



# Program Planning

**The key function of program planning is to ensure that the goals of the School Age Care (SAC) centre are met, or at least approached, in every activity through every play environment. Program planning helps the staff; children and parents connect the day-to-day events at the centre with its overall goals and philosophy. Without effective program planning the goals and philosophy will simply be words written somewhere on a piece of paper and the day-to-day activities will bear little or no resemblance to them.**

**Steve Musson**, *School-Age Care: Theory and Practice*.

My Time, Our Place acknowledges time and place as children engage in a range of play and leisure experiences that allow them to feel happy, safe and relaxed, interact with friends, practice social skills, solve problems, try new activities and learn life skills.

### WHAT IS A PROGRAM?

Basically, a program is a planned sequence of activities and experiences, which are intended to achieve an outcome. This means, that all of the activities/experiences that the children engage in on a daily basis, have an aim/objective and those activities/experiences are available for the children.

The program should provide experiences that focus on all areas of child development:

- ★ Cognitive/intellectual - numbers and shapes, counting, patterns and measurement, sense of space, knowledge and experience with the world, art, movement and dramatic play
- ★ Language/literacy - communication (listening, understanding and speaking), knowing about letters and word sounds and patterns, knowing about print and books
- ★ Social - cooperation, positive social relationships, respect for others, knowledge about families and communities
- ★ Emotional - self control and knowledge about feelings



- ★ Physical - gross motor skills, fine motor skills, active play and health and safety
- ★ Cultural - awareness and appreciation of their own and others' cultures
- ★ Approaches to learning - initiative and curiosity, engagement and persistence and reasoning and problem solving

While each of these areas should be covered in the program, depending upon the age or stage of each child's development, there may be a different focus for the experiences that are planned for individual children.

Program planning is an essential part of running a quality OOSH service and the program will be looked at as part of the quality assurance process. Having fun, interesting and varied programs will help to attract families to the centre and ensure the children are excited about attending your service.

A program of experiences for OOSH children should, as far as possible, allow children to make their own choices based on individual interests, needs, strengths, age and energy levels. The program should promote the importance of play, especially child-initiated play. Regimented times – when everyone is required to do the same thing at the same time – should be kept to a minimum.

Program planning for OOSH children is not about the staff planning 'lessons' or doing 'formal' teaching – it is about designing recreational experiences for children in the hours after school or during school holidays. Most centres will have limited structured activities planned for before school care.

The program of experiences should be developed in consultation with the children and their families and take into consideration the cultural background of the families and the local community.

## ■ PLANNING THE PROGRAM

Programs don't just happen - they need to be planned. As many staff as possible should be involved in programming, not just the coordinator. The strengths, talents and interests of the whole staff team should be utilised to make the program as exciting as possible for the children. The children should be consulted on the kind of things that they would like to do and parents should be aware that there is a program in existence and that their input would be greatly appreciated. This can be done through a variety of methods such as suggestion books/boxes available to children and families and by having regular meetings with children and staff where programming is discussed.

When planning the program, ensure that all of the resources and materials required are available and that there is an explanation of how to do the activities/experiences, so that any staff member present is able to facilitate the experience.

## ■ GOOD PROGRAMS

- ★ Offer children a balance of structured and unstructured activities to choose from.
- ★ Involve children in the decision making process.
- ★ Are evaluated to see what worked, what didn't work and how activities could be improved upon. Written evaluations should be filed for future reference and referral.
- ★ Have a broad range of challenging, stimulating activities on offer.
- ★ Cater for the different ages, genders, abilities and interests of the children.
- ★ Are flexible. If an activity is running well, extend its time allocation, if its not, then cut it short and do something else instead.

- ★ Take into account the indoor and outdoor space and equipment that is available.
- ★ Offer opportunities for play and development that the children may not normally get at home.
- ★ Utilise the different skills and talents of the staff members.
- ★ Have a balance of indoor/outdoor, noisy/quiet, and active/passive activities.
- ★ Recognise that children have been at school all day and want to relax and have fun.
- ★ Are displayed in an attractive way, so it can be seen by anyone who is interested.
- ★ Provide opportunities for family members to be involved in the program – ask if they have a special interest or talent that can be utilised.

**Network of Community Activities has a number of publications that are relevant to programming, please go to:**

<http://www.netoosh.org.au/publications.htm>

## ■ OTHER RELEVANT OOSH DEVELOPMENT FACTSHEETS:

- ★ Family Involvement #14
- ★ Equipment #4
- ★ Evaluation #31
- ★ Encouraging children outdoors #44



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