Enhancing partnerships and networks with culturally and linguistically diverse families in early childhood settings
Foreword

This report describes the processes and outcomes of the research project Enhancing partnerships and networks with culturally and linguistically diverse families in early childhood services. The research project described in this report has been in informed by previous research projects carried out by the Healthy Childhood Research Group (HCRG). Findings from previous studies provided an information base and the methodology upon which this project is built.

This report provides the rationale for the accompanying handbook, entitled “A sense of belonging... Handbook for enhancing partnerships and networks with culturally and linguistically diverse families in early childhood settings”.

Included in the handbook are instructions for providing comments and ideas which can be posted on the HCRG website (www.healthychildhood.org). In this way the report and the handbook become dynamic documents which can be reviewed, changed, enhanced and added to as services experiment with the ideas and strategies presented within.

Our thanks to Deb O’Connor and Anne Marie Dyer of Families First for their assistance and support during all stages of this research project.

Sincerely,
Chief Investigators
Jacqueline Hayden & Denise Fraser
Research Team
Katey De Gioia, Fay Hadley & Bronwen Cara

January 2003

*Parts of this report are replicated in the handbook.*
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Glossary of Terms

This report uses terms as follows:

**Families**

This refers to a dyad or larger group which incorporates the child, parent(s), extended family members, babysitters, nannies and/or any other person who has designated ongoing responsibility for the care of the child outside the early childhood setting.

**Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)**

This refers to a person or family from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

**Culture**

This refers to the traditions, norms, values and practices which influence the manner in which a person interacts with others and their environment.

**Early childhood service**

This refers to any service which is licensed by the New South Wales Department of Community Services and caters for children from 0 to 5 years. The term encompasses child-care centres, preschools and occasional care services.

**Ethnicity**

This describes the particular country of origin or cultural group of an individual or family.

**Family Representative**

This is a person who is associated with the child-care setting and who works in a liaison role with staff and families at the setting.

**Network**

This refers to the linkages between individuals or groups. Networks can be informal or can be formed around a particular issue.

**Partnership**

This is defined as a relationship or alliance between two or more parties whereby each party contributes meaningfully to the alliance.
This study investigated the mechanisms within early childhood settings which enhance the provision of information and support to families with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD).

The study built upon previous work in the area of health promoting early childhood settings (Hayden et al, 2000, 2001) and investigated two critical components for early childhood service delivery: the facilitation of enhanced partnerships between staff and family-users and the facilitation of networking amongst families.

The research centred around the viability of incorporating a Family Representative role in early childhood services and the particulars which would make that role attractive and effective for a wide range of service providers. Family Representatives are family members from early childhood services who serve as liaison persons for CALD families and others. In the process of the study, ‘pilot’ Family Representatives played a major role in the directions for the study, the generation of data and the analyses of findings.

Pilot studies, interviews, surveys, focus groups and validation processes were undertaken with a diverse range of families and early childhood staff in NSW. The final outcomes of the research culminated in the development of the handbook for staff in early childhood services, “A sense of belonging...” Handbook for Enhancing Partnerships and Networks with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families”.

Rationale

Many researchers have identified the most critical challenge for the new millennium as the need to enhance social connections and community cohesion for all citizens (Putman, 1995; Cox, 1995; Vinson, 1999). For myriad reasons individuals and families are feeling increasingly isolated and socially alienated (Jfe, 1998). Studies have shown that a lack of social relationships and a diminished sense of community may be correlated to psychosocial, emotional, behavioural and biomedical outcomes in children and families (Cox, 1999; Barry, 1996; McCain, 1999; Shonkoff, 2000; Swick, 1997).

In one assessment of social functioning in Western Australia, the authors concluded that identity and sense of community were sorely lacking and that there was a critical need to ‘rebuild community structures’ to achieve health and wellbeing of children and families (Jfe, 1998). Other Australian studies have shown that an eroded sense of community is prevalent throughout socio-economic levels in society. Individuals and families feel increasingly stressed and isolated due to longer working hours, less access to extended family members, increased violence and fear of crime, media sensationalism and other real and perceived social dangers. These phenomena are often pronounced in urban environments and are of special concern to families who have migrated and/or whose cultural background (and language) does not match that of the dominant society (Adamson, 2002; Arndt, 2000; Australian Labor Party, 2001; Nance, 1999; Murphy, 2001).

Since 1945, 5.5 million people from 170 countries have migrated into Australia. Over 500,000 of these have been displaced persons who have arrived under humanitarian programs (Bartrouney & Stone, 1998). Many of these families come from Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD). Many have young children.

There is reason to believe that CALD families with young children may be at risk for isolation and other forms of social alienation. Many CALD families do not have access to extended family members or other supports in times of need. A recent study showed that immigrants from CALD backgrounds in Australia are often unable to access close relatives who remain living overseas. Relatives and extended family members who may be in close proximity are often without the financial and other resources needed to help their family members (Bartrouney & Stone, 1998).

The development of positive relationships with institutional staff such as those in early childhood settings and the facilitation of networks for CALD families can have long term positive outcomes for children, families and communities.1

The Healthy Childhood Research Group at University of Western Sydney has carried out a number of studies whose goals were to identify support mechanisms for families using early childhood services in NSW. Findings from these studies revealed that early childhood staff are well placed to facilitate health promoting activities for families including communicating around child issues, linking with community

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1 The Healthy Childhood Research Group is currently developing a book which investigates the needs generated by current social conditions for CALD families and others with young children. The information in the book provides the rationale for this study and other health promoting projects for families. Please contact j_hayden@uws.edu.au for more information about this project.
services and networking with other families (Hayden, De Gioia, Fraser & Hadley, 2002).

It was shown that early childhood settings similarly benefit when they engage in activities which are aimed at increasing communication with families, linking families with community services and facilitating networks amongst families. The research team coined the term ‘health promoting early childhood settings’ to describe these features of early childhood service delivery.

Anecdotal evidence from these earlier studies suggested that CALD families are less likely to make use of these health promoting features of early childhood services.

Myths about CALD families

As Australian society evolves, early childhood staff find themselves increasingly dealing with a variety of ethnic and cultural groups. When staff are unfamiliar with these groups, it can impact on the effectiveness of communication and the quality of service delivery to these families.

A number of myths commonly associated with CALD families have arisen amongst early childhood staff and others. These myths are listed below, along with the evidence uncovered by this study which dispels these common beliefs.

Myth #1.

CALD families are hesitant about participating in the early childhood service.

Finding: Many CALD families would like to participate in early childhood services.

