

# Journey to Excellence

## Wynnum Family Day Care

### 2003-2013

A Paper Commissioned by  
Wynnum Family Day Care

Researched and written by Penny Gordon,  
Director, Penny Gordon & Associates.  
February 2014

# Journey to Excellence

## Wynnum Family Day Care

### 2003-2013

This paper has been written in response to the many requests received by Wynnum Family Day Care (WFDC) to tell their story about the journey the organisation has been on to achieve the successes of the last few years. In very concrete terms these successes can be measured by significant organisational growth at a time when many family day care services are struggling to retain educator numbers or attract new quality educators. The success of WFDC has also been recognised by the family day care sector, and more broadly the early childhood education and care industry. In this regard 2013 was a year of highlights for WFDC which achieved numerous awards including:

- Family Day Care Australia Queensland State Award for Coordination Unit of the Year 2013.
- Family Day Care Australia Coordination Unit of the Year – 2013 National Winner.
- Undertaking the National Quality Standard Assessment during 2012 and achieving an overall rating of – *Exceeding National Standards*.
- Applied for an Excellent Rating to ACECQA during 2013 and was successful in achieving an overall rating of – *Excellent* – the first family day care service in Australia to achieve this rating.
- Australian Business Quality Awards – 2013 winner of the Gold Award for Excellence in Customer Service.

Given these recent accolades it is timely for WFDC to document how it achieved its current level of recognised quality. In this paper the clear message is that these successes did not happen ‘overnight’. Instead, these service outcomes are a result of a ten year action interactive research cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection, which created an environment of continuous iterative improvement (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This report documents the key features of this journey. In doing so, WFDC is not attempting to give a message that there is just one ‘right’ approach to organisational effectiveness and success. However, WFDC does believe that the factors mentioned in this report are key to developing and sustaining organisational success. Wynnum Family Day Care recognises that if other family day care services choose to pay specific attention to some of the issues outlined in this paper, those services may implement different strategies given different organisational and environmental contexts.

This paper has been written by Penny Gordon who, as a psychologist specialising in organisational change, has consulted to WFDC for a period of 12 years. This paper could not have been written without input from all of the membership of the coordination team. In particular, Cathy Bavage, service manager, and Marie Sayers and Lisa Meyer, both

coordinators, have contributed valuable insights, reflections and information about the 'journey'. These three staff members are long serving coordination unit team members with 27, 13 and 10 years of employment respectively and have therefore been integrally involved in making and implementing key long term decisions within the service.

### ***Brief History of Wynnum Family Day Care***

In response to a lack of childcare options in the bayside suburbs of Wynnum/Manly in Brisbane Queensland, concerned community members worked together to establish a community based organisation called Community Childcare Inc. with the purpose of providing a range of childcare options. The organisation was established in 1979 and over time it established and continues to sponsor three community based early childhood education and care services, consisting of two family day care services and one centre based service. Wynnum Family Day Care commenced operation in 1988 with a capped EFT of 125. Community Childcare Inc. operates with a management committee structure whose membership is drawn from the local community. More information on the governance structure associated with WFDC can be found at [www.wynnumfdc.org](http://www.wynnumfdc.org) and the current WFDC operational model and organisational chart can be found in the Appendix.

### **Timespan for this Paper 2003-2013**

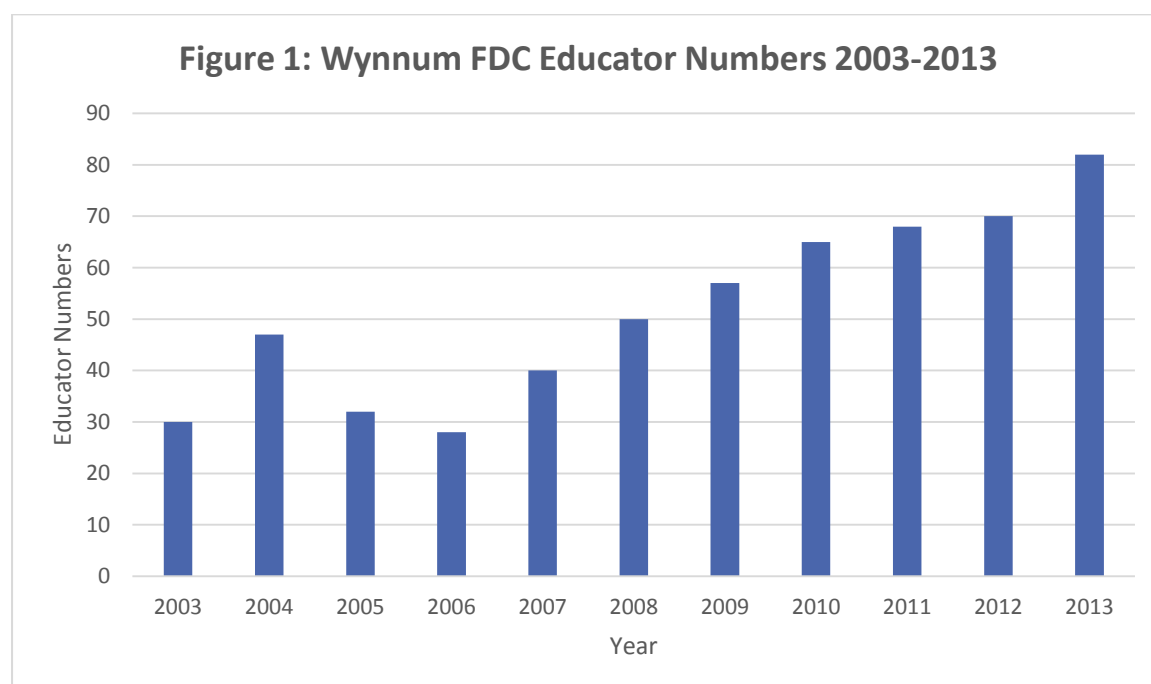
A ten year time span has been identified for this paper to emphasise the longitudinal nature of effective change and that decisions made in one year can continue to have lasting impacts in subsequent years. This timeframe has also been chosen to reinforce the earlier point that successful change at WFDC has not occurred 'overnight'. This paper will dovetail with an earlier article commissioned by WFDC entitled *Waving Not Drowning: Reporting on Wynnum Family Day Care Scheme's Experience of Implementing Quality Assurance* (Gordon, 2004). This earlier article reflected on the two year period of implementing quality assurance during 2002-2004 and described an explicit change management approach to the organisational implementation of quality assurance.

