



Promoting and celebrating achievements in inclusion



Photo: Lime

Building inclusion in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services requires planning, resources and ongoing changes to improve the access and participation of children with disability and complex additional needs. This takes time and thought, conversations with families and other support agencies, and a willingness to try new things. With these in-place, the outcomes can be significant for everyone involved. Identifying and celebrating achievements along the way is an important part of the service improvement process.

The importance of evaluation and reflection

Evaluation, reflection and review are vital elements of program and project delivery. Reviewing what worked well, and what you would do differently if you had your time over again, enables ECEC services to assess the effectiveness of a particular program or initiative. This helps services to know when goals have been reached and what outcomes have been achieved.

Evaluation should be built into plans for inclusion right from the beginning. In ECEC services, evaluation is an essential part of the ongoing planning cycle. Evaluation is closely linked to the critical reflection on which day-to-day decisions and longer-term planning are built.

How to undertake evaluation and reflection

Critical reflection involves a series of steps to help ECEC services make decisions about their practice. These steps can be summarised as:

1. Deconstruct: unpack or describe what is happening.
2. Confront: examine difficult topics and issues.
3. Theorise: link your professional knowledge to your practice.
4. Think otherwise: think differently and come up with better ways of practice (Cartmel, Macfarlane & Casley, 2012).

In moving through these steps, there are questions you should consider to engage in evaluation and focus on critical reflection:

1. What did we do? Did we do what we said we would do?
2. What did we learn? What did we learn about what worked and what didn't work?
3. So what? What difference did it make?
4. Now what? What could we do differently?
5. Then what? How do we make it even better next time? (Department of Health and Human Services [Tasmania], 2015).

These questions can be adapted to seek feedback from children and families accessing your ECEC service, as well as from partner and support agencies. It is important that evaluation results are communicated to all key stakeholders and used in future planning and program development.

Celebrating success within your team

Evaluation is not just about finding ways to improve—it is also about celebrating success. Recognising positive outcomes and successes is an essential part of the planning and evaluation process in ECEC services. Services may need to make time and a concerted effort to do this. To support the process of celebrating success, each member of an ECEC team can be encouraged to:

- note their team's successes and identify how they have contributed to them
- share their observations with the team
- give others in the team 'the gift of listening to them', through acknowledging their successes
- think about how to consolidate and build on successes, linking them to new goals (KidsMatter, 2013).¹

The importance of communication and promotion of achievements

Promoting and celebrating achievements, including communicating the outcomes of evaluations, are important ways to recognise and acknowledge the efforts of children, families and staff working together. Celebrating achievements can help maintain motivation and commitment to continuous improvement.

Communicating and promoting achievements in inclusion has the added benefit of helping to break down barriers and stereotypes, and encourages other support agencies in your community to take action to change. Positive stories of inclusion build awareness of the rights and capacity of people with disability to participate in the life of the community. For children with disability attending ECEC services, there are also opportunities to share stories about the benefits of early intervention and universal access to early childhood education. It may also help to demonstrate what is possible in supporting children with disability and complex additional needs to transition to school.

Strategies for promoting and celebrating inclusion

There are many different ways that ECEC services can promote and celebrate inclusion within their communities. Some strategies include:

- sharing stories in service newsletters, the annual report or service website (with appropriate permissions)

- hosting an event to share successes and achievements with local partners and community members
- arranging a media event to launch or announce a new program or partnership to improve outcomes for children with disability or complex additional needs
- participating in and supporting awareness-building days such as the International Day of People with Disability (3 December)
- presenting at an interagency meeting on the results of an evaluation of an inclusion project or initiative.

Tips for promoting your achievements

If you are planning to share your achievements with your service community, or the broader community, it is important to:

- work with the children and their families—find out how they would like to share their stories
- make sure communication is child-centred and family-focused and highlights the differences the service is making for children's learning and life experiences
- ensure you have the appropriate permissions from the family to tell their story or use their photo.

Where to find more information

The [Evaluation Toolbox](#) is aimed at community-based organisations. It includes templates, samples and practical advice for all stages of evaluation.

Case study: Disability Action Week

Disability Action Week is held in September each year, and aims to raise awareness of disability and improve inclusion throughout the community. Services and organisations that participate in Disability Action Week can promote and share their events through a Queensland Government [website](#). The Queensland Government also supports Disability Action Week through the provision of community grants for 'events and activities that welcome and include people with disability in everyday life'. The grants are available to community groups, schools and non-government organisations. Education services can be valued participants in Disability Action Week. For example, in 2015, Tully Primary School participated in Disability Action Week events in collaboration with Tully Carer's Group and Cassowary Coast Regional Council (Queensland Government, 2015).

References

Cartmel, J., Macfarlane, K., & Casley, M. (2012). *Reflection as a tool for quality: Working with the National Quality Standard*. Research in Practice Series. Canberra, ACT: Early Childhood Australia.

Department of Health and Human Services (Tasmania). (2015). *Fact Sheet 5—A simple guide to evaluation*. Hobart, TAS: Department of Health and Human Services.

KidsMatter Early Childhood. (2013). *Celebrating successes and making goals*.

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