Our research has shown that most families are eager to take part in their early childhood service, but they may be unclear about how to do this. Some CALD families believe that they are not welcome as participants in the service and some families reported that they lacked the confidence to offer their skills to the service. When families understood their role and the expectations of the early childhood service CALD families were very pleased to share their skills, knowledge and time with the service.

Myth #2.

Translating information into home languages is the most effective means for communicating with families from CALD backgrounds.

Finding: Translations are welcome but some caution is advised.

Our research showed the following obstacles with the use of officially translated documents for circulation to CALD families.

- Even with nationally accredited translations it is sometimes difficult to develop documents with the correct tone and wording for families. A trusted individual who knows the language (perhaps a family member from the service) should check all translated documents before they are handed out to families.

- Some home spoken languages are not the same languages which are used for reading and writing. Services should check with families to find out what language they read or write.

- Some CALD families actually prefer to receive their written information in English. This should be checked before handing out translated documents.

- CALD families often appreciate the effort made when staff or a service client is used as a translator/interpreter. Access to this service through the early childhood setting, rather than through external agencies, is appreciated and tends to facilitate increased communication on a regular basis.

Myth #3.

CALD Families tend to have a lot of support from extended families and/or from their communities.

Finding: Many CALD families do not have support from relatives and/or close friends.

Many CALD families reported that extended family support was not available. Many were in Australia without relatives and close friends. Families also reported that it was common for one family member to be working very long hours and the stay at home family member (usually the mother) was often left to make decisions about their children with little input or opportunity for discussion.

Partnerships

Partnerships have been identified as one of the most important components of quality care. All parties benefit: staff, families and children. Partnerships refer to opportunities to work together for common goals and to the development of feelings of trust and equity between families and staff.

The importance of partnerships is highlighted in regulatory requirements and guidelines set out by government and professional bodies. Examples are:

From the New South Wales Department of Community Services:
1. The Service Based and Mobile Child Care Services Regulation (No 2) 1996. These regulations require services to develop policies and procedures which show how families are made aware of their child’s development and can have input into the curriculum in a language that is understood by them.

2. The NSW Curriculum Framework for Children’s Services (2002) advocates the importance of partnerships with families and the early childhood service.

From the National Childcare Accreditation Council: The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS). This system focuses on the importance of partnerships as a way to encourage ongoing communication between families and staff as services work through the accreditation process. Emphasis on the development of partnerships is also identified within a number of specific principles describing quality of care to children and families.

Partnerships and communication

To address partnership goals, early childhood staff need to concentrate on enhancing communication with families at every level and opportunity.

Networks

Social networks are considered to be one of the most important aspects of a healthy life. Families who form trusting relationships with other families have been shown to be less anxious, less stressed and to interact in more positive ways with their children. Some researchers have claimed that the development of family networks is one of the most important benefits that come from using early childhood services. Our research has shown that the processes involved with forming family-to-family networks have an added advantage of creating opportunities for increased communication between staff and families.

Families and staff have reported that networking achieves the following:

- They provide an informal and non-threatening way for families to share and receive information about their children (Hayden et al, 2003)
- They provide important information and support to families (babysitting groups, referrals to services and professionals).
- They increase family participation with the service because family members feel more comfortable to join in when they know other families.
- They offer opportunities for increasing children’s social networks outside the early childhood service.
- They reduce social isolation sometimes felt by family members.
- They increase family members’ self esteem.

When individuals or groups identify linkages with each other and feel confident of support and assistance around particular issues, they can be said to have formed a network.

Networking amongst families can occur on two levels in the early childhood setting:

Level One – informal networking

Level Two – formal networking activities.
Level One – Informal networking amongst families

Informal networking takes place when parents have a chance to mingle and talk. Some strategies for facilitating informal networks include:

- Break into small group discussions during the family meeting (see below). This provides an opportunity to meet and have meaningful discussions between families.
- Staff can facilitate introductions between families whom they note have things in common, for example who live close to each other, whose children are friends.

Level Two – Formal networking

Formal networking is facilitated through activities which are specifically organised for this purpose. These events bring families together in social ‘fun’ activities which allow informal meetings to take place. Formal networking will be more successful and have a higher participation rate when families are asked to identify their preferred activity of choice and when family members are involved in the preparation. Early childhood services have identified a wide array of events which culminate in networking opportunities for families. (See Handbook)

Need for facilitation of networking

An outstanding finding from this study is that networking does not occur incidentally through early childhood services. Graph 1 shows the networking activities reported by families from participating early childhood services (N=56).

While many family members chat with others informally (72%), less actually use other parents to seek advice (28%) and only one third (33%) have been asked themselves for advice about child care issues.

A few parents have visited or entertained a visit from parents at their home (25% and 19% respectively) but close to one quarter of respondents (22%) stated that they had no opportunity to chat or meet other parents.

Very few parents met with other parents for social occasions (8%) and very few were involved in parent groups through their early childhood service (3%).

Target group and goals for the project

The target group for this study was families who make use of early childhood services and whose home language is not English. Family members from the target group were recruited as Family Representatives.

The following goals were identified for the research project:

- To investigate effective methods for enhancing partnerships through communication processes with the target group families: those who are using early childhood services and whose home language is other than English.
- To trial and assess identified strategies for enhancing communication and support for the target group.
- To develop information for early childhood staff and families about processes that will enhance communication and support for the target group.

Outcomes of the project

Outcomes of this project include

- Raising awareness about ways to provide support to CALD families through early childhood settings;
- Identifying strategies for enhancing communication and trust relationships between and amongst early childhood service providers and CALD families; and
- Offering a vehicle (the Handbook) for the dissemination of information and strategies for use by staff in early childhood settings who are working with CALD families.
Fourteen early childhood services and 180 individuals participated in this study. All participating services had high enrolment rates of CALD families. Most services were located in South West Sydney.

Three services reported their findings from experiences involving action research whilst the remaining services participated through interviews and questionnaires. Findings from these processes were validated through focus groups held with early childhood services from ethnically diverse communities in Sydney.

Appendix 1 describes all processes involved with this project.

Findings

The following research questions were developed to guide the study

1) How can partnerships between staff and families be enhanced?
2) How can networks between families be supported through the early childhood services?

How can partnerships between staff and families be enhanced?

Analyses of data produced the following processes which were considered to be related to increased communication and/or enhanced partnerships between families and early childhood service staff.