The starting point of 2003 has also been chosen as it was in this year that WFDC made some key decisions that have been instrumental in the service's later success. It was at this time that WFDC decided to embark on a planned strategic approach to transforming their organisation from an essentially traditional family day care service to an innovative cutting edge service exemplifying leadership in the family day care sector. Put another way, WFDC decided to move away from the 'business as usual' approach to service provision and instead embark on a process of review and renewal. This was motivated in part by the introduction of quality assurance and the increasing industry expectations for professional service provision. The period 2003 – 2006 was the first three year plan for renewal and was a time of significant flux and change providing many challenges organisationally. This is because in order to introduce new ways of perceiving and operating services, 'old' ways of perceiving and operating family day care needed to be reviewed, challenged and at times changed.

One decision in particular required considerable organisational courage to implement, that is, the decision to rigorously internally review all of the then WFDC carers (now educators)

to determine if they were meeting quality standards or were demonstrating the capacity to meet the standards in the short to medium term. Wynnum Family Day Care recognised that some educators had been with the service for many years and had become educators at a time when standards and expectations were less rigorous. Whilst the majority of the educators were working hard to positively change their practice to be congruent with quality standards, a percentage of the educator group were not demonstrating the confidence, skill or commitment commensurate with operating a professional service. The expressed goals of the coordination team were therefore to:

1. Individually assess each educator's practice to determine congruence with the quality assurance standards.
2. Identify those educators who were demonstrating the commitment and skill level required to be successful but required extra support and training to improve their practice.
3. Identify those educators who were expressing serious doubts about their capacity to change or who were demonstrating high resistance to the whole idea of quality assurance. Of this group it was identified that there may be educators who would be able, in time, to make the shifts required, as well as those educators who were either unable or unwilling to make the changes required.
4. Assist those educators who were not able to make the desired changes to leave the service with dignity and self-respect.
5. Recruit new educators with quality assurance standards in mind.



As displayed in Figure 1, as a result of this very conscious change management approach 19 educators ceased their roles with WFDC over the period 2005-2006. At that time this represented 40% of educator numbers and had significant implications for the service's capacity to provide care placements for families, the quality of practice as the service was in a period of major transformation, and also serious budget considerations became a reality.

It could therefore be described as a high risk strategy for WFDC as they made the decision to bear some immediate and short term pain in the hope that it would be a turning point for the service in attracting and retaining an increased number of quality educator applicants. As Figure 1 indicates, Wynnum Family Day Care dipped to 28 educators registered with the service in 2006. It took the next two year period to return to previous educator numbers, however importantly, the profile of the new educators was different. The WFDC office team recruited new educators with the quality standards firmly guiding recruitment and selection processes.

Reflecting in 2014, the coordination unit identified that the 2005-2006 period had been a very stressful and challenging time but there had also been some very positive unintended outcomes from making and implementing the decision to review and renew the service. They included:

1. The approach taken by the coordination unit team assisted some educators to refocus their energies and attention to their practice and make renewed efforts to improve their practice.
2. It reinforced to educators that not just anyone could perform this role and coordination unit staff noticed educators re-evaluating the importance of their roles.
3. The departure of some educators who operated with a more dependent and compliant approach freed up coordination unit time and resources to engage more in the development of the service and institute change at all levels.

What the WFDC team did intend and hope for was that the new self-motivated professional educator team would positively contribute to an organisational culture of professionalism and ultimately contribute to redeveloping the service into a contemporary quality organisation. Wynnum Family Day Care's belief was that striving for and achieving this profile would proactively attract families and new appropriately qualified and skilled educators to the service. The data reported in Figure 1 vindicates this belief as WFDC has experienced a 200% increase in educator numbers between 2006 –2013.

### ***Snapshot of Organisational Growth 2007-2013***

Outlined in the table below are a set of metrics which give a summary account of Wynnum Family Day Care's organisational growth over the last 7 years. Whilst these figures are important as measures of organisational health, it is important to state that these figures are an outcome of a planned strategic focus on *quality* rather than being the focal point of organisational goals. In other words, improvements in organisational metrics, including the steady increase in signing on quality educators, was evidence of the improving quality of WFDC as a service rather than an increase in educator numbers being the primary goal of the coordination unit. This is a key point. For WFDC an increase in educator numbers is viewed as a key performance indicator relating to the goal of achieving quality across the service rather than an increase in educator numbers being the primary goal of the coordination unit team. The information contained in this table will be referred to and commented on further in later sections.

**Table: Wynnum Family Day Care Key Service Metrics for the Period 2007–2013**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Office Staff Numbers</b>	5	6	6	6	7	8	11
<b>Educator Numbers</b>	40	50	57	65	67	70	82
<b>EFT<sup>1</sup></b>	160	165	201	235	253	276	345
<b>Productivity Rate<sup>2</sup></b>	3.67	3.60	3.50	3.62	3.89	4.0	4.32
<b>Educators with a Cert III Qual. and as % of Educator Group</b>	11 28%	16 32%	29 50%	35 53%	39 60%	53 75%	70 85%
<b>Educators with above Cert III Qualifications and as % of Educator Group</b>	2 0.5%	7 14%	11 20%	13 20%	21 31%	27 39%	32 39%
<b>Hours of Service Delivery/Week</b>	5,250	5,917	7,038	8,251	8,866	9,774	12,300
<b>Number of Families Serviced</b>	180	158	279	283	316	350	415
<b>Number of Children in Care</b>	187	201	287	359	395	440	520
<b>Annual Income</b>	\$376,407	\$402,765	\$457,482	\$537,517	\$636,426	\$706,696	\$792,575

1. EFT relates to equivalent fulltime utilised places.
2. Productivity rate is a business term that measures how effectively labour and capital are turned into products and services. In family day care this gets translated into the relationship between the number of service hours an educator works and the corresponding number of childcare hours produced e.g. a higher number of children in an educator's care over a period of time will produce a higher productivity rate and therefore increased profitability for the educator and the service.

