Group meetings with teachers, families and specialist to discuss how a child with additional needs is developing.

There are some differences in how a LDC service addresses areas of the framework compared to OSHC. These differences are more based around how they are implemented rather than what is required. For an OSHC program to include the community is to include the school community and to be a part of that environment and events. We have encouraged the children to help with moving tanbark onto gardens to have pride in the surrounds and have an OSHC item in the school concert each time. We also extend school events like footy day and the OSHC educators also dress up and we plan activities and food to extend the interest. The children really enjoy our participation.

Overall the introduction of the NQF has produced a massive growth in the way we view the program and has inspired our educators to strive for high quality for our children. All children deserve to have the best care possible and those who attend OSHC shouldn't be disadvantaged because the service is not valued as important in the learning and development as individuals and future, contributing members of our society.