Partnerships are enhanced when:

1. Staff work to develop individual relationships with families. Families are open to communicating and participating in service activities.
2. Staff facilitate the development of confidence in families.
3. Time is given to receive and gather information from families.
4. Children are used as liaison (communicators) to share information about centre activities.
5. Appropriate means for communication between families and staff is provided.
6. There is adequate space and information for browsing by families.
7. Staff communicate verbally with families, in the home language whenever possible.
8. Staff provide written material to support verbal communication, ideally translated into their home language.
9. Centre staff, families and other associates are used for translation and interpretation.
10. Staff provide meetings that impart information about the program and children's development.

1. Staff work to develop individual relationships with families. Families are open to communicating and participating in centre activities.

The importance of establishing relationships was identified by nearly all participants of the study. Staff and families acknowledged the importance of developing a relationship that is based on trust, respect, openness and acceptance of diversity. This comes about through opportunities to communicate over issues of mutual concern, such as the wellbeing of the child. Trust relationships are facilitated when staff listen and make attempts to ‘hear’ the concerns of families. Conversely, families need to be open to communicating and to forming relationships. They need to be proactive in their interactions and communications with staff. One staff person summarised the sentiments as follows:

“It’s not about the family conforming to what you want them to do. It’s about having a relationship which involves sharing information or compromising (Staff Member, Centre G).

One family member articulated the responsibility of parents as follows:

I communicate well with the staff and gain all the knowledge I need. This has improved over the years as I have a long association with the centre. This year I am actively involved in the family advisory committee. This has been of great benefit – but it took me a while to decide to participate at this level . . . I wish I had done it sooner (Parent, Centre F).

2. Staff facilitate the development of confidence in families.

An important role of staff is to show appreciation and find other means to encourage confidence building (and trust relationships) with families.

Families stated that they needed to build up confidence to approach staff and to discuss issues, ask questions about their child and the program and to engage in centre operations. Families who reported...
positive relations with staff exhibited confidence to be assertive when seeking information from staff.

I read/look at/listen to all information routinely provided and always ask staff about my child’s day (Parent, Centre F).

If one staff member is busy, then I will ask someone else or if they can’t help me, I will approach the person I need to talk to at another time eg afternoon or mornings. Sometimes I ring up on the phone if it’s urgent. (Parent, Centre G).

3. Time is given to receive and gather information from families.

Families reported that they felt inhibited by a perceived rush time during drop off or pick up times and that these could be ideal times to communicate in formal or informal ways.

Families felt that it was appropriate to give information to staff at this time, but that time needed for discussion and to receive information from staff was less available.

Graph 2 demonstrates the responses to a scale of 1-5 whereby families identified the ease with which they gave or reviewed information. The vast majority (94%) of respondents stated that it was easy or very easy to impart information to staff. A smaller percentage (74%) stated that it was easy or very easy to receive information from staff. About one fifth of respondents (22%) claimed that it was not easy to receive information from staff.

While overall ratings are high, the difference between ease in giving information and ease in receiving information calls for some assessment of processes (see Recommendations page 21).

4. Children are used as liaison (communicators) to share information about centre activities.

Both families and staff reported satisfaction with the use of (older) children as interpreters and liaisons, especially for CALD families when no one else could speak the home language. This strategy was reported to raise the self-esteem of the child and to facilitate increased communication between CALD families and staff.

One staff member stated:

The children are excited. Families see this and want to find out why. (Staff Member, Centre H).

5. Appropriate means for communication between families and staff are provided.

Families identified the importance of providing space to write notes to staff and to receive information from staff. Communication books were mentioned several times as a valuable tool for developing confidence in communicating to the early childhood staff, as reflected in this statement by a family member:

If there were a ‘communication box’ (or book) then I could write notes if I’m concerned about something or if I wanted to talk to a staff member who has already left (Family Member, Centre D)
6. There is adequate space and information for browsing by families.

A space for resources was identified as an important vehicle whereby families could access information about child development and/or about community resources. This resource corner or room was also identified as a way for families to build a perception that the early childhood service provided services over and above the care of their children and the resource corner was seen as a place to meet other family members.

7. Staff communicate verbally with families, in the home language whenever possible.

Communicating face to face with families was reported to be effective in developing relationships and facilitating comfort for family members. Verbal and face-to-face interactions were especially effective and appreciated from CALD families if the staff were able to speak the home language.

A higher attendance rate for meetings and events was reported when verbal invitations were issued. Staff stated that they felt good when a family they had personally invited came to the event or meeting.

Typical statements from family members were:

If I am asked I am more likely to go. I feel more comfortable because I am asked (Family Member, Centre H) and

[The] only reason I came tonight because I was asked. If I got it on a newsletter I wouldn’t have bothered (Family Member, Centre I).

8. Staff provide written material to support verbal communication, ideally translated into their home language.

Written modes of communication between families and staff was valued by all respondents. Notices, communication books, email lists and visual displays were identified as effective and appreciated vehicles for communication. The reminder note was identified as a very effective method for increasing family attendance at events and meetings.

Reminder notes which were sent out a few days before activity (which had been well advertised in advance) made a big difference to families.

The meeting was successful and the parents appeared to enjoy it. Most of the parents agreed that the reason they attended the meeting was because they had received a reminder the day before hand, as they often forget about meetings. They also liked the different way we had done the invitations (scroll form). (Liaison Officer Journal 3)

9. Centre staff, families and other associates are used for translation and interpretation

It was shown that staff members, Family Representative and/or other family members from the setting were most appreciated as translators and interpreters - over and above the use of professionals in this role. When families and/or staff members are responsible for translations and interpretations, they are much more likely than external professionals to capture the tone and essence of the items. Use of personnel connected to the setting also serves to increase the confidence and sense of worth of the family(s) who volunteers to do the translating. The Family Representative as interpreter was a successful method for increasing the numbers of CALD families attending meetings and events. One family member stated:

I liked the way I was spoken to face to face and personally invited to the activity in my language (Family member, Centre C).

NOTE: Families from CALD reported that it was not always necessary to provide translated information. Many were comfortable receiving their information in English. It was also noted that some families use different languages for speaking and reading/writing. Staff should check with families what the preference is before translating documents.

One Director stated:

We should not assume that a CALD family will want a form in their home language. We had a number of families requesting questionnaires in English when we thought they would want to respond in another language (Director, Centre C).

10. Staff provide meetings that impart information about the program and children’s development

Organised meetings were seen to be effective in facilitating confidence and building the relationship between families and staff. Meetings allowed for discussion of issues, programs and policies as well as allowing for informal discussions between the staff and families. It was reported that meetings were more effective when children were not present in the same room.

How can networks between families be supported through early childhood services?