### ***Approach to Transformation***

Permeating all of the approaches and changes that WFDC undertook were three key interrelated foci – a focus on the child, a focus on quality and a focus on the team. This meant that in undertaking planning or implementing ideas or practice the WFDC coordination unit asked themselves, or each other, or broader team members (see Figure 2) the following three questions:

1. Will this decision add value to a child's life in our community? (child focus)
2. Is this the best we can do? (quality focus)
3. How do we feel/think about this and who else needs to be involved? (team focus)

Genuinely asking these questions, and then listening to the responses, has at times proven to be a more complex and challenging process than may be first thought. Within the WFDC team these questions often contribute to significant debate as different team members

contribute alternative perspectives on an issue. Depending on the different issues being addressed by the team, the priority order of attending to these three questions may change.

A prime example is the process of appointing new educators. In this case the question that is prioritised is Question 1 – will this decision add value to a child’s life in our community? Maintaining integrity on this issue is not always easy as it can be tempting to slip into an organisational focus which might prioritise increasing educator numbers motivated by making educator numbers look good, instead of firstly considering a child’s experience of being cared for by this person. This is especially tempting when the applicant does present with many elements of the skill sets required for the job. However, if WFDC is unable to satisfy their concerns about some aspect of an applicant’s approach or skill set then the applicant is not appointed even if they have had years of experience as an educator in another service. Over the past 18 month period, nine educators operating in other services who have applied to be educators at WFDC have not been accepted as educators. Understandably in these circumstances an applicant with years of experience can feel a range of negative feelings when told that they have not been successful. These decisions are not based on an elitist approach, instead what dominates is the focus on a child’s wellbeing given that a significant period of that child’s formative years may be spent with this person caring for and educating them.

Wynnum Family Day Care has utilised the lens of these three focus questions across all aspects of its service transformation. To give even more structure to their directions for change, WFDC also identified six key priority areas of service planning and practice. In reflecting on their service journey over the last ten years, the WFDC coordination unit believe these six priority areas have been absolutely integral to their recent achievements.

The six priority areas are:

1. Healthy relationships and partnerships.
2. Operating with an explicit business approach.
3. Distributive leadership structure and processes.
4. Maintaining open systems.
5. Embracing change and innovation.
6. Learning and development.

Some of these priority areas were identified early as part of the strategic plan of renewal and some elements evolved as the service evolved. Each of the six priority areas are discussed in the following pages. It will be evident that there is considerable interrelationship between the six areas. In writing about each area a similar structure is used. Firstly, the discussion centres on the importance of paying attention to this area of organisational development and how it connects to achieving practice and service delivery quality. Secondly, practical examples are given of what WFDC actually did in concrete terms to develop their culture, practice and service.

### ***Healthy Relationships and Partnerships***

There is much talk across the family day care sector of the relationship culture that pervades family day care. In this context, WFDC experienced two early realisations. Firstly, that a relationship approach per se does not necessarily indicate the healthiness or effectiveness of a service culture, and secondly that the health of a service and team culture is intrinsically linked to service quality. These understandings strongly influenced service decisions to dedicate time, energy, resources and commitment to ensure that relationships across the service were healthy, effective, and positively dynamic, and encouraged quality practice in every way.

Wynnum Family Day Care takes a broad view of team. For WFDC each part of the broad team as well as the whole is important. For example, WFDC uses language such as ‘the office team’ to denote that part of the team which is the coordination unit. The educator team is viewed as another subpart of the whole, as are the management committee and the families and children that access the services. This approach communicates to all those connected to WFDC that they are important and included in different ways. This model is represented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Wynnum FDC Sub-Teams**



The benefit to the office based team is that they are reminded that the strategies that work for them may need to be altered or changed entirely to meet the various needs of different sub-teams. There are both philosophical and practical implications here. Philosophically, this



team does not take the view that they are central to everything that happens across the service or that their team is the most important sub-team. Instead, the WFDC office based team identify that they have specific and important roles and functions to perform, and that if these roles and functions are not performed well it will have a deleterious impact across the broader team. However this same view is adopted for each part of the broader team (i.e. that all parts of the broader team have specific roles and functions, which if not performed well, will have a deleterious effect across the broader team).

As stated earlier in this section it takes time, energy, resources and commitment to ensure that a co-located group of people become a team and that the different team elements are healthy and effective. This is because all teams experience disagreements, tensions and difficult patches which as much as possible at WFDC are viewed as opportunities to learn about self and others. Healthy and courageous teams do not 'sweep the difficulties under the carpet' but take the time to discuss and where necessary problem-solve team or practice issues. The challenge of doing this at times cannot be overstated. The rationale for this focus on ensuring healthy team dynamics includes:

- If the office based team operates with an unhealthy culture then this culture will pervade relationships with broader team members, especially with educators. This will increase the presence of unhealthy dynamics such as splitting, triangulation or colluding with poor practice by ignoring issues that require attention. The reverse is also true. That is, if the office based culture is healthy, dynamic and effective then this will have a positive influence on the rest of the WFDC team system.
- Paying attention to team relationships is congruent with the philosophy of operating as a reflective practitioner that is so prominent in early childhood education and care literature and documents such as the Early Years Learning Framework.
- Working through any team issues has an educative component, in terms of increased self- knowledge and problem solving capacities, as well as building confidence and skills in the office based team members who then feel more adept at giving positively reinforcing or corrective feedback to others in the broader team.
- It is increasingly documented that the "best" advocates for a family day care service are those that work in the service and those that use the service. The vast majority of people who enquire about family day care, either to become a provider or a user of services, have heard about the service from someone they know. Having positive relationships with families and educators is probably the most effective marketing strategy a service can engage in (Vaka, 2013).

