

reflections

GOWRIE AUSTRALIA PUBLICATION **AUGUST 2016**



Dear Colleagues,

Gowrie Australia, a consortium of the Gowrie Centres across Australia, has provided advice and information for education and care professionals for many years through the publication Reflections.

This support will continue through a refreshed and revised form of Reflections. In the future, articles will be produced digitally every month as opposed to the former quarterly edition. It is believed that this new look and feel is better suited to the opportunities for more spontaneous reading as well as discussion starters for professional reflection. It will also enable individual articles to be downloaded and distributed more widely within services. Gowrie Australia is confident that Reflections will continue to provide support and contribute to the continuous improvement within the education and care sector.

Enjoy this first issue which focuses on the importance of ongoing professional development and learning.

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING – AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT!

The Australian Government's Inclusion and Professional Support Program came to an end on 30 June 2016. This program included the Professional Support Co-ordinator in each state and territory that provided professional development and support to eligible education and care services throughout Australia.

Acknowledging some education and care services may still have resources available through the Long Day Care Professional Development Program, the cessation of this program means that subsidised professional support will no longer be available into the future. Despite this loss, it is imperative that ongoing professional development is available to educators so as new and emerging research informs their practice as well as to enable critical reflection and continuous improvement.

Employers that commit time and other resources to supporting ongoing professional learning and who also provide ongoing support for the process of implementing related changes; will be well positioned to create a work place in which staff feel confident and purposeful in their work. Professional development is central because it enables educators to contribute to developing practices that are guided by current theory and research. It develops deeper levels of understanding about their work, enhances effectiveness in work with children, families and staff teams.

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING – AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT! (CONTINUED)

It comes in many forms

While acknowledging the challenge of affordability for families accessing services, service budgets must include an allocation of resources to support educators in ongoing professional learning and development. Such allocation could include:

- Subscriptions to journals, magazines
- Attendance at conferences
- Mentorship and coaching programs
- Customised in service training workshops
- Participation in interest groups, hubs, networking groups
- Visiting programs
- Participation in professional associations
- Upgrading or gaining qualifications
- Action research projects

Technology is now an integral factor in accessing professional learning and development. The availability of on line courses and learning hubs, webinars, discussion groups, together with the profound amount of information available through search engines provides a myriad of opportunities and flexibility for engagement.

Value for the investment

Given the investment required, it is important to be strategic and considered in the decision making process in respect of professional learning given that services will now be likely to be paying commercial rates. Some thoughts to support considered decision making include:

- Ensure the facilitator is credible and authentic – seek a referee report
- If a service specific group event, develop a briefing and seek quotations from at least two providers
- If a workshop send one or two educators and plan for the information/learnings to be shared with all other educators at the services – presentation at a team/ staff meeting/program planning session, written summary to all team members
- Align professional learning to agreed outcomes of a performance appraisal/review process
- Link the learning to the service Quality Improvement Plan

Who is responsible?

Having a planned approach to professional development also contributes to improving staff retention. Through prioritising support for the professional learning builds staff relationships in which all staff feel valued and respected.

Staff that access a rich array of professional development opportunities are better positioned to contribute to ongoing improvements in their own practice and make significant contributions to the quality of programs in their workplace.

The leader of the education and care service plays a central role in establishing a culture of professionalism and ongoing learning in their staff teams. The leadership exercised by the inspiring leader to engage, motivate and support staff in being effective learners and reflective practitioners is paramount in creating a professional learning community. As is often quoted in governance and management courses: The culture or tone of the organisation is set at the top.

While the service leader has a key role, individuals also need to take responsibility for their own professional learning. This may mean reading journals and articles, searching the web and seeking information, and importantly being reflective in their own work – stopping and thinking about how and why they are doing what they do. This provides a platform for deciding what actions or changes can be made to improve practice and generating new and creative ways of working.

The benefits

The concept of lifelong learning has become of vital importance with the emergence of new theories, technologies, changing regulations and standards that enable early childhood professionals to question and continually reflect on practice e.g. the 'why' of the 'what' we do. Commitment to life-long learning is essential when working with children and families.

All stakeholders within an organisation have a responsibility to ensure engagement in continuous professional learning and apply that learning to improve outcomes for children, families and indeed ourselves.

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For your professional learning and support contact your state based Gowrie listed below:

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QLD www.gowrieqld.com.au

SA www.gowriesa.org.au

TAS www.gowrie-tas.com.au

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