Networks are enhanced when:

1. A Family Representative is recruited to serve as liaison and to assist with family relations.
2. Staff provide welcoming, comfortable spaces to talk to families at drop off/pick up time.

3. Staff and families organise Family centred activities through the service.

1. **A Family Representative is recruited to serve as liaison and to assist with staff /family and family/ family relations.**

The Family Representative is a person (usually a parent) who works in a liaison role with staff and families at the setting. The Representative(s) takes responsibility for liaising with families, organising social events and ensuring communication from the service are distributed to all families.

**Issues with finding Family Representatives**

Most families who were nominated for this role by the Director or Staff Representative. Many Family Representatives were initially hesitant to take on the role. They often did not feel as though they had the necessary skills. It was not unusual for several families to be approached before the staff could find a representative. Comments from Directors include

*When you told me what the project involved I wasn’t too sure – we haven’t had a good response from families to date. But I just kept asking until someone said “Yes!” I had approached 4 families before I found someone.* (Director, Centre A).

*There is always someone in every service who is interested in taking on this kind of role. You just need to keep looking until you find them* (Director, Centre G).

Details of time requirements, contracting and modes of remuneration for Family Representatives are provided in Appendix 3.

**Benefits to the Family Representatives.**

Family Representatives identified that they benefited by

a) **Developing a stronger understanding of the functioning of the early childhood service.**

By spending extra time at the early childhood centre the Family Representatives believed they obtained insight into the everyday running of the service. One Representative stated:

*At the end of the day the more contribution you make, the better insight you have of staff and centre that your child attends.* (Family Representative Centre C).

b) **Developing organisation and evaluation skills.**

Being able to organise and coordinate the event were skills required by the Family Representative. By organising (which including delegating tasks) the Family Representative gained experience in running activities. Some comments by Family Representatives include

*I’ve gained experience of organising an event for a group of people and am confident to be involved in organising another event in the centre* (Family Representative 2, Centre B).

*I didn’t know that I could plan such an event, I am so pleased!* (Comment from Family Representative to Community Liaison Officer).

b) **Improving their communication skills and relationships with staff and families.**

Family Representatives improved their communication skills (which included the confidence to speak to families about attending the activity) and through this developed closer relationships with the staff at the service and other families. Some Family Representatives organised volunteer working committees (with other family members) and coordinated and delegated tasks to this committee. One Family Representative stated:

*I have got to know the families and staff a lot more, as I had spent a lot of my time at the centre. Also I approached a lot of families who I have not spoken to before* (Family Representative Centre C).

d) **Gaining acknowledgment and increased confidence**

All Family Representatives reported satisfaction with the role. Some comments included:

*The best supports to me in this role are satisfaction of success and doing something to help other families and the centre* (Family Representative, Centre B).

*I like to thank you for this wonderful experience that you put me through. I have never experienced this kind of journey in my life. I feel like I have a lot more courage now than I did before. I talk to people or families and just relate to them so openly. I think I made a lot of friends now since I’ve been in this project* (Family Representative Centre A).

e) **Increasing their understanding of different cultures.**

Developing a broader understanding of other families and their cultures were identified as unexpected benefits:

*It is a good opportunity to meet new people from a range of different cultures, and to learn more about these cultures.* (Family Representative, Centre B)

**NOTE:** At the conclusion of the study, Representatives reported that the role was achievable, enjoyable and
not overly taxing, especially when staff were supportive. Comments include:

I can see that it would be difficult to improve communication and family networks without this role. It is much easier and less threatening for Family Representatives to talk/invite families to the meeting/event. (Family Representative 2 Centre B)

I believe that this role can be done easily by any families in childcare centre, especially with the help of the staff/director in the centre. (Family Representative Centre A).

It would be possible to carry out this role as volunteer, without pay. There are many families who work part time and would be happy to help. (Family Representative, Centre C).

2. Staff provide welcoming, comfortable spaces to talk to families at drop off/pick up time.

Families reported that drop off and pick up times provided opportunities to meet other families, chat informally and begin to develop relationships. Activities such as swapping phone numbers, inviting the child over to play and discussing child issues such as sleeping, toilet training, discipline and eating took place during drop off and pick up times at early childhood services.

3. Staff and families organise family activities through the service.

Family activities organised through the early childhood service were reported to be effective in developing family-to-family networks. Activities provide family members with the opportunity to mix and chat with other families. Families found it helpful when a particular issue or item stimulated conversations about a child care, health and/or a wellbeing issue. Activities which were reported successful in stimulating friendships and networking included picnics, orientation meetings, specific celebrations, morning teas, red nose day, discos and others (see Handbook).

Statements from families about the organised activities included:

A lot of parents started to talk to each other during the party. They started to get to know each other. It was easy to start conversations around things like the food everyone brought in… (Family Representative, Centre A)

We actually had time to get to know each other, other than the usual rush when picking up and dropping off our children at the service. (Family Member, Centre A)

The parents seemed to enjoy the egg and spoon race. There was a lot of laughing and giggling, and the director pointed out that parents who hadn’t really spoken to each other before were now communicating with one another. (Community Liaison Officer)

Most of the parents were very excited with the parent networking ideas. They were very happy to be able to talk to other parents about their concerns: School (age, quality of the schools in the area) and things like discipline, food, books, use of doctors were common issues that everyone seemed to want more information about. (Family Representative, Centre B)

We were all there for a common purpose and were willing to interact with the others in the group for the common good of the children. The sessions facilitated a lot of ideas and opinions. (Family Member, Service A)

Every social gathering leads to new knowledge and helps to overcome negatives that face us all. (Family Member, Centre B)

The planned activities provided the opportunity for those family members to meet others they had not seen or met previously. As one parent stated:

We actually had time to get to know each other, other than usual rush when picking up and dropping off our children at the centre (Family Representative 2 Centre B).

Summary of findings

The most prevalent finding from the study was that working with family representatives had beneficial outcomes for all. All activities were rated higher by participants when they were organised by the Family Representative. A particular poignant observation was made by one staff member

It’s really funny you know, I found out [from being involved in this project and meeting with families] that parents are people too! (Staff, Centre A)

NOTE: All stakeholders who took part in the study and pilot projects reported satisfaction and wide ranging benefits from their participation. All strategies developed in this study were trialed, refined and validated with a broad range of services and have been collated into the Handbook which accompanies this report.
Recommendations for sustaining support to CALD families

The findings from the research project provide directions for enhancing service to CALD families through early childhood services. Strategies for this process have been developed, trialed and validated and are outlined in the Handbook which accompanies this report. Recommendations for building on the research and the pilot programs are offered below.