#### *Strategies Implemented by WFDC*

1. Quarterly team supervision. This strategy involves accessing an appropriately trained and skilled external facilitator to support, guide, and where necessary, challenge the team in its functioning. To maximise the benefit from this process it is essential that a relationship of mutual respect and trust is developed between the facilitator and team members. The team at Wynnum Family Day Care undertake a team 'health check' with an external facilitator at a minimum of 4 times per year for three hours

at a time. The frequency and timing of these sessions can vary depending upon the needs of the team.

2. Designing and implementing cross sub-team connections. This strategy involves members from the different sub-teams coming together for conversation, training and development, or the organisation and enjoyment of events. Most notably different members of the WFDC office based team and the educator team meet regularly for these purposes. A specific example at WFDC involves the staging of an annual 'trivia night' where members from the office team, the educator team and the families team are involved in the development and staging of a fun night that also raises money for the WFDC service. Events like these are very well attended and the 2013 Trivia Night was attended by 260 people connected to WFDC. In relation to the money raised on the night, the educator team decide how the money will be re-invested into the service. A post event reflection process inclusive of educators and office based team members identifies the learnings from the most recent event and generates ideas for future events.
3. A whole of team event. Even though WFDC has grown considerably in recent years, the office team and the educator team continue to see the benefit in undertaking a whole of service event inclusive of families and children, the coordination unit, educators and management committee. This takes the form of a Christmas party that is held annually in a park in December. In 2013 approximately 1000 people attended the function at some time over a 3 ½ hour period.
4. Having fun. Whilst having fun is part of the first three examples given, it is worth making this explicit. Having fun and engaging in social connection is a powerful form of 'relationship insurance'. This term refers to the positive relationship impact of sharing fun and light-hearted occasions together. These experiences can assist in insulating a relationship from the negative impacts of stressful events or dynamics that may occur at some future point, and contribute to developing a positive shared history of experiences for those involved. Having fun and social connection also pays homage to the importance of self-care and resilience building in the workplace.

If you are reading these examples and you are from a family day care service you may identify a number of similar strategies or events that occur in your own service. The important focus of the examples given here is that the events or processes outlined are not just 'tasks' but are approached and constructed in ways that enhance relationships. Numerous organisations may have similar events, however for some, these type of events are approached with a perspective that they are to be endured or 'let's get it over as quickly as possible'. When this stance is present opportunities for relationship enhancement are sadly missed.

### ***An Explicit Business Approach***

Wynnum Family Day Care does not believe that a strong business focus is incompatible with a healthy and dynamic relationship focus. In fact, the two approaches are viewed as highly complementary, each contributing to the sustainability of the other. Wynnum Family Day Care made an explicit strategic decision that first and foremost its service is a business and

not a community service. This does not mean that WFDC does not do both. It does. However, this conceptual positioning has had significant implications for the structure, processes and systems of the organisation, the expectations and roles of team members across the whole service, and the language used. A couple of examples of this business model in action follow:

In the first example, WFDC has restructured its office based services and divided them into placement and business support positions, and educational leadership roles (see Appendix). This is to denote that being skilful at business as well as education and care is essential for both educators as well as for the office team. Also, WFDC believed that if it was important for educators to be skilful in running a business, then the office team needed to model a professional business approach to service delivery to educators. This means that the whole of the office team needs to be conversant in business terminology, such as EFT capacity and productivity rates, and are mindful of how they utilise their professional resources during the working week, especially their time.

One of the new roles developed in this restructure was the role of Educator Business Principles and Practice worker. This 20 hour a week role focuses on supporting educators to establish a professional environment and professional systems development. A part of the responsibility of this role is to visit educators when they are first appointed and undertake a business system assessment of their business, and offer advice and practical training and support on business development.

A second example of this shift to an explicit business model is the expectation that educators perceive their role as a professional career option and not only as a stop gap source of income whilst they have their own children. Past perspectives on the purpose of family day care still echo in the community's mind and are reflective of the following quote from an early evaluation of the model of family day care:

“The purpose of family day care should be an extension of a house-wife's occupation of running a home and rearing a family, rather than an alternative to being in the workforce” (Home Away From Home Report, 1975, page 11)

From Wynnum Family Day Care's viewpoint, long gone are the days when family day care was identified as an opportunity for women to earn a little extra money to supplement the family income. Family day care is now a professional business.

As such, at WFDC it is expected that prospective and current educators will work for a minimum of 4 days per week, already possess a Certificate III in early childhood services, and have previous early childhood education and care experience. This approach to the appointment of educators is understood at WFDC as being professional, well organised and clear about expectations to prospective and current educators. And of course, as the reader has already noted from the previous section this approach is complemented by a professionally driven relationship focus which assists in facilitating all aspects of business functioning.

In the context of running a business, WFDC is conscious of ensuring the best use of resources, be they human, material or financial. In relation to resource usage, an ongoing conversation within the office team concerns how to achieve both efficiency and effectiveness and when to prioritise one over the other. Efficiency is often achieved by operating procedurally, which usually involves developing useful systems or methodologies which can save time or streamline a series of tasks. On the other hand, effectiveness often requires responding in flexible ways depending on the current circumstances. Both effectiveness and efficiency are perceived as important at WFDC and in this light, attention is paid to ensuring that approaches to efficiency and effectiveness are appropriately implemented. There is no 'correct' formula for deriving this balance, hence the benefit of ongoing reflection and review of practice. As an example, it would not be good business if the office team was to over-emphasise efficiency in all of its interactions with educators or families as this would detract from healthy team connections and being able to 'hear' what the other person is communicating. Conversely, not giving enough attention to efficiency means that the cost/benefit analysis shifts too heavily to a cost to the organisation of supporting an educator over time and this does not make for a sustainable business. In concrete terms the cost is calculated by adding up the hours of support provided by office team members to an educator and comparing this figure to the income provided to the service by the educator levy. Whilst there may be times when the cost to the service is higher for a period, if this were sustained then WFDC would be seriously questioning the capacity of that educator to competently undertake their role. For some readers, the business model in operation at WFDC and seeing the important workplace relationship between the office team and educators being described as a business equation may be challenging. However, that is what a business is all about – ensuring that the income (benefits) out-weighs expenditure (costs).

