

# **Supporting Families: Professional Insight into their Knowledge for Action**

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Parent Resource Program

SDN Children's Services

## **Supporting Families: Professional Insight into their Knowledge for Action**

- SDN Parent Resource Program
- Our Evaluation Intentions
- Evaluation as Action Research
- Strategies Used
- Reflections on Interviews
- Writing Stories in Collaboration
- A Case Study
- Lessons We've Learned
- Limitations

### **SDN Parent Resource Program**

- Integrated approach to family support in six SDN long day care centres in inner Sydney
- Inclusion of 'vulnerable' families in regular child care and parenting support services
- Child care scholarship offered up to three days a week
- Funded by Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (FaCS)

### **Our Evaluation Framework focus**

Action oriented – investigating 'making a difference'

- Parents' perceptions/change
- Child change
- Agency networking
- Staff orientation and change

### **Our Evaluation Intentions**

#### **1 Evaluating parent outcomes**

- Accountability to program funding
  - 5 key outcomes identified

#### **2 Gaining insights into parents' needs and experiences**

- Informing and improving services for families

### **Parent outcomes – project identified**

**Five key outcomes**

- Referral to/from agencies
- Increased involvement in education/training/employment
- Understanding of the importance of early year for learning
- Building resilience to risk factors
- Developing a sense of community and availability of support through networks

## **Knowledge initially underpinning action ....**

### **Questionnaire/interview**

- **Structured** – set questions are asked by interviewer and direct responses sought
- **Semi structured** – interviewer has predetermined questions but these are more open ended
- **Unstructured** – conversational style where interviewer seeks opportunities for in-depth conversation and collection of narrative accounts; responsive.

### **Interviewer role...**

- **Structured** – brings previously identified perspectives that wishes to pursue (ie. has an a priori theory)
- **Semi structured** – has a sense of what information is being sought but flexibility in questioning exists
- **Unstructured** – questioning is open ended; must be prepared to follow leads provided by interviewee ; responsivity required

### **Interviewee responses...**

- **Structured** – required to fit responses (i.e. experiences, feelings) into categories determined by interviewer
- **Semi structured** – some flexibility in responding and provision for elaboration
- **Unstructured** – interviewee may take the lead in expressing point of view; perceived relevancy; more personal

## **Evaluation as Action Research**

- Use genuine relationships with ‘clients’ to evaluate the effectiveness of the program (critical reflection)
- Use expert knowledge of clients’ context to make improvements to service delivery (action)

### **Action research...**

- ‘Seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities’

(Reason & Bradbury <http://bath.ac.uk/~mnsprw/Papers/HandbookIntroduction.htm>)

### **Strategies: From Questionnaires...**

- Looking for expected outcomes using standardised questions  
(literature/other projects informed the questions)

#### **Strategies: From Questionnaires...**

- Issues with reading and writing: “it feels like a test”
- Previous experiences with government agencies “these forms are meant to be tricky”
- Important to establish rapport with participants before asking questions
- Difficult to standardise and quantify personal experiences

#### **...to Semi-structured Interviews**

- Personalising the interview process: making the experience casual and flexible
- Emphasising face to face contact with the program
- Spending time: the value of incidental conversations
- Informal interviews make it possible to gather narrative stories of family involvement and their context

#### **...to Semi-structured Interviews**

- “How is the Parent Resource Program working for you?”
- “What opportunities has the program provided for you and for your children?”
- “In what ways have you been involved in the centre?”
- “What difference has receiving a child care scholarship made to you and your family?”

#### **Reflections on Interviews**

- Respect participants’ right to choose the issues they wish to discuss

- Empower participants by giving them a voice to reflect on their experiences
- Allow for individualisation of what involvement in the program has meant for each participant
- Methods feel natural, informal, and understandable to participants

### **Writing Stories in Collaboration**

- Participants tell their story of their involvement in the program
- Story is tape recorded and transcribed by researcher
- Parents' story is self-edited to maintain their primary role and control
- Rapport is essential before this strategy is effective

### **A Case Example: Family 5002**

December 2003--recently entered program

- "Mum feels parenting is difficult and unnatural for her. She often doesn't enjoy parenting, especially when her daughter demonstrates challenging behaviour at home. They recently moved to Sydney and mum is feeling some tension from her partner and her sister who live with them. Mum and her sister recently attended a parent session which eased some of her worries about her daughter's behaviour."

### **A Case Example: Family 5002**

July 2004

- "We (my daughter and I) get along much better now. I've learned lots of really great tools to work with her and it has brought us a lot closer. I'm a lot more confident in parenting. I am able to study now, so I can do something for myself to improve our situation. Without the support of the centre, I wouldn't have been able to do that. They've also been flexible with my hours to meet my needs. I've got a lot of support here and I know that if I have a problem I can approach the manager and talk about anything with her."

### **Reflection and Action**

- Parents' stories in their words can demonstrate change, learning, and building resilience
- REFLECTION: stress relief, empowered to seek education, improvement in parent-child relationship, learning strategies for behaviour management at home
- ACTION: flexibility in program hours/days to attend TAFE

### **Lessons we've Learned**

- Participants are more willing to be open if they know you or if people they trust know you
- Maintaining informality makes the sharing of sensitive information a less stressful experience

- **Parents' reflections can be used as input to shape service delivery**

### **Limitations to Researcher's Role**

- **Separation of program services and evaluation**
- **Creation of superficial relationship as outsider to direct services**
- **Families are diverse-- strategies used must respond to their needs**