Policy and research recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the handbook, “A sense of belonging...” Handbook for enhancing partnerships and networks with culturally and linguistically diverse families in early childhood settings, be widely circulated to staff and that supports such as training workshops and group discussions be offered to assist with the implementation of the Handbook strategies and to further develop the goals for service delivery to CALD families.

Recommendation 2

That an intensive research project which focuses on developing strategies for particular groups be developed. This project will involve the trailing of the strategies outlined in the Handbook and their adaptation for particular groups and regions (for example rural and remote regions, families with children with disabilities, families in marginalised communities and other special groups).

Recommendation 3

That support materials be developed for enhancing the strategies outlined in the Handbook. This could include a CD Rom, video, and live website for ongoing assistance and improvements to the strategies.

Recommendation 4

That an assessment of the CALD program be developed after a period of use with the Handbook. The assessment needs to involve several diverse service types and families. Refinements and/or additions to the Handbook be made based on assessment results.

Service delivery recommendations

Recommendation 5

That the role of Family Representative be included in policy and guidelines for service delivery and be supported through resources and other means. Job descriptions of directors or other designated staff members be revised to include the role of liaison and support person for the Family Representative.

Recommendation 6

That the planning and holding of Family Meeting(s) be considered a vital component of early childhood service delivery and that supports be provided to staff to assist with this activity. This includes incorporating this activity in job descriptions and providing resources to assist with carrying out and following through on this activity.

Recommendation 7

That the development of environments and programming which facilitate communication and networking become an intrinsic part of early childhood service delivery. This includes the provision of welcoming, comfortable spaces to talk to families at drop off/pick up time, space and time for families to receive information from staff, and the facilitation of opportunities for families to mingle with other families and to communicate in a variety of ways.
Appendices

1. Research processes and outcomes
2. Description of participating services and languages
3. Ideas for Recruitment and Documents for Engaging Family Representatives
4. Agenda for training workshop for Family and Staff Representatives
5. Outline for the Family Meeting
6. De-briefing questions for Family Representatives
7. Post pilot workshop for participants in all services
8. Family Survey
9. Post study thank you letter to participants
## Appendix 1: Research processes and outcomes

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<th>Process</th>
<th>Outcome and Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics approval secured</td>
<td>Ethics approval was secured through the University of Western Sydney.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The position of Community Liaison Officer (CLO) was developed</td>
<td>The CLO was recruited to monitor the processes involved with the project, advise and provide support all facets of the pilot project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services were chosen and oriented</td>
<td>Six early childhood services were identified through key stakeholders (Community services representatives) and self selected throughout the South West Sydney area (as determined by Families First, South West Sydney) (see Appendix 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot projects were implemented</td>
<td>Services were contacted and invited to take part in one of two phases of research. 1) Three services to participate solely in pre and post questionnaires for families, 2) Three services to participate in pre and post questionnaires, in action research aimed at improving communication and networking. Directors were oriented to the goals and processes of the project and passed this information to staff. Research team was constantly available to deal with questions and concerns. Consent was gathered from participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Representatives were nominated</td>
<td>The Director or nominated staff person took on the role of Staff Representative responsible for; keeping the staff team informed of the project; attending and helping facilitate the Family Meeting; refining and following through with action plans; reporting on outcomes; assisting with development of recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Representatives were nominated</td>
<td>Directors for each service nominated Family Representatives. Nominated Family Representatives were given information to assist in their decision to take on the position. (This was translated where appropriate.) A letter of agreement was negotiated with each FR. (This was translated where appropriate. (Appendix 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training was provided</td>
<td>Training was provided for the Staff and Family Representatives at a joint 4 hour workshop. The focus of the training session was to orientate the Family and Staff Representatives to the project and goals to be achieved. Strategies for running successful family meetings, communication ideas and networking activities were discussed to ensure the Representatives would be given support and assistance where needed (see Appendix 4, Agenda).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-questionnaires were distributed</td>
<td>The pre questionnaire was translated into the appropriate languages and distributed to six participating services along with specific instructions about distribution and collection of questionnaire for families (Appendix 8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Meetings were held in three services</td>
<td>Meetings were held for families and staff at each service. These were planned by the Family and Staff Representatives in conjunction with the Community Liaison Officer. The purpose was to identify current strategies for communication, to identify gaps in the current strategies and to make recommendations for addressing the gaps (Appendix 4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plans were developed in the three services</td>
<td>An Action Plan for communication strategies and the networking activity was generated from information collected at the Family Meeting in each service. Family and staff representatives and research team staff contributed to the plan. Family and Staff Representatives met weekly to evaluate, plan and organise the networking activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plans were implemented</td>
<td>The Action Plan was discussed and validated with families through the Family Representative. All families were given the opportunity to comment on the strategic plan. The plan was implemented over a six-week period with the assistance of the Family Representative. The Family Representative took on the tasks of organising the networking activity. This included organising and delegating tasks to other families, discussing activity with families verbally (both in English and in their first language) and overseeing the implementation of the network activity in conjunction with staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports were kept</td>
<td>The Family and Staff Representatives recorded progress on the plans and wrote final reports. (Appendix 5) Strategies/activities were revised during the process of trialing the plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-questionnaires were distributed</td>
<td>The post questionnaire was translated into the appropriate languages as nominated by each service and distributed to six participating services with specific instructions on distribution and collection of questionnaire for families (Appendix 8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debrief meeting for services involved in action research help</td>
<td>Meeting was held with Family and Staff Representatives, CLO and Project Managers to discuss findings, perceptions of supports and constraints of the project, to share experiences amongst services (networking) and to discuss future directions for the projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data was analysed</td>
<td>Data was input into QSR N6(^3). Principles and processes for enhancing communication and networking activities were identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups for validation of findings were organised</td>
<td>Three early childhood services were identified in communities deemed to be ethnically diverse by the Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales (1996)(^4). The Director of each service was contacted and invited to host and participate in a focus group. Follow up information, documentation and consent forms were distributed. Directors were asked to invite staff and family members to the focus group meeting. Directors nominated participants from two additional services to the focus group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups were held</td>
<td>The UWS Research team facilitated the focus groups in three communities/services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data was analysed</td>
<td>Data was input into QSR N6 and analysed alongside previous data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbook was developed</td>
<td>Analysis of data led to the finalising of <em>Handbook for enhancing partnerships and networks with culturally and linguistically diverse families in early childhood settings</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter of appreciation and summary of findings sent to all participants</td>
<td>Letter outlining findings was sent to each centre with copies to post and/or pass out to staff and families. (See Appendix 10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^3\) A qualitative data analysis computer software program.