#### *Strategies Implemented by WFDC*

1. Explicitly develop a business model as the primary conceptual approach to undertaking a family day care service. This attention to the cost/benefit ledger will help insulate a service if and when future government funding models change. Wynnum Family Day Care has calculated costs in relation to key activities such as recruiting and selection of new educators and can therefore consciously allocate team resources to different activity based on activity costs.
2. Consciously using explicit business language such as productivity rate. It is expected that all of the office based team at WFDC understand and are able to speak with clarity about EFT and productivity rates. Position titles have been reviewed and, where appropriate, renamed to reflect that the service has a strong business orientation.
3. Only register educators that are able to commit to a cost effective productivity rate in their role as educators.
4. Utilise a project management approach to service activities and priorities. Each of the office team members have been allocated or chosen specific project responsibilities that they report on in team meeting, and they ensure implementation of tasks associated with project goals. The recognition of the need

for this model was heightened by the realisation of the increasing complexity of family day care and that it was preferable for office based team members to not try to be an 'expert' on all matters but instead to develop significant expertise in some areas. Hence WFDC shifted the focus from coordination team members needing to possess often a shallow breadth of information across many subjects to possessing in depth expertise on some subjects. Information is then shared with educators and parents about the most appropriate team member to contact for information or expertise on varying topics.

### ***Distributive Leadership Structure and Processes***

WFDC operates with a hierarchical organisational structure where different levels of the organisation possess different responsibilities. Within the operational structure, the service manager has responsibility for the overall performance of the service and as such possesses formal leadership functions. Whilst this is acknowledged, the team has considered how they want leadership to be enacted within their service and in doing so identified a number of guiding principles:

- Formal leadership positions possess legitimate authority and associated accountability to enact certain tasks, activities and responsibilities.
- Informal leadership roles exist and can be as powerfully impactful as formal leadership positions. Therefore there is a need for informal leadership influences to be made explicit and utilised constructively to further the organisation's goals.
- Every person is a leader in his or her own role and makes leadership contributions to the service as a whole.
- A collaborative team approach enhances any leadership activity.
- Leadership practice needs to be congruent with the espoused organisational values and contribute to sustaining a healthy team culture.
- Leadership is understood to possess significant developmental opportunities for those engaged in its practice.

Over the past four to five years WFDC has experimented with different ways in which individuals might express their leadership capabilities and potential. This has developed into the present model which is strongly reflective of a distributive leadership model (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2004). Numerous definitions of distributive leadership exist. Outlined below is a definition from Jones, Harvey, Lefoe, and Ryland (2012) that most closely reflects the leadership pattern in place at WFDC. Interestingly this definition was developed in a tertiary education environment of teaching and learning.

*Distributed leadership is a leadership approach in which collaborative working is undertaken between individuals who trust and respect each other's contribution. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across an organisation. It is an approach in which reflective practice is an integral part of enabling actions to be critiqued, challenged and developed through cycles of planning, action, reflection and assessment and replanning. It happens most effectively when people at all levels engage in action and accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise.*

A distributed leadership model is premised upon the interactions between many leaders rather than the actions of an individual leader, and emphasises leadership practice rather than formal leadership roles. So how did WFDC arrive at this leadership practice? Firstly, as a result of regular planning processes which included environmental scanning of the predicted and potential future changes operating within the family day care sector and more broadly the early childhood education and care sector, it became clear that leadership required 'all hands on deck'. This was because the increasing complexity and rapid pace of change within the early childhood education and care sector meant that a shared leadership approach would be more effective in achieving certain organisational goals rather than the more traditional 'leading from the top' approach.

In order to action this, WFDC undertook a number of activities. This included the office team membership completing an audit of their expertise and skills and areas of interest. In the team restructure associated with a move to a more explicit business model, separate project management areas were identified with each of the office team members identifying the areas of leadership that they would like to take responsibility for congruent with their expertise and interests. Examples of project management leadership areas operating within WFDC include:

- Educator professional development program.
- Inclusion Support Subsidy program.
- Onsite Early Years Learning Framework training.
- Play sessions program.
- Professional environmental practice.
- Child Development Initiative.
- Initial intake and childcare placements and interviews.
- Intake for prospective educators.
- Information, communication, and technology support.
- Educator business principles and practice program.
- Home play sessions program.
- Kindergarten program.
- Educator qualification support program.

A leadership function that WFDC has prioritised has been engaging in both strategic and operational planning processes for the service. At a strategic level this has involved engaging in formal planning processes 1-2 times per year and most importantly allocating time to track the external political, professional, community and economic environments to ascertain a sense of the predictive future for family day care. These planning processes were externally facilitated and provided opportunities for the office based team to think about the 'big picture'. Utilising an appreciative inquiry approach to planning (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) the office team members were also encouraged to brainstorm ideas and contribute 'provocative propositions' as to the future of family day care and by association, the potential futures for WFDC. A clear example of how the thinking and planning at these sessions has influenced the service at an operational level, was the identification at a big picture planning session in 2004 that 'the writing was on the wall' with regard to the need

for educators to possess training qualifications to enhance the professionalisation of service delivery. This understanding was then incorporated into the service operational planning with the allocation of responsibilities and resources to action. The outcome of this approach was the successful gaining of a grant and the implementation of the government funded Community Response Training Program operating within the WFDC service. In this program, training was delivered by an external training service for educators within WFDC at no cost to the educators.

The metrics outlined in the table earlier in this report reinforce the importance placed on training and development within WFDC. Whilst the service is operating with 85% of educators with a relevant Certificate III, the service continues to strongly encourage all team members, both in the office and educator teams to continue to build on their qualification base. Currently WFDC has 39% of educators with above Certificate III qualifications which include educators with diplomas, advanced diplomas and bachelor degrees in early childhood education studies.

