

## **Fun Friends and QIAS.**

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) is an Australian government initiative to centre based long day care. QIAS is administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council, Inc (NCAC).

The QIAS process involves seven quality areas that are described by 33 principles of quality practice. The following document describes how the Fun Friends program satisfies many of the guiding principles for quality care. (Quality Practices Guide, 2005).

### **Quality Area 1. Staff Relationships with Children and Peers.**

It is well-established that the development of the whole child is closely linked to the quality of the relationships experienced with others. In order to promote children's social and emotional well-being, consistent respectful and sensitive interactions and communication need to be developed between staff and the children.

#### **Principle 1.1: Staff that interact with each child in a warm and friendly way.**

The Fun Friends program supports staff to interact with each child on an individual basis and as a member of the group. Trained staff help children to not only explore their feelings, but to also recognise the feelings of their friends and peers. Recognition of individual temperaments, competencies and cultural backgrounds is supported throughout the programme. Throughout the Fun Friends program staff support children by listening sensitively and ensuring interactions are meaningful and personal. Role modeling is an important aspect of the Fun Friends program. The children are engaged in interactions and activities that are fun.

#### **Principle 1.2: Staff guide each child's behaviour in a positive way.**

The Fun Friends positive approach encourages children to develop and use strategies that build confidence and self-esteem. Responding to the children's interests and emotions such as pleasure, empathy and pride is an integral part of the program.

#### **Principle 1.3: Staff initiate and maintain respectful communication with each child.**

Fun Friends is designed to be a cooperative program shared with families. Families have the opportunity (indeed are actively encouraged) to be part of the program, contributing and learning with the child/ren. Problem-solving skills

development guide children to make better choices for resolving conflicts. Staff model language and behaviour and have been trained to administer the program. Children's language skills in communication often relate to how well adults listen to them, converse as partners, initiate interactions and conversations and communicate courteously. Recognising and understanding non-verbal communication is an important part in understanding our feelings, the feelings of others and our needs. Through the many Fun Friends activities the children also learn to recognise non-verbal cues.

#### Principle 1.4: Staff respect each child's background and abilities

The Fun Friends program is universal -- it knows no boundaries. Children with diverse and additional needs are not excluded. The program is flexible and allows staff and parents to respect every child's many abilities, competencies, interests and needs. Staff are supported through manuals, training and are able to get extra support from the Pathways Fun Friends website and staff if and when needed.

#### Principle 1.5: Staff treat all children equitably.

The Fun Friends program does not stereotype roles, all the characters are actively involved in a multitude of activities including cooking, swimming, gardening, hugging etc. The Fun Friends program develops empathy through promoting inclusive practice and it engenders an atmosphere of support, acceptance and positive role modeling.

### **Quality Area 2. Partnerships with Families.**

Staff and family share the common goal of positive outcomes for children. The relationship between the child's family and staff is crucial to the child's well-being. Children benefit most when this is a trusting and mutually supportive partnership.

#### Principal 2.2: Staff encourage family participation and involvement within the centre.

The Fun Friends program actively encourages the involvement of families. Parent/family activities are suggested after every session. Families are encouraged to practice new skills daily and for these to be ongoing over their children's school years. Because of Fun Friends flexibility in activities, parents are able to tailor follow-ups to suit their individual child and family circumstances. Sharing the Fun Friends journey is easy for parents and staff through the children's workbooks.

In keeping with the notion of partnership, families can be actively involved with the Fun Friends program. Parents are welcome to do the training and help staff facilitate the program at the centre. Staff also get added insight into individual children's abilities, interests and needs through this interaction with their families.

### **Quality Area 3. Programming and Evaluation.**

The Fun Friends program satisfies many areas of the early years curriculum in addition to enhancing other learning experiences. The Fun Friends workbooks offer an important document for teachers to record play, interests, ideas, thinking, conversations, home interests, learning and development.