Appendix 2:
Description of participating services and languages

The project was piloted in the four local urban government areas of Bankstown, Canterbury, Liverpool and Fairfield.

These four local government areas rate lower in relation to English proficiency (speak English not well or not at all) than the Sydney average of 14.7% as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Government Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bankstown</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfield</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over fifty percent of the population in these communities (51.7%) do not report English as their first language. Families in these areas come from Lebanon, Greece, China, Vietnam, Italy, Croatia, Indonesia, France, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Chile, Laos, Uruguay, Cambodia, Iraq, Fiji and Philippines.

The research carried out for this project made use of professional translators and interpreters to gather data from CALD families. Table 1 describes the languages which were identified by participating services for translation.

Table 1: Languages within services for translation of documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Centre A (107 families)</th>
<th>Centre B (55 families)</th>
<th>Centre C (50 families)</th>
<th>Centre D (60 families)</th>
<th>Centre E (75 families)</th>
<th>Centre F (75 families)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese (Mandarin/ Cantonese)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assyrian</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonian</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Ideas for recruiting family representatives

- Place a call for nomination and a job description information in the newsletter and on notice boards. This should be in CALD languages.
- Invite families individually to take on the role. Keep asking! Directors report that there is always someone who will say yes!
- Ensure that staff and others consistently promote the role as something valuable for the setting, the children and for other families.
- Some family members prefer to work in a team; sharing the Representative role could be offered as an option.
- Provide an orientation about how the service runs and how the role of the Representative fits in with overall service delivery, goals and outcomes.
- Ensure that the Family Representative understands the terms of reference for the position but at the same time allow for flexibility.
- Pay a salary where possible.
- Connect with the local community and see if they will sponsor the role by providing free or discounted goods or services (for example approach the local hairdresser, beautician, mechanic for gift vouchers and in exchange the service can offer to advertise the business on the notice board or in the newsletter).
- Show appreciation for the Representative on the front page of the service newsletter and/or the notice board. Include a photo along with information about the parent and his/her family (if appropriate).
Dear Parents and Friends

(Name of early childhood service) is looking for one or more family members to volunteer some of their time to take on the important role of Family Representative.

This role involves approximately 4 hours per week or less if shared amongst a few people.

Activities include working with staff and families to:

- Plan a family & staff information evening
- Try out new communication strategies identified at the family/ staff evening
- Coordinate an activity for all families in this service.

Because this is a valuable role for our service, the Family Representative(s) will receive the following reward/s for their time (insert appropriate information from p.10)

If you are interested please let __________________________ (Director or designated person) know ASAP. An interview will be arranged to further discuss the position.

Thank you for your interest in helping us to run a better service for families and children

Yours truly
Letter of Agreement  
*(should be translated where necessary)*

Dear _______________________________________________

Congratulations on being appointed as the Family Representative for  
_______________________________________________ (name of early childhood service).

Your term of duty will run from         /        /          to         /        /          .
We anticipate that you will be available for an average of 3-4 hours per week for this time.

In exchange for your time the service will provide you with the following____________ (list remuneration,  
see p 10 for ideas).

As Family Representative for X Centre, your tasks will include the following:

1. **Planning a family & staff information evening (in conjunction with others).**  
   This event entails:
   - ✓ Liaising with Director (or designated staff person)
   - ✓ Developing and organising distribution of invitations to families and staff.
   - ✓ Organising refreshments, childcare and other arrangements for the meeting.
   - ✓ Assistance at the meeting as negotiated (could be note taking, leading small group discussions,  
     organising evaluation forms or other).

2. **Performing follow up tasks to the meeting.**  
   This could involve:
   - ✓ Liaising with Director and/or staff to develop the centre’s Action Plan and to determine strategies for  
     implementing this plan
   - ✓ Assist with implementation of a number of strategies.
   - ✓ Liaise with families (and possibly staff) to ensure that they are informed of strategies to be implemented.

3. **Planning and implementing family-centred event(s).**  
   This could involve:
   - ✓ Liaising with Director and others to determine processes and resources needed for implementation.
   - ✓ Oversee (with Director) methods for inviting family contacts the event(s).
   - ✓ Liaising with families to ensure that invitations are distributed to all.
   - ✓ Recording family related information of significance to the planning of the event.
   - ✓ Overseeing (with the Director) planning and implementation of the event(s).

You will be working with ___________________________ (if more than one Family Representative is appointed)  
(Name)______________________________________________________ is the staff person who will liaise with  
you. You should feel free to call on this person at any time. Regular meetings may be scheduled.

Please note that you are free to withdraw from this agreement at any time.

Once again congratulations!

__________________________________________________________________________________  
(List all staff names) are very happy to have you as part of our team.

Yours sincerely

Director or Other Designated Person
Appendix 4: Agenda for training workshop for family and staff representatives

Agenda for training workshop for family and staff representatives

- Welcome, outline of agenda and introductions.
- Icebreaker.
- Overview of project, aims and roles.
- What are partnerships and what are their benefits in child care centres?
- Small group discussion: What types of communication are currently used in centres?

LUNCH BREAK

- Large group brainstorm – Methods for inviting families to meetings.
- Tips for holding a family/staff meeting.
- What are family networks and why are they important?
- Small group brainstorm - networking activities/ events.
- Developing and writing action plans.
- Reporting requirements.
- The handbook.
- Neighbourhood mapping.
- Conclusion, contacts for support, evaluation.
Appendix 5: Outline for the family meeting

Before the evening commences complete the Checklist for a Successful Meeting (See Handbook).

It is advisable that the Director or designated staff person facilitates the meeting in English and the Family Representative translates as necessary. Staff members, families or relatives and/or professional interpreters need be available for interpreting to all language groups.

Supper can be laid out throughout the meeting. It is recommended that coffee and sweets be laid out at the break or later to encourage families to stay on after the close of the meeting.

1. Welcome, introduction and icebreaker (10 mins)
   a. Introduction of staff and Family Representative and thank all for coming. Have participants introduce him or herself, name their child and say one thing about themself.
   b. Explain the purpose of the evening: to identify communication strategies used in this early childhood service and to trial a family event or activity which will begin to build friendships between families.

2. Review of agenda: Read through the agenda (should be posted on wall or handed out) and give approximate time frames for each item.

