The importance of leadership in early childhood services is a feature of the *National Quality Standard* (NQS). Leaders create a positive culture, empower others and work to continually improve the quality of care and education. The *Guide to the National Quality Standard* tells us that ‘Well-documented policies and procedures, well-maintained records, shared values, clear direction and reflective practices enable the service to function as a learning community’ (ACECQA, 2013, p. 163).

In this case study on leadership, we visit a family day care service in Brisbane.

**Case study No. 2 | Wynnum Family Day Care**

Wynnum, Qld

**NQS Rating: Excellent**

‘Relationships are the key to our service, and they’re based on honesty and respect. All team members are valued for who they are and what they offer.’

Leadership of any early childhood service can present great opportunities and challenges. For the team at Wynnum Family Day Care, these opportunities and challenges include leading a network of 84 educators, 12 coordinators and one play session leader, providing education and care services to 586 children in the eastern and south-eastern suburbs of Brisbane.

‘The service promotes exceptional education and care that improves outcomes for children and families’, says manager Cathy Bavage. Wynnum Family Day Care received an *Excellent* rating from the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) in January 2014. ACECQA commended the service on its performance in several areas, but highlighted in particular its ‘Child Development Initiative’, which brings together educators, families, community services and health professionals to provide support for individual children.

Many of the programs and practices at Wynnum FDC—which also include the Speech and Language Development Initiative and free parent training sessions—are built on collaborative leadership by educators and health and community professionals, all working in partnership with families. ‘We understand that children’s strengths and challenges might be identified by an educator, a parent or a coordination unit member. Our action plans are developed in conjunction with parents, educators and external professionals’, explains Cathy.

The coordination unit team at Wynnum FDC has worked hard to achieve the strong results. ‘Each team member brings a specific skill set that enhances the overall culture of the organisation, as well as promoting those collaborative partnerships within the community’, Cathy says. A large number of the staff members and educators have been with Wynnum FDC for many years, and have enjoyed the ‘welcoming, family-friendly environment’.

Leadership is also encouraged throughout the network of educators at Wynnum FDC. Cathy says that educators can demonstrate leadership ‘through their professional interactions with their peers, families and allied professionals in the community’. Each educator is seen as ‘a valued team member able to contribute to all aspects of the service’, she says.

‘Relationships are the key to our service, and they’re based on honesty and respect. All team members are valued for who they are and what they offer, and that’s also reflected through the personal and professional support we offer to staff and educators.’

Professional development is one of the areas singled out by ACECQA in its Excellent award for the Wynnum service. The approach to
professional development taken by the coordination team has been carefully calibrated to the needs of the educators. ‘We changed the delivery of our training based on feedback from our educators,’ Cathy explains. ‘The educators told us that, after working a 10- to 12-hour day, it was just too difficult to attend an evening training session and retain the information. We took this on board and changed the monthly evening training sessions to a one-day conference every 18 months. This is held on a Saturday, it’s at no cost to the educators and it’s been really successful—we have 100 per cent attendance.’

The coordination unit still offers individual and small group training, depending on the needs of educators. These training sessions might be held during business hours or in the evening, either at a venue provided by the service or at the educator’s home. ‘We have also renamed our coordinator-educator visits as “professional development sessions”,’ Cathy says. ‘This emphasises the point that the sessions are driven by each educator’s professional development plan, and they should be purposeful and respectful.’

The leadership team at Wynnum FDC also places strong emphasis on self-assessment. ‘We engage a consultant organisational psychologist to conduct an external review of the service every two years, and from that we develop our strategic plan,’ says Cathy. ‘Our Quality Improvement Plan is also a living document, and we regularly review it in line with our changing needs.’

A ‘culture of reflective practice’ at the service is fostered by weekly team meetings with all office-based staff, and monthly Advisory Committee meetings run by the manager and parent and educator representatives. The service also uses online surveys to gain feedback from educators and parents, on topics ranging from programs to professional development needs.

For services wanting to improve their leadership capacity and performance, Cathy advises ‘engaging the best people in the internal team and the extended educator team’, and creating ‘a whole-team approach to professional reflection and learning.’ ‘You need to create a positive culture, promote the service as a learning community, and make that commitment to continuous improvement and systems that add quality to all of the service programs,’ she says.

Reference