

Engaging with families at Wynnum Family Day Care

The following case study has been created by [Wynnum Family Day Care & Education Service](#) to demonstrate how they engage with families and the benefits of this interaction for children's education outcomes.

Summary

Our service found that supportive relationships with families develop through trust, collaboration and shared decision-making. We believe that there are two very important ingredients: 1) acknowledging and celebrating the expertise of both the family and the educators, and; 2) providing meaningful learning experiences that are based on shared values and beliefs.

Early Years Learning Framework – Principle 2: Partnerships

Educators create welcoming environments where all children and families are respected and actively encouraged to collaborate about curriculum decisions to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful.

National Quality Standard – Quality Area 6

This quality area recognises (among other things) that each family's wellbeing and capacity to nurture and support their children, is influenced by the community in which they live and the material resources and social supports available to them.

Overview

Wynnum Family Day Care & Education Service, located in Brisbane, is a not-for-profit, home-based service providing early childhood education and care for children from birth to 12 years. In this case study, we look at 3 strategies our family day care educators use to encourage family engagement. All of these examples describe how educators build and sustain collaborative partnerships with families to support children's learning and development.

Recognising and supporting family engagement in learning at home

As a service, we make regular visits to places within our local community. One of our regular outings is to the community library. The library is a wonderful resource for promoting family literacy, engagement in fun, interactive experiences, and a foundation for a love for books and lifelong learning. Regular discussions with families have led us to some interesting findings; for example, we discovered that

not all families were aware that libraries are a free service to supplement access to books at home.

We have reflected on the use of community facilities at our service. This reflection has prompted discussions with children and families about what they value the most about our outings. Our educators and families recognise that adding library visits to the weekly program provides children with an opportunity to be involved in their local community, as we share this communal space and interact with a diverse group of community members. Children can see people of all ages gaining enjoyment from reading and accessing a wide variety of printed materials, such as newspapers, magazines, large reference books and maps, written in both English and other languages.

During our library visits, children can listen to audiobooks and experiment with other forms of media, such as computers. We often participate in story and music sessions run by the library. These sessions allow children to listen to a story read by a less familiar adult, other parents, grandparents and even other children. This expands the group of people coming together to experience enjoyment from books and reading. The entire group benefits from the interactive nature of these early literacy experiences, nurturing pre-literacy communication



and promoting social skills and language development. We have also begun to promote the library to our families as a place to seek information, access reference books and borrow storybooks for children that can assist with explaining difficult topics to children, such as tragedy or grief.

Together with the children, we continue our regular visits to the local community. We share our discoveries and enjoyment, extending this awareness to families whose experiences may not have been the same. We have found that children visiting these places with us has given confidence to the families to access these services and resources themselves. This was an amazing finding for us – realising that us sharing our passion can influence others so greatly!

Supporting two-way, positive communication and providing light touch updates about learning and development

We believe in open and honest communication, and that even the small moments are worth sharing. Recently, we have observed that our younger children (aged 12–18 months) began showing how strong they are in their physical development and how eager they are to leave the table during mealtimes. Over the past couple of weeks, they have learned to push themselves away from the table, signaling that they have finished eating and are ready to engage in other experiences.

This observation prompted us to have conversations with families around routines and transitions, and how these are managed at home. We shared our views on children as independent learners, and how we can foster independence. We also spoke about children's verbal and non-verbal communication, and the way children can express their needs. We see a great value in non-verbal cues and trialed these during mealtimes; for example, role modelling 'more please' and 'finish' using both words and actions. These strategies were discussed with families along with exploring simple signs and language the educators, families and children could practice together. We have included other repetitive phrases and actions that could be paired with a signal. We

continue to share our knowledge and experiences with families, and, in turn, they share their views with us, maintaining a high level of trust.

Promoting a literacy-rich environment at home

Storytelling and books are a great passion within our service. We have a large selection of adults’ books for families to access, and children’s books at children’s reach on lower shelves. We engage in spontaneous storytelling anytime when the children are keen. To maintain and encourage children’s interest in stories and lifelong reading, we have started our own book club. Each child decorates their own book club bag and can borrow a book from us to take home to share with their families. When they return the book, the children are prompted to retell the story among the group or tell us about their favourite parts. At other times, a child may simply prefer to choose another book to take home, and that’s okay, too. Our book club experiences take place at any time, especially when a child is returning their borrowed book and is excited to share it with the other children.

We also create photo collages of children reading, and display these on the wall next to our bookshelf. It promotes more regular time spent looking through the books – and their photos, of course! Families share their images of children reading at home, or wherever the story is being enjoyed. Shared reading builds a stronger connection between home and our service. We have had a lot of positive feedback from both families and the children:

‘We love the book club initiative. It is so generous of you to loan us your books and gives the kids a lovely incentive to read more at home. It also teaches a real-world concept of the library with a personal touch from you.’

We have shared the techniques explained in Mem Fox’s *Reading Magic* with our families, encouraging those who were not avid readers themselves to appreciate the value of exploring books with their children. An important message for parents is that reading aloud, reading often and providing children with plenty of opportunities to hear stories is a wonderful start and helps with their child’s learning development.

We also encourage storytelling using pictures and props to prompt imagination and generate storylines. We have a number of books that share cultural connections to our children’s and educator’s identities. This authenticity allows us to talk to children about diverse backgrounds, customs, traditions and festivals as they use the pictures to enquire. We often incorporate personal details of children’s lives, their family members, pets and friends, places they have visited and topics they’re interested in, while reading a story, enhancing child’s engagement and personal connection with the story. The saying ‘a book is a dream you hold in your hands’ reflects the idea that we can let our imaginations run free whenever we read the text or view the pictures within its pages.



We have decided to build on our very successful book club program and create a community street library. This new community library is located within a hutch painted by the children at entry to our building. We are encouraging locals to stop by and select a book from the collection and donate a book in return. This is another way of reinforcing the joy that stories bring and encouraging children and families to read together.



Where next?

We will be creating a resource set within our shared toolkit promoting the establishment of similar reading projects as well as adding more ideas. We will be brainstorming ideas and asking various questions, for example: 'What opportunities do you provide for families to collaborate with you?' and 'How can you foster a stronger connection between home and service?'

Our tip

These ideas can be easily applied at your service. Create an 'information exchange' area where educators, families and the service can post community activities and experiences, services, and resources, share/swap books and other resources, exchange ideas, recipes, parenting tips. Provide library bags or similar (these might be decorated by the children) to encourage using shared spaces.

Celebrate families' special skills, knowledge, and expertise in parenting, learning and development. Let them know that they are valued, appreciated and that they are part of your community.

Reflection questions

Educators and teachers

- How do you share updates about a child's learning and development with families?
- How do you support a 'literacy rich environment' at home and in your service for each child?

Service leaders

- How can you ensure all families are involved in the service? How do you consistently support this engagement?