3. Small group activity: Draw one or two cartoons (10-15 mins)
   Organise family members and staff into small groups. Try to have a mix of those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those able to interpret for them and a mix of family members and staff in each group if possible. Hand out large sheets of paper and textas. Have groups work together to draw a cartoon which represents the following: Why communication between staff and families is important? and/or “How communication between staff and families takes place.

4. Debrief (3-5 mins per group)
   Have each group nominate a ‘spokesperson’ to explain their cartoon to others in the group (Try to encourage culturally and linguistically diverse participants to be the spokesperson, even if through an interpreter. Try to avoid staff members as spokespersons.)

5. Partnership and communication (10 mins)
   Explain why the staff want to enhance their partnership communication with families (see p.7). (Perhaps show a cartoon that the staff drew to reflect this.)

6. Brainstorm activity (10 mins)
   Working in the same small group, have participants write their answers to the following questions on large sheets of paper. A recorder should be identified in each group to write down the answers. Another person should be nominated to be spokesperson for this activity.
   i. What are the types of communication currently used in this service between families and staff? (For example, speaking with staff when dropping off children, sending home newsletters, placing notes in individual pockets for each child, etc).
   ii. What other strategies, methods and/or ways to enhance communication between staff and families could be used?

7. Debrief (10 mins).
   List all responses to question 1 on a large sheet of paper and the same for question 2. Explain the purpose of the meeting is to trial suggested communication strategies for 4 weeks. With group consensus, number newly identified strategies in order of preference for trialing. The following ideas have been identified. Feel free to offer these suggestions if they do not emanate from the group:
   1. Develop an E-group.
   2. Make contact through phone calls at designated times.
   3. Develop communication journals and/or portfolios for each child. Both the family and the staff make contributions to this item.
   4. Families contribute to a photo display of “Things we do at home”. Have parents or children write a sentence under each photo to explain what is going on.
   5. Send surveys to families regularly to gather ideas and comments about the service.
   6. Ensure that important notices are translated in relevant languages.
   7. Have families make posters about their home life. Staff can make posters about life at the centre.
Ask the audience for volunteers to implement some of the ideas. Explain that an “action plan” will be developed and posted. At that time family members can sign up to assist and/or speak with the Family Representative or staff members about their ideas and participation in the action plan.

**SHORT BREAK** (Can bring out sweets and coffee/tea at this time)

8. **Networking (10 mins)**

Explain what the term ‘network’ means and why this is a goal for early childhood services (see p.7).

9. **Brainstorm (10 mins)**

In the large group have families brainstorm the following questions and record responses on a large sheet of paper (5 mins).

- What family network activities have been held in this service?
- What other activities could we do?

10. **Vote for the network activities to be implemented (6 mins)**

Using group consensus, vote for up to three network activities from the list which can be implemented within the next few weeks or months.

11. **Recruit volunteers to assist with network activity (10 mins)**

Provide an overview of the process for the network activity. Get participants to breakdown this activity and to determine the steps to be taken

   a. Pass a paper around for nomination by parents at the meeting
   b. Ask for volunteers to record their names, contact numbers (what language they would like to be contacted in) and which task they would like to be involved in
   c. Explain that this notice will be posted so that others can sign up in the next few days.

12. **Open the floor for any comments or questions about the focus of this meeting**

13. **Thank all participants for their involvement and distribute evaluation forms.**

Remind families to stay back for sweets and coffee/tea (5 mins)

Conclude Family meeting with completion and collection of evaluation forms.

d. Hand out Evaluation Form for the Family Meeting (see Appendix 6). Have some spare pens available for parents to use. Ask parents to place forms in a box close to the exit.

e. Thank everyone for their participation and assistance.

f. Invite people to stay for some refreshments and informal chatting.
Appendix 6: De-briefing questions for family representatives

Pre-Meeting
1. How did you go about inviting families and staff to the Family/Staff Meeting? Why did you choose these methods?
2. How did you organise the room for the meeting? What types of displays were arranged?

At the Meeting
1. How effective were these for encouraging families to talk with each other? Was there anything you would have done differently? Why?
2. How many families attended the meeting? How many staff?
3. What cultural backgrounds were represented at the meeting?
4. How many families did not have English as their first language?
5. How did you deal with families who might not be fluent in English?
6. What did families and staff identify as the things they liked about the centre?
7. What did families and staff list as communication strategies they already use in the centre?
8. What did families and staff list as the communication strategies they would like to trial in the centre? How were the three (3) strategies identified which were to be trialled?
9. What ideas did families and staff suggest for family networking? How do you feel they responded to the idea? Were there any particular comments? Please list.
10. Were families and staff responsive to group discussions? Was there anything that could be done differently next time?
11. From your experience what advice do you have for other child care centres organising a family/staff meeting?
12. Could you identify a difference between families from different backgrounds? Did culturally and linguistically diverse background families have different kinds of answers/needs to other families? Please be specific as possible.
13. Please provide some quotes which reflect the way families and staff reacted to the questions.

Trialing Communication Strategies
1. What strategies were trialed?
2. What were the expected and unexpected outcomes from these strategies?
3. What is the best thing that happened?
4. What is the worst thing that happened?
5. What would you try again?
6. What changes might you make the second time?
7. What would you never try again?
8. Why not?

Trialing Family Networks
1. What was the hardest part about organising the family activity?
2. How might this be addressed in future?
3. How many families attended the event? Did any other family members or friends attend the event?
4. Were families from a variety of ethnic backgrounds?
5. List some of the comments made by families and staff about the event (include both positive and negative comments).
6. Identify the three (3) most positive things to come out of the event.
7. Were there any negative aspects? If yes please list these and explain how you think they could be overcome.
8. From your experience what advice do you have for other child care centres who want to organise a similar event?

The Role of Family Representative
You honesty in answering this next set of questions will help us to improve our recommendations to the Department of Community Services.
1. What was the outcome of you participating as a Family Representative?
2. Do you think that this role could be done easily by families in child care centres?

3. Would it be possible to carry out this role as a volunteer (do you think others might do it for no pay)?

4. What would you recommend as an incentive for others to take on this role?

5. What were the best supports to you in this role?

6. What did you like best about this role?

7. What did you dislike most about this role?

8. Is there any way that goals for the project (improved communication and improved family networks) could have been achieved without this role?

