

Queensland Inclusion Network

State-wide Network for Inclusion Support Agencies

Submission to the Childcare and Early Childhood Learning Productivity Commission

By Queensland Inclusion Network

January 2014

This submission has been developed in conjunction with members of the QIN with a specific focus of the inclusion of all children, including children with additional needs.

Background

The Mission of the Queensland Inclusion Network is to be active Advocates at a state and National level for positive outcome for all children including those children with additional needs. One of the QIN's roles is to work with ISA's nationally to develop and implement strategies to improve the delivery of inclusion support whilst maintaining cultural competence, safety and security of services. Membership of the QIN comprises of Team leaders, managers and Coordinators of Queensland Inclusion Support Agencies who meet quarterly.

Issues

Inclusion – Inclusion and Professional Support Program

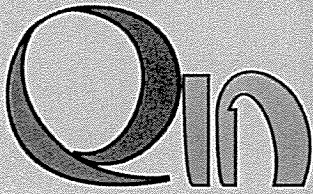
- Consideration that the Inclusion Professional Support Program needs to be more integrated so that the partners are working in collaboration with the ability to blend funding to achieve better outcomes for the ECEC sector. This will further assist more rural and remote areas who struggle to receive the same service as metropolitan settings. Segmented areas of the program do not always allow for the most cost effective service delivery. A more simplified process for applying for IS funding would shift the emphasis of administration from the Inclusion Support Facilitator to be able to spend more time in the coaching and mentoring role that has demonstrated its effectiveness for ongoing capacity building with Services. The IS application and reapplication process is now so complicated that ECEC services are unable to complete the requirements without considerable support from the ISA – the time spent on admin directly detracts from the coaching and mentoring role in the actual care environment.
- IS Portal and the application – reapplication process is so incredibly complex that even ISF's can struggle with what type of application is appropriate in certain situations let alone ECEC settings that only engage with the process a few times a year – If an application is not written in a specific way then it will be declined and services find this incredibly frustrating and some services decline using the IS as a resource and ask the family to move on rather than go through the process. A more cost effective approach could be that the ISF assists the service with developing an understanding of their need through an SSP that identifies what strategies are going to be put in place, by whom and by when and this will then determine if ongoing IS funding support is required. If this is required then the ECEC service deals with the NISSP directly on a simplified system (with phone support for the on-line system) and leaves the ISF to continue their work that builds capacity e.g. links to resources and professional development, support visits, coaching and mentoring, assistance with networking etc. The application would remain an agreement between the Service and the NISSP and the ISF spends valuable time in the service and assists in monitoring that the funding is being used for approved purposes.



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- Nationally consistent PD for ISF's is vital – if there is a real commitment by Govt for consistency across the Nation then the program that is 80% of the IPSP should have recognition and value as a Professional status

Services

- A common theme is emerging from services regarding the inclusion of children from low socio economic backgrounds, those exhibiting behavior of concern or working alongside families and supporting children who may have a member with a mental illness. In considering the needs of the environment that the child is engaged in, leads to considering what services and resources can be drawn on in the community. This shows that the whole child is affected by the vulnerable situations they are exposed to and that recognising the needs of these children on both individual and community levels would provide positive outcomes across the lifespan.
- Parents need to feel secure that Educators are able to support a child with high support needs. Enrolment packages / processes need to gather enough detail about families and children, to allow Educators to be prepared for needs of children when they enter their environments and Parents can then have confidence in the service, thus alleviating the inexperience and reluctance of Educators to perform tasks to support children with complex needs:
- It has been identified that a key factor in overcoming the barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children enrolling in ECEC is to develop strong relationships with families and create partnerships with them in the education and care of their children. This shows that educators can assist in overcoming the barriers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families enrolling in ECEC services, by developing stronger relationships with them and assisting in creating partnerships with the communities they live in. However, the skills or training needed to understand community development and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families may be limited and this may require additional PD where the need is identified.
- Outside school hours care is an important part of our sector but we support the establishment of a plan to address the unique challenges of school aged services. This includes how to improve access to OSHC, particularly in schools where services are not available or where demand exceeds supply. In the OSHC sector the administrative workload can be burdensome and often unachievable for Services that do not provide Administration time for the Educators.

Workforce

- There are demonstrated benefits that need to be perpetuated in support of ECEC Services participating in workshops that allow for discussions and collaboration on what inclusive practices look like in an early childhood settings, positive experiences from implementing inclusive practices and the benefits.
- The high turnover of ECEC Staff results in ongoing building capacity from base line. Strategies need to be in place to allow educators to feel valued in their profession (e.g. increased wages and conditions of employment.) This high turnover results in key Staff not being familiar with the IPSP program. Evidence supports the need for ongoing face to face contact to ensure relationships are developed and maintained between Inclusion Support Facilitators and child care educators.
- Some educators are inexperienced and move from assistant to Group Leader/Educator in a very short period of time, thus being inexperienced in the role of senior educator which leads to limited



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skill development and poor support mechanisms. Mentoring before promotion is necessary to maintain quality care

- Lower ratios will help to provide a more inclusive environment for all children and assist services to retain Educators and reduce burnout. The National Quality Framework must be adhered to and changes introduced on the time frames suggested.
- RTO's providing ECEC training need to have a stronger focus on developing the skills and the knowledge of the skills required for Early Childhood Educators today. Focus on quality inclusion is important as all children have the right to attend child care and kindergarten services

Eligibility

- In remote areas Educators support children who are not diagnosed or undergoing diagnosis (for various reasons), but whose development and behavior are of concern. The children don't meet eligibility criteria and therefore may miss out on additional support. This is compounded by the lack of allied health and other support services in remote areas. While it is recognized that it would be difficult to open up eligibility to children who have no diagnosis at all, consideration needs to be given to the inclusion and support of children who live in remote regions where access to relevant allied health services does not exist, therefore preventing evidence of eligibility.
- Reform should prioritize increased investment to improve access for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, especially those from rural and remote areas.
- A significant trend is high needs children with social and emotional issues that are a barrier to their inclusion that are not related to a diagnosed disability. Mental health issues in families and attachment issues for children pose significant challenges for ECEC settings. Often an offshoot of this can be that families are asked to seek ongoing investigation for possible diagnoses where more appropriate support would be for building family skills and relationships and support for children at risk of developing mental health issues. We see children with challenging behaviors move from service to service as their behaviors are a barrier to inclusion, however they do not fit within the current IPSP priority groups. This area of early childhood development should be carefully considered as another 'priority group' for support.



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