

COMMUNITY CHILD CARE

HOW TO GENERATE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICE MANAGEMENT

A quality children's service seeks and values input from the families and parents of the children they care for and educate. The National Quality Framework and the approved learning frameworks discuss the importance of educators developing respectful, supportive and collaborative partnerships with families.

There are many ways in which families can be involved in service management. The extent to which families can be involved depends on each service and its specific governance structure and needs, and the families of the service's community themselves. If a committee of management governs your service, parents will form the basis of this committee, in most cases. If a school, local government, private entity or other organisation manages your service, families may be able to be involved in a subcommittee, reporting to the governing body. There are also many ways that families can be involved generally, helping out in an informal capacity. It is important to consider the specific needs and structure of your service in terms of family involvement and also to know the unique make-up of your parent community, and what they may be willing and able to contribute.

Following are some ways in which families may be involved in a children's service:

Committee of management

Depending on the governance structure of your service, parent volunteers may make up a committee of management and be the approved provider of the service. Family members can bring a wide variety of skills to the service, and can have a positive effect on the service operation. Sometimes it can be challenging to recruit new members to become volunteers on the parent management committee. Through building positive partnerships with families, educators may be able to suggest parents who have specific skills and who may be interested in being involved in the service operation.

Subcommittee or advisory group

Depending on the governance structure of your service, a subcommittee may be an effective way of involving families in efficiently running the service. A subcommittee or parent committee generally functions in an advisory capacity and can provide support for the service's management team (coordinator/director and/or approved provider). A subcommittee does not replace the need for the sponsor or governing body to function as the approved provider. Subcommittees may be responsible for various aspects of the service, offering support and advice, which may include policy writing, philosophy development, resources management, administration and fundraising.

Volunteers for specific task

There may be times when your service needs the assistance of a person with a specific skill or area of expertise, e.g. handy-man assistance, accountancy, financial management, recruitment or cooking. Some parents may find it rewarding to volunteer their specific skills to the service on a once-off basis. It is important that all parties are clear about their expectations, outcomes, time-lines and parameters of the task.

Asking family members to contribute by doing a one off task is often a good introduction to being involved in service management. For example a parent who is approached to review one policy may then go on to be part of a policy subcommittee and then feel more confident about nominating for the Committee of Management.

Special Events

From time to time, services may have special events, such as fundraising or social activities, cultural celebrations, farewells or community festivals. These can be ideal opportunities to involve families in your service in a fun and relaxed way. Make sure that any events are promoted well in advance to allow families time to plan their involvement.

Day-to-day life at the service

Establishing mutually respectful partnerships between families and educators can start by services inviting families to be involved in the day-to-day life of children when they are at the service. Inviting parents to share morning or afternoon tea, or a special activity with the children and see what happens in the program can be a valuable way of sharing information, gaining insight and building respect.

Strategies to promote and encourage family involvement in service management

Enrolment form/survey

- ▶ Ask families what their occupation, skills and interests are on their child's enrolment form (or a short survey) when they start at the service.
- ▶ Compile a list of the occupations, skills and interests of the families in your service and encourage staff to spend time getting to know the families of the children in their care

Advertising

Advertise any committee and volunteer positions vacant in as many ways as possible as different people access and use different forms of communication. This can include newsletters, display/notice board, emails, messages on fee statements, website posts and social media, if appropriate. These days, many people respond best to electronic forms of communication so it is useful to have a current email listing for families. It is also important to remember that not all families have access to this technology and maintaining hard copy forms of communication will also be necessary for some families too.

A letter of introduction from the president of the committee of management or the approved provider of the service can help to generate the interest of other family members. It is important that families know what is entailed in volunteer (or other) roles that are advertised, so make sure that there is a description, which includes the following:

- ▶ a brief explanation of the role of the committee or subcommittee
- ▶ a description of the roles of the various committee members
- ▶ a description of what happens at meetings and their frequency
- ▶ a statement of the benefits of being on the committee.

Personal Recruitment

It helps to know your service community, as specifically approaching family members with particular skills or interests can be the most effective method of generating parent involvement. Follow up advertising with personal approaches to specific people you think would suit the role. Encourage current volunteers or committee members to discuss their involvement on a one-to-one basis as well.

Promote the Benefits

In order to attract families to be involved in committees, it is important to promote the benefits of such involvement. You could include a statement of benefits in the newsletter or on the notice board. Benefits to families may include:

- ▶ a productive way to have input and influence, and gain a better understanding about how the service is run and ways it could be improved
- ▶ an opportunity to meet other parents and develop new skills
- ▶ an opportunity to be involved in the community of the service.

Testimonials of other parents who have been committee members in the past and the benefits they experienced being involved in the service can assist in recruiting other parents. Encourage existing committee members to talk about their experiences in service management.

Community Child Care

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COMMUNITY CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION INC.

ABN 90 494 504 678 Reg No A0030026F

Suite West 08 & 09, 215 Bell Street, Preston Victoria 3072

Tel 03 9486 3455 Freecall 1800 177 017 Fax 03 9486 3271

Email reception@cccinc.org.au Web www.cccinc.org.au