9. If so – how could they be achieved?

10. If not – how can centres develop this role if they do not have funds to pay Family Representatives?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about this role, the way it was developed and supported, the requirements for the role, the training that was provided etc.
Appendix 7: Post pilot workshop for participants in all services

Agenda

1. Welcome and overview of session. (5 mins)
2. House keeping – finalise return of surveys, journals, tax invoices and any other outstanding paperwork. (15 mins)
3. Sharing success stories. (15 mins)
4. Large group brainstorm. Working in partnership with families – identify general strengths and constraints from the project. (15 mins)
5. Staff group/ family group discussion – discuss communication strategies which were most effective and least effective and describe why. Report back. (30 mins)
6. Large group discussion. Identify most successful outcome of the family meeting and most unsuccessful – reflections for how this could be overcome next time. (20 mins)
7. Present findings from surveys to centres. (20 mins)

BREAK FOR LUNCH

8. Large group discussion. Describe your centre’s family activity and any associated outcomes from the day i.e. family friendships, families spending more time at the centre etc. (15 mins)
9. List successful strategies for getting CALD families to attend. (15 mins)
10. Brainstorm: How effective was the handbook, what needs to be changed? What was missing? (20 mins)
11. Thank you and gift distribution
Appendix 8: Family survey

PLEASE FILL IN AS MANY ANSWERS AS YOU CAN. THERE IS A SPACE FOR EXTRA COMMENTS BELOW. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO WRITE ON THE BACK OF THIS PAPER.

PLACE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ENVELOPED PROVIDED. SEAL THE ENVELOPE AND PLACE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT BOX.

1. Please use the scale of 1-5 to comment on the statements below. 1 implies that the statement is seldom true. 5 implies that this statement is always true?

   a) It is easy for me to give information to staff

      1  2  3  4  5
      do not agree agree sometimes agree absolutely

   b) It is easy for me to get information from staff

      1  2  3  4  5
      do not agree agree sometimes agree absolutely

2. Please tick as many different ways as you can think of which staff at this centre have used to give information to you. (Please list strategies trialed by your centre here.)

3. Please list as many different ways as you can think of which you have used at this centre to give information to staff.

   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. What strategies do I use particularly well in terms of seeking information from staff?

   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

5. How might the staff at this centre improve the way they communicate with me?

   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

6. How might I improve the way that I communicate with the staff at this centre?

   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Please place a tick (✓) in the box next to any of the sentences, which describe your relationship with other families who also use this child care centre.

   ☐ I have not had the opportunity to chat with families from this centre.
   ☐ I chat with families while I am at the centre.
   ☐ I chat with other families outside of the centre.
I chat with families on the phone frequently.
Families have been to my house.
I have visited families at their house.
I regularly meet families socially.
I sometimes ask advice of other families.
Other families sometimes ask me for advice.
I am in a babysitting group or other organised group with other families.

8. I was involved in (state what the organised family network activity was) at this centre.
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   If you answered no, please suggest what could be done to ensure you could be involved in the future.

________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

9 a) I met some other families through this activity
   Yes ☐ No ☐
   b) If you answered ‘No’, please finish this sentence. It is hard to meet other families’ because
________________________________________________________________________________________________

10. What do you think may help you and other families to meet?
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

11. This activity was helpful to me in meeting other families. How did this activity encourage your interactions with other families?.
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

12. I would like to be involved in future activities, which involve meeting other families
   Yes ☐ No ☐

13. Here are some of my ideas about how I and other families could become acquainted and meet more often

________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________________

30
Appendix 9: Post study thank you letter to participants

January 16th 2003

Dear Participant,

A little while ago you participated in a research study carried out by the Healthy Childhood Research Group at University of Western Sydney. This research was sponsored by Families First South West Sydney.

The study investigated ways to increase supports for families who use child care centres in Western Sydney.

We would like to share a summary of our research findings with you.

The overriding finding was that communication between families and staff provided the best means of support for all parties. Effort placed on improving communication with all families was shown to have far reaching benefits.

Below are some of the key findings, ideas and recommendations that emerged from the study.

Create a position of ‘family representative’.

Centres and families benefited from the use of a volunteer “Family Representative(s)”. This is one or more parents who are recruited by the centre to assist with a number of activities. The role usually lasts for 6-12 months.

What the family representative does

The representative(s) take responsibility for liaising with other parents, organising social events and ensuring communications from the centres are distributed to all parents. Outgoing family representatives were seen as very valuable for assisting with recruiting and orienting new (in-coming) family representatives.

How are family representatives recompensed?

In some case it is possible to offer a form of financial payment for this position. In other cases the family representative could be recompensed with free child care for a few hours per week while the parent is working on ‘centre’ business. Other ways to show appreciation for the position is to provide free services and coupons solicited from the local community (eg: massages, hairdressing and other special services).

Public appreciation of the work of the representative, through notices in newsletters, other vehicles and a public ceremony bestowing a gift and certificate was seen as an important incentive.

Develop an email communication group.

Centres could set up an email group for families to network with the centre and each other. This could be used to distribute information, share ideas and establish chat groups amongst parents.

Invite parents to social events in a personal manner.

Our research revealed that families greatly appreciated verbal invitations to social and other centre events. This personal touch allows people to feel respected and special. As one parent put it : “If I am asked personally, I believe that they really want me to go.”

Staff members or volunteers in the centre should reflect the cultural and language background of the family clients whenever possible.

Having staff in centres who speak the same languages as families was identified as a great benefit to both staff and families.

Carefully prepared visual aids are effective for communication to families.
Some families did not find information given on ‘posters’ to be effective. Care needs to be taken to make the poster inviting to read and easily accessible. Other forms of displays or visual aids were appreciated when they were eye catching and displayed in appropriate locations. Posters and notices made by children aroused a lot of interest.

**Be conscious of family activities when planning meetings.**

Meetings and events held on Friday evenings (right after work) were reported to be popular with families, especially when supper and child care services were included.

**Families benefit from their participation in centre activities.**

Families who become involved in centres in a variety of ways have reported gaining awareness about their own skills and contributions and also increasing their knowledge about child development and other issues.

**Families enjoy participating in centre activities.**

Family members are usually happy to participate in centre activities and can contribute in a number of ways. It is beneficial to all when centres take the time to find out about the interests and hobbies of all family members.

The research team is currently developing a detailed report on the study. A Handbook for Staff is also being developed. These items will be available on the Healthy Childhood website shortly. Please watch for this at www.healthychildhood.org

Once again, thank you for your valuable assistance with our research. We hope that the study has contributed to creating more effective services for children and families in Western Sydney.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Jacqueline Hayden
A/Professor, Applied Social Sciences, University of Western Sydney

**Members of the Healthy Childhood Research Group involved in this study:**

Katey De Gioia
Fay Hadley
Bronwen Cara
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