The final comment about the importance of leadership enacted at WFDC relates to another benefit of a distributive leadership model, that is, sharing the load and responsibility when making tough decisions. A very powerful example of this at WFDC is when the service made the decision to enact the three focus questions referred to earlier – child focus, quality focus and team focus, and apply these focus questions to internally assessing the standards of quality service provided by each educator in the service. As already mentioned, the result of this internal assessment process was that 19 educators were identified as not reaching the quality benchmark expected of educators working at WFDC. Two very important leadership skills were needed to implement this decision. Firstly, to be able to envision a more desirable future state for the service and to stay focused on that big picture vision even when times were challenging. Secondly, implementing these decisions requires a strong consistent capacity to manage significant resistance to change and see this as a normal human response to being confronted with the need to change.

#### *Strategies Implemented by WFDC*

1. Explicit conversations about preferred leadership models and the development of a project management structure across the office team.
2. Regular strategic and operational planning processes – at least two formal processes per year – to gauge the external environment and incorporate new information into the service's goals and direction.
3. Individual coaching/supervision for the service manager by an external mentor equating to 1.5 hours each six week period.

#### ***Maintaining Open Systems***

Systems theory (Schein & Bennis, 1965) focuses on the interactions between parts of a system and on the interaction between a system and its environment. Utilising a systems approach to understanding how an organisation operates means viewing an organisation in a constant state of change. In this context, organisations – just like living organisms – grow, mature, decline and eventually pass away. However, unlike typical living organisms the

duration of each stage is not so predictable and can vary enormously from organisation to organisation.

Further, the literature surrounding systems theory delineates systems into open and closed systems. An open-systems approach first applied by Katz and Kahn (1966) describes organisational behaviour as operating in repeated cycles of input, throughput, output and feedback between an organisation and its environment. Closed systems on the other hand are described as organisations that are insensitive to environmental changes, internally focused with goals of limiting change and maintaining known stability.

Characteristics of organisations operating with open systems include:

- There is a constant exchange of resources between the external environment and the organisation.
- Significant flows of new information, energy, and ideas flow between different parts of an organisation, and an organisation and its environment.
- Feedback mechanisms are in place and operational.
- Creativity and innovation are encouraged.
- Organisations are constantly using new information to respond to their environment and making adjustments accordingly, usually to both structure and process components of the organisation.

It has been recognised for decades that operating organisations as closed systems is no longer tenable (Senge, 2008). In recent years this understanding has only intensified with the increasing complexity and dynamism of external organisational environments and the rapid change being experienced in technological, social, economic and political domains. A commonly cited statement in contemporary organisational planning processes is evidence of this:

*If the rate of change outside the organisation is faster than the rate of change inside the organisation the end is nigh.*

(Carnall, 2003)

Wynnum Family Day Care has strived to operate as an explicitly open system with a focus on considerable information flow through the organisation and engaging a range of external professionals to contribute different skills and knowledge. These professionals have contributed across organisational development, training and development, team development, practice development and business development areas. Some specific examples are given below.

#### *Strategies Implemented by WFDC*

1. Bi-annual service reviews undertaken by an external consultant. To date WFDC has had four service evaluations conducted during 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 with the fifth review scheduled for April 2014. The focus of these reviews is to access both qualitative and quantitative feedback from educators on their views of WFDC's



organisational functioning. This valuable feedback is gained via face to face interviews and survey responses and all information is non-identifying of any particular educator. Educators are asked their opinions across a range of domains which include their feedback on the functioning of the office based team in areas such as team culture, inclusion, provision of service support, participation, transparency of decision making, role clarity, team work, approachability and training support. The outcomes of the data collection are documented in a comprehensive report and each report includes not only the outcomes of the most recent feedback but also the implications of this feedback in relation to training needs, business and resource priorities, succession planning and future areas of service provision. After the publication of each service review report, educators are provided with summary information of the findings.

2. Cross organisational professional linkages. Wynnum Family Day Care understands that operating in an environment of rapid change requires giving ongoing attention to the broader environment and establishing numerous links and information channels across organisations. Wynnum Family Day Care very consciously has developed professional linkages with state and national peak bodies, with local, state and federal politicians and government personnel. Different staff from WFDC have also visited other early childhood education and care services to identify areas of leading practice that they can learn from. In addition, WFDC has provided a range of opportunities for other family day care services to visit their service and investigate areas of service operation.
3. Accessing professional expertise. As already mentioned, WFDC seeks out external consultants to work with different parts of the team through the provision of training to the office based team, educator team or parent team. As a professional organisation WFDC acknowledges the value of other professionals in supporting its organisation in areas such as organisational psychology, ICT systems, business and legal areas and practice development.
4. Creativity and innovation. Being creative and open to possibility is an important skill in operating with an open system organisation. Engaging in expansive thinking and not being constrained by past experience is a priority at WFDC. This is perceived as so important that it will be the subject of the next section of this report.

### ***Embracing Change and Innovation***

At the outset of this document it has been clearly articulated that WFDC has engaged in a conscious change management framework as part of its approach to reviewing and transforming its service over the last 10 year period. Wynnum Family Day Care has maintained awareness of the rapid environmental changes impacting on family day care (e.g. technological, community expectation, social, legal, policy, political and workforce) and sought to respond to these as well as being predictive of future change and correspondingly

innovating service delivery. This change management approach has seen WFDC engage in change across four major organisational domains:

1. Strategic change – When WFDC specifically reviewed its mission, vision and goals and made the decision to shift from a ‘business as usual’ approach to striving to be an innovative cutting edge service exemplifying family day care leadership. Since 2003 WFDC has regularly reviewed and updated its mission and goals via formal planning processes.
2. Structural change – Where WFDC has engaged in processes of ongoing internal structural change to maximise resources and increase responsiveness to sub-team and community needs as they change.
3. Process-oriented change – WFDC has regularly reviewed its operations to ensure that they are maximising both efficiency and effectiveness which has involved reviewing systems, technology, information and communication processes, roles and training needs.
4. People-oriented change – WFDC has prioritised investing in the people capital of the service and has directed resources to promote group cohesion and health across the office based and educator teams, and invested in identified training needs.

Specific activities undertaken by WFDC to increase organisational competency in managing change include:

1. Continuing to work on creating a ‘safe’ organisational environment for the office based team and educator team as it is recognised that engaging in innovation involves taking risk. People are less likely to engage in innovation if they feel they will be ‘punished’ for failure.
2. Sessions with the WFDC office team on possibility thinking, encouraging big picture visioning about what could be possible.
3. Training sessions with the educator team on managing change for self and others. Providing specific training for the office based team on being change agents and increasing their competency at managing other people’s journey through change, especially constructively managing resistance to change.
4. Providing up to three confidential counselling sessions, paid for by the service, for educators who identify that an opportunity to debrief or discuss issues would be helpful for them, including the resolution of personal matters.

All of these strategies and the promotion of a ‘can-do’ attitude as part of the culture of the service has contributed to a range of innovative practices occurring at WFDC. Some of these are outlined below:

#### *Strategies Implemented by WFDC*

1. Engaging in a bi-annual service review – Whilst this strategy has been described in the previous section it is worth restating the importance of this service review activity. The outcomes of a service review contribute significantly to the planning for the service for the next two year period and provides an opportunity to explore creative and innovative activities for the service.

2. Introduction of Hubworks! Hubworks! Is a web based CCMS platform which was fully implemented in 2012 after three years of development. All educators and families now use this online platform to access information such as booking schedules and child registration forms, and this program allows parents to update family information including contact details, emergency persons, medical and health information. This system also has a message centre which enables the office based team to send emails to all or selected families. This system has brought a new level of streamlining of processes for the service and means that processing of childcare attendances are now done weekly. The compliance check of data takes two to three hours and is sent immediately to CCMS. The return information is received less than 12 hours later, with payments to educators completed the same day. The increased efficiency of these systems has meant that staff time has been able to be redirected to other areas of organisational development.
3. The Child Development Initiative – The Child Development Initiative (CDI) is an innovative program implemented by WFDC in 2012 to provide support for individual children’s development. This program ensures that educators, parents, community services, health professionals and WFDC are working together in partnership to ensure quality outcomes for children. Wynnum Family Day Care provides specialist speech therapy services to children in care at WFDC where it is recognised by parents and the educator that some developmental delay may occur. Within the WFDC office team, one full time position is allocated to the implementation of this program. This service is provided at no cost to the parents and has played a major role in assisting children access therapeutic services and increasing the awareness and education of parents and educators of ways to best assist children with certain needs. Another outcome has been a 100% increase in the numbers of children supported by the Inclusion Support Subsidy.
4. Kindergarten Program – Wynnum Family Day Care is implementing a home based Kindergarten Program to facilitate the smooth transition for young children to school by focusing on emotional, physical and cognitive wellbeing and developing the skills needed to integrate into a classroom setting. This program is designed to focus on a child’s individual development and school readiness and will target any specific developmental delays identified with individualised interventions and support.
5. Strong support for innovative practice by educators. Wynnum Family Day Care supports educators to develop innovative practice and showcase great ideas across the service. Ideas such as setting up of web pages, on-line photo albums for parents, creative home play sessions and innovative use of the environment and resources are just some of the ideas. The use of an educator peer mentoring program assists in the transference and development of innovative practice across the service.

### ***Learning and Development***

If you have read this paper from the beginning it will be no surprise that the last priority area highly valued by the WFDC team is that of learning and development. This document is already peppered with examples of how WFDC values knowledge and the processes of learning. Wynnum Family Day Care identifies itself as a learning organisation (Senge, 1990). Senge posited that a learning organisation is an organisation that does the following:

- Continuously adapts and improves how it shares knowledge and information.
- Creates an environment where new ideas are generated, debated and implemented.
- Enables continuous adaptation to the volatile and complex business environment.

Other writers have progressed Senge's work on identifying the characteristics of a learning organisation. For example, Paine (2011) identifies the following five distinct characteristics of a learning organisation:

1. A place where learning is respected.
2. A place that can absorb ideas from the outside rapidly and shared knowledge internally.
3. A place where ideas and creativity are highly valued.
4. All staff from the senior leadership down see themselves as both teachers and learners.
5. Failure is an accepted part of success.

In order to develop a service wide culture of learning, WFDC has concentrated on developing strong relationships across the service, and within and across teams. In this context, strong teams and strong relationships are key to managing difficult experiences and confronting new knowledge that can arise from ongoing processes of inquiry. Importantly, WFDC has also taken on a very process oriented understanding of knowledge. This means that knowledge is viewed not only as a product but also as a process. When this is embedded in organisational culture, curiosity and inquiry become valuable processes to discover knowledge and learning.

Finally, the office based team at WFDC appreciate that the majority of professional learning occurs on the job and not in specific or discrete training programs. Therefore in order to maximise the process of learning at WFDC, a variety of on the job coaching processes were viewed as vital to identify and capture the learnings from daily practice. With this understanding, WFDC has very intentionally developed a culture of coaching and mentoring in both formal and informal forms. Listed below are examples of seven different forms of mentoring and coaching engaged in by different parts of the service:

1. The service manager accesses regular external coaching.
2. The office based team access team coaching processes with external consultants.
3. Office based team members engage in coaching and peer-based mentoring with each other to learn different aspects of each other's roles and ensure that there is back up knowledge in the office when a team member goes on leave.
4. Educational leaders provide formal mentoring to educators engaged in formal study.

5. The educator team operates with a peer mentoring program to assist newer educators gain knowledge and confidence in undertaking their role.
6. Educators receive specific coaching sessions from field experts on topics as they are required, such as managing child protection concerns.
7. Educational leaders work very explicitly with educators on assisting them to identify their areas of strengths and development, and support them in their learning processes.

Outlined below are a number of further strategies engaged in by WFDC which evidence WFDC's commitment to learning and development.

#### *Strategies Implemented by WFDC*

1. Each office based team member has developed and operates with a professional development plan with identified annual goals for development.
2. Each educator develops and operates with an annual professional development plan which is discussed regularly with educational leaders.
3. There is encouragement for the coordination team and educators to attend external training opportunities such as conferences or seminars. The office based team members are also encouraged to pursue training outside of early childhood development or business as it is recognised that exposure to the thinking and frameworks of other professional groups has the potential to enhance thinking in the early childhood sector.
4. Significant resources are dedicated to mentoring and training of educators to promote ongoing expertise development. Wynnum Family Day Care has focused on education and qualification attainment for educators for 10 years and as a result is operating with 85% Certificate III trained educators and with the remaining 15% of educators currently studying their Certificate III. Wynnum Family Day Care expects to achieve 100% Certificate III trained educators by December 2014. This focus on education and development is formally organisationally supported by the Education Qualification Support Program. This WFDC program is project-managed by the service's educational leader who provides a range of supports to educators who are studying. It is the expectation of WFDC that the current percentage of 39 % of educators qualified above the certificate III level will continue to increase in future years.
5. Redesigning the WFDC induction process away from a series of prescriptive modules for educators to an induction program that is individually tailored to the individual learning needs of each educator.
6. Reflective practice processes are formally and informally encouraged. The office based team model the value of reflective practice through their own team supervision and coaching sessions and incorporating opportunities for critical reflection post service events to ensure learnings are identified. Educational leaders encourage and guide reflective practice approaches with educators.
7. Development of educational resources such as a DVD on fire safety for educators.

8. Supporting educators who need to take time away from their work (by providing alternative placements for the children) to engage in a formal study program or attend specific developmental or training activities.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This paper has included many different specific strategies undertaken by WFDC as a snapshot of what has assisted the team to develop its service achievements. There are many more – too many to mention in one paper. The particular strategies were included because, from the office team’s perspective, they were some of the most influencing and impactful on the positive development and evolving coherency of the service. If you are from a family day care service and reading this paper and believe that Wynnum’s journey is relevant for your service you may be wondering where to start in transforming your own service. To assist in planning for your service, outlined below are some summary points from the office team at WFDC.

#### ***Five key challenges that require attention, resources and stamina when implementing a significant change process in your service.***

1. Setting, reaching and then maintaining practice benchmarks without losing energy, focus or commitment, especially during difficult times.
2. Shifting educators from a compliance model (where the office based team takes lots of responsibility for ensuring safe practice is occurring through a multitude of checks and assessments of educators) to a professional business model where it is expected that educators will take responsibility for meeting all regulatory requirements. For example, WFDC does not remind educators when their mandatory training is due and the office based team does not undertake safety checks.
3. Developing a philosophy shared by all of the team, across both the office based team and the educator team.
4. Being resilient enough to engage in critical reflection, internal audits of work, and the giving and receiving of constructive feedback within the office based team and the educator team.
5. Developing safety and trust in the team. It takes time, and can be emotionally risky.

#### ***Five positive reinforcing experiences/processes that helped get us through:***

1. Sharing positive experiences in the team, either individual office based team member’s achievements or stories from educators about their own learning or the growth and progress of children.
2. The positive support team members have given each other as a result of operating in a healthy functioning team.
3. Continuing to have opportunities to be exposed to the ‘big picture’ of early childhood education and care through conferences, seminars and inviting those with specialist expertise to visit WFDC.
4. Positive feedback from parents and educators.
5. Developing a positive and trusting relationship with members of the educator team.

***Six top strategies needed to transform a service culture and practice:***

1. Engage in regular service reviews undertaken by an external consultant and use the results as a basis of reflection and planning for the service.
2. Develop a business model that is congruent with operating a quality early childhood education and care service. Ensure all office team members and educator team members are skilled in running a business and are articulate in using business language and concepts.
3. Put time and energy into developing healthy and effective teams via activities such as team supervision and training, and having whole of team meetings.
4. Be clear about your vision, in other words, the goals your service is aiming for.
5. Develop a change management model, train team members in how to manage change, and support others through significant change.
6. Develop strategies and/or structures to transform great ideas into practice. For WFDC a project management approach was an action oriented and accountable structure that facilitated allocation of responsibilities and measurement of outcomes.

## References

- Carnall, C.A. (2003) *Managing change in organisations*. (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.
- Cooperrider, D.L., & Srivastva, S. (1987) Appreciative inquiry in organisational life. In Woodman, R.W., & Pasmore, W.A., (Eds.) *Research in organisational change and development*. Vol. 1 (pp. 129-169) Stanford. CT: JAI Press.
- Cutlip, S., Centre, A., & Broom, G. (2006) *Effective public relations* (9<sup>th</sup> Ed.). NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Ebbeck, M., & Waniganayake, M. (2004) *Early childhood professionals: Leading today and tomorrow*. Sydney: Elsevier.
- Gordon, P. (2004) *Waving Not Drowning: Reporting on Wynnum Family Day Care Scheme's Experience of Implementing Quality Assurance*. Paper available on request from Wynnum Family Day Care.
- Hargraves, A., & Fink, D. (2006) *Sustainable leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Jones, S., Harvey, M., Lefoe, G., & Ryland, K. (2012) *Lessons learnt: Identifying synergies in distributed leadership projects*. Office for Learning and Teaching, Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. Sydney, Australia.
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R.L. (1966) *The social psychology of organisations*. NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Paine, N. (2011) *Attracting and retaining talent: Best-practice strategies*. Peoria: Ark Group.
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2001) (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participatory inquiry and research* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.). London: Sage.
- Schein, E.H., & Bennis, W.G. (1965) *Personal and organisational change through group methods*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Senge, P. (1990) *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of a learning organisation*. New York: Doubleday.
- Senge, P. (2008) *The necessary revolution: How individuals and organisations are working together to create a sustainable world*. New York: Doubleday.
- Tinney, P. M. (1975) *A home away from home? A comparative evaluation of three Melbourne Family Day Care Projects*. A research project of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.
- Vaka, T. (2013) *Business Models FDC: A Tale of Two Futures*. Presentation at the Family Day Care Australia Symposium. Melbourne: Australia.