#### **Principal 3.3: The programme assists each child to be a successful learner.**

Fun Friends assists children to become successful learners through encouraging problem-solving, extended thinking, role-play, building relationships, communicating etc. The program considers the children's:

- Physical environment: at the centre, at home, in the community.
- Relationships: developing connections and interactions.
- Role models: identifying roles in family, friends, staff, and community.
- Time and routines: recognising and allowing time to rest and self-soothe.
- Opportunities: allows the spontaneous play, ideas, thinking.
- Communication: sharing and discussing information, being positive.
- Wider community: reflecting wider community events.

Staff use a wide variety of strategies to foster children's learning e.g. talking, listening, drawing, puppetry, role plays, exploring, wondering, thinking, testing, predicting, negotiating, seeking out information, constructing etc. Inquiry is through individual, small-group and whole group experiences.

### **Quality Area 4. Children's Experiences and Learning.**

Children are fascinated by their world and want to explore it, make sense of it and have some control over it. Staff have to consider many things especially creating an environment that is sensitive to needs, stimulating, reflective and aesthetically pleasing.

#### **Principal 4.1: Staff encourage each child to make choices and participation play.**

Children engage in activities because they are fun and give them a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. The Fun Friends program invites curiosity, problem-solving and thinking through creative activities using a mixture of strategies and resources. Children work together in groups growing in confidence as they engage in social play. There are opportunities to be active and passive. There are no right or wrong answers. The staff support all efforts and the children are encouraged to appreciate other's efforts.

Principal 4.2: Staff promote each child's ability to develop and maintain relationships.

Children's interactions and relationships influence their interpersonal and intrapersonal development and, thus, their concepts of self and self-esteem. Fun Friends facilitates children's understandings, theories and ideas about the world and their feelings and behaviour. Through these understandings children become empowered, competent communicators with positive self concepts. Learned problem-solving skills and strategies allow negotiation within peer relationships and families to occur in a supportive, positive manner through recognising feelings and implementing the sensitive strategies in the Fun Friends program. Staff are able to support, redirect and foster positive outcomes.

Principal 4.3: Staff promote each child's language and literacy abilities.

Children's stories are created from their experiences and beliefs. Storytelling provides a way for children to process information about their world. Children are invited to tell their stories, listen to written stories and those of their families. Simple words, phrases and symbols act as supportive cues for the children. The Fun Friends program includes many experiences which promote communication in a variety of ways e.g. talking, singing, and drawing.

Principal 4.4: Staff promote each child's problem-solving and mathematical abilities.

Thinking about what is possible is an act of inventing, discovering and planning -- it involves many skills. As the children take part in the Fun Friends program they are continually thinking, discovering, assessing, problem-solving, making choices and implementing new concepts and strategies. The workbooks help support, initiate and encourage the children to be innovative, to construct generalisations of concepts and even make predictions.

Principal 4.5: Staff promote each child's enjoyment of and participation in the expressive arts.

The expressive arts allow children to hypothesise, inquire and process information that has meaning for them. Through the Fun Friends activities such as role plays, construction, using visual arts materials, ideas are explored e.g. photo stories of the children's days and lives, families, pets, holidays all help extend the children's creative expression in addition to acknowledging the creative process.

Principal 4.6: Staff promote each child's physical abilities.

An awareness of our own bodies and feelings is the beginning of the Fun Friends journey. As these concepts develop so does an understanding, awareness and respect for differences. It is from these concepts the children build empathy and tolerance in addition to perseverance and a positive outlook -one of 'I can do it!'.

### **Quality Area 5. Protective Care and Safety.**

Principal 5.1: Staff act to protect each child and all 5.2 Staff supervise children at all times.

Supervising children in child care necessitates staff to be alert at all times. The Fun Friends group leader's guide reminds staff to be attentive to the children's individual needs and the group in addition to precautions when using scissors, staplers etc.

### **Quality Area 6. Health, Nutrition and Wellbeing.**

Principles 6.1: Staff promote healthy eating habits.

Sensitivity to and responsiveness to nutritional needs and eating patterns is important in early childhood education and care. This is complemented by a focus on the child's emotional wellbeing in addition to providing developmentally