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http://www.dubbo.nsw.gov.au/InformationandResources/DubboImageLibrary/clock_tower_h.jpg

Orana Early Childhood Intervention Capacity Building Pilot Project Evaluation Report

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Wobbly Hub and Double Spokes Research Team

Faculty of Health Sciences

University of Sydney

Angela Dew, Gabrielle Hindmarsh, Kim Bulkeley, Anita Bundy.

Executive Summary

In July 2013, Orana Early Childhood Intervention (OECI) service in Dubbo received funding from New South Wales (NSW) Family and Community Services, Ageing Disability and Home Care (ADHC), Western Region to conduct a 12 month pilot project funded under the *Strengthening Children 0-8 Years Strategy*. The project was known as the Orana Capacity Building Project. The aim of the project was to train mainstream childcare staff in four early childhood centres in Dubbo and surrounding areas to identify and include children with developmental delay and disability in their centres. OECI seconded one of their Educator staff members into the role of Capacity Building Project Officer (CBPO) to coordinate and implement the project.

The Wobbly Hub and Double Spokes research team at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney, was engaged by ADHC Western Region to evaluate the Orana Capacity Building Pilot Project. Collaboratively, the Wobbly Hub team, Orana ECI and ADHC Western Region agreed on the best ways to measure the outcomes of the pilot project against the aims. The pilot project had already commenced when the Wobbly Hub team became involved. The CBPO had already collected data on the development and implementation of the workshops. The Wobbly Hub team supplemented this data with interviews with the CBPO, OECI Manager and workshop attendees. An aim of the evaluation was to build capacity within the organisation to engage in ongoing service evaluation. The CBPO at Orana demonstrated a capacity to develop evaluation measures, and to collect and use data for service improvement.

Inclusion training

The project involved: identifying how confident early childhood staff felt they were in a range of inclusive practices and then determining the top priorities for professional development. The top three priorities were:

1. Identifying children at risk of requiring early childhood intervention (ECI);
2. Communicating with families about the referral process;
3. Referring children to appropriate ECI support services.

The CBPO developed the workshop content to address these priorities. Forty-five staff from the four centres attended the workshops. Pre and post workshop confidence level measures indicated the majority (approximately 95%) of attendees reported an increase in confidence following the workshops.

Evaluation of pilot project

Eight of the 45 workshop attendees participated in telephone interviews with the Wobbly Hub research team three months following the workshops. The **greatest benefits** described by participants included:

- Workshop Format – voluntary attendance; evening sessions; two weeks between sessions to allow for practice and reflection; networking opportunities between staff from four centres.
- Workshop Content – resources and contacts lists; tips for talking to parents; understanding developmental milestones.
- Workshop Spin-offs – growth in confidence; identification of need for further training.

The **biggest challenges** reported by the Orana CBPO and Manager were:

- Level of commitment required – time and resource intensive model; competing priorities; number of early childhood centres involved.
- Training model – time and effort required to tailor content; need for training in coaching model.
- Follow-up and sustainability – need ongoing input; adaption of workshop content for different centres with different priorities; focus on training at the expense of individual child intervention.

Evaluation recommendations

The approach taken by OECI to run inclusion capacity building training with early childhood staff was well received by the participating services. There is evidence that the approach was successful in: providing information and education to childcare centre staff to assist them in identifying children with developmental delays and disability; boosting staff confidence and providing them with skills to speak to parents of children about whom they have concerns; staff knowing when and who to refer to in the Dubbo and surrounding communities.

This approach however, is likely to require sustained follow-up with childcare centre staff, as ongoing training will be required to ensure new staff members are included. The training may be viewed as a ‘first step’ in building the capacity of mainstream childcare settings to work with children with developmental delay or disability and their families.

The following recommendations build on the effective approach taken in this pilot project.

1. Develop as a pre-training exercise, the 12 statements of inclusive practice so that other early childhood centres can identify areas for staff training. Formalise the training package developed by the CBPO so that it can be made available as a flexible template to early childhood services in other areas with appropriate acknowledgement.
2. OECI to develop strategies and allocate financial and staff resources for follow-up and support for childcare staff working with children with identified developmental delay or disability and their families. Strategies may include direct support such as one-on-one or group therapy, mentoring relationships, education sessions.