

reflections

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STRENGTHENING FAMILIES INVOLVEMENT – CHILDREN’S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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Partnering with families and encouraging family input into their child’s learning and development within the education and care setting has been an area of focus for Lady Gowrie Tasmania.

National Quality Standard 6.1 states ‘*Respectful and supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained*’. Lady Gowrie Tasmania educators recognise the importance of continually reflecting on family engagement and respectful partnerships, and identified (and documented within their QIP’s) that family engagement was not as evident as they would have liked, despite adopting a myriad of methods to capture family input. This included family partnership forms, survey monkey, family newsletters and family information sessions, all with minimal and varied response.

Documenting children’s learning and development has always been evident throughout the organisation’s services

in a variety of formats, which are determined by educators to reflect the community and culture of each service.

With technology now a significant tool to aid communication, services investigated a way to use technology beyond the basic strategy of emails. Educators recognised that families responded more effectively to this form of communication and therefore considered ways of expanding the use of technology.

Through this reflection, recognising and valuing families and family structures, it was identified that there are only small opportunities to engage with families at the beginning and end of each day as many families are busy at these critical times. This led to the organisation looking at an electronic medium to support planning and documentation that would strengthen the partnership with families and their input into children’s learning and development. With easy access to laptops, smart phones,

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iPads and other electronic devices, documenting through an electronic medium is readily available for families at any time anywhere.

An online documentation platform was explored through an extensive trial process with five of the organisation's long day care education and care services. This trial resulted in a significant increase in family involvement and collaboration. Not only did family engagement increase, but families' interest in the program was heightened. This fostered conversations with the educators about individual children's learning and development.

Lady Gowrie Tasmania is committed to building on the current skills and knowledge of educators in the use of technology. Our educators are embracing this form of communication and are eager to learn more. As they work with technology they have witnessed the benefits firsthand. Increased family engagement has included wider family networks which are very much a part of the online digital community. An example of this is a family who added their child's grandparents who live overseas to their online portfolio. This allowed the extended family to be a part of the child's learning and development; to see the environment in which their grandchild engages, contribute through sharing photos and provide input into the planning and development program.

This online method of documenting has been in operation for six months and is now extended to include eleven Lady

Gowrie Tasmania services. Within a short period of time, the services have seen a significant increase in family input and curiosity into their child's learning and development.

A Manager recently stated:

"Families are now regularly contributing their ideas and thoughts that support educators to extend children's learning. It is great to see how much families enjoy receiving regular information and photos depicting their child's day as part of the learning community. We are now getting to know more about families' lives beyond the service. Educators are excited about being part of the online documentation journey and the possibilities it presents."

The online documentation platform does not replace the traditional program planning cycle. What it does is enhance collaboration and communication between families and the service to support the planning for individual children.



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