

Reflecting on excellence

An interview with your inaugural Hall of Fame inductee, Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service



At this year's FDCA 2018 National Conference Gala Dinner on Saturday 8 September 2018, Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service, who formed in 1988 in the Queensland bayside suburbs of Wynnum/Manly due to a lack of child care options, made history by becoming the first inductee into the Excellence in Family Day Care Awards Hall of Fame.

Following on from this historic achievement, we were lucky enough to catch up with Service Manager Cathy Bavage and ask about the secret to Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service's success, her thoughts on the challenges facing the sector and where she sees family day care heading in the future.

Q What is the early childhood education and care philosophy of Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service?

Our philosophy can be broken down very easily by examining our

service's vision is to provide quality outcomes for children - every child, every day in care; our purpose is to be a field leader in delivering a high quality early childhood education and care service to benefit all of our stakeholders including children, families, educators and staff and at Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service. We value respectful relationships, honesty, inclusive practices and ethical decision making.

Q At the moment Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service is the only family day care service holding the Excellent Rating. What do you believe has allowed the service to achieve this?

One of the keys to providing a high quality early childhood education and care service is having a dedicated internal and external team that are committed to providing quality education and care for children and families

fortunate with a very high retention rate both across our educators and office staff.

We use a benchmarking recruitment process. Our perspective is that educators, specifically recruited because of their capacity for autonomy and self-direction, are less likely to require ongoing intensive support. Initial interactions between coordinators and new educators can then focus upon building rapport, further identifying the team culture and establishing the groundwork for a long term collaborative relationship.

We engage a distributive leadership structure and process. This means that collaboration is undertaken between individuals who trust and respect each other's contribution. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across the 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, assessment and replanning. It happens most effectively when people at all levels engage in action and accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise.

Our service has also embraced an explicit business approach to service delivery. At the time, the reframing of community-based service delivery in terms of business principles was revolutionary in family day care. In many ways this still remains the case. For Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service, our broader vision of quality care for children was refocused through the lens of financial viability. That is, we recognised that we could continue to offer our 'brand' of quality home-based care for children if it had a robust financial position gained from strict fiscal discipline. The challenge was in the marrying of a warm humanistic approach to service delivery with the austerity of economic rationalism. What has helped us to achieve this is that its vision has driven its business plan.

- We set high expectations of ourselves every day – not to achieve a particular rating but in order to deliver the best service we can to our community
- Strong and committed leadership
- Embrace change and innovation
- Strong business management strategies - encouraging and facilitating opportunities for educators to contribute to strategic, policy and operational issues is integral to building and maintaining healthy partnerships
- Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service has strengths in building and maintaining healthy relationships and the

feedback from educators is for the coordination unit to continue to prioritise support, inclusion and respect in the processes and interactions it uses to build its partnerships with educators

- A distinctive feature of Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service's philosophical approach to operating its service has been an avoidance of a compliance-based approach to relationships with educators

Q What advice would you have for services who want to make the step to become rated excellent or improve their rating?

I would recommend that services employ an explicit business approach.

Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service 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. We made an explicit

strategic decision that first and foremost our service is a business and not a community service. This does not mean that our service 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.

An example of this business model includes pursuing organisational improvement regularly and rigorously. Forward thinking and innovation are enabled by reflective practice. Daily "mini" team meetings are held in the office as a way for coordinators to share not only practical information about tasks to be completed but also to "check in" with each other about workloads and the best way to manage. A weekly team meeting allows for extended time to review current happenings in the service, discuss how any challenges will be managed and by who, and to reflect on practice by giving and



receiving feedback. As mentioned above, due to the trusting relationships between educators and coordinators, questions about practice can be posed without evoking a defensive response, and instead taken on board as a valuable part of continual professional development.

An Excellent Rating can be compared to an iceberg, in that the visible part (the rating) is held up by the processes and practices, which are in turn supported by the deeper underlying principles or beliefs that form the service's philosophy. Therefore the first steps for services seeking to enhance their rating is to develop a philosophy including the values that are most important for your context and community, followed by the processes that will best enable you to put your philosophy into practice.



It is important to engage professional consultants to assist in critically reflecting the business as a whole. Focusing on how to stay current, identifying what is redundant within the service, identifying business strengths and challenges.

Having the right people in the right roles helps great organisations more easily implement the strategies that deliver on its purpose and mission. A challenge in implementing innovation is that the skill sets required to successfully deliver on new initiatives can be hard to define with certainty prior to implementation. In a desire to commence new initiatives there may be a propensity to overlook the gaps in the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to deliver a service.

For important initiatives, great organisations wait to have the right people 'on the bus' before it heads off on the journey.

Last, but certainly not least, a service must remember to keep the child as the central motivation.

Q During your time as the Service Manager at Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service, what do you believe have been the biggest changes for the sector?

There's been a number of big changes in the sector during my time as the Service Manager. With initial changes such as the recognition of the status of educators, moving from a family day care "mum", to a carer through to an educator and the professionalisation of the sector with mandatory qualifications.

I've seen deregulation (educators setting fees), the removal of boundaries and a move from compliance-based (co-supportive) to relationship/partnership based businesses.

In recent times some of the biggest changes have included the movement to an IT-based, paperless system, the withdrawing of government financial support continuing to be a challenge in regards to the viability of services, changes in legislation (Family Assistance Law) and of course the move to the Child Care Subsidy.

Q Outside of the service twice obtaining the Excellent Rating, what do you believe is the service's proudest achievement?

For our service, industry acknowledgement, that validation of the work we do within the sector is something that we are very proud of, as well as our capacity to embrace change.

We take pride in being a relationship based business and having a strong team culture that has lead to our longevity. The reputation that we have developed through positive word-of-mouth about the service we provide to the community is also something that we are very proud of.

Q What challenges and opportunities do you see for family day care in the next 5-10 years?

No doubt that it has recently been a challenging time for the family day care sector. Whether it be the perception of family day care within government after the years of fraud, non-compliance or legislation changes at both state and federal levels that have a significant impact on the operational model.

Keeping family day care as a viable choice for parents in the face of being under resourced and undervalued by the government compared to other early childhood care options is something that I see a big challenge for the sector.

However, I also believe that there are opportunities for the sector in the future. With our service, the loss of government funding has allowed us to develop the business to reflect the needs of clients and not be accountable to the government for determining how we allocate funds. This means we can develop and deliver programs tailored to individual services.

I also see the future giving educators the chance to be recognised as small business operators and family day care being further redefined as a boutique, high quality, specialised form of child care for small groups of children.

FDCA would like to again congratulate Wynnum Family Day Care and Education Service on being inducted into the Excellence in Family Day Care Awards Hall of Fame and thank Cathy and the team for taking the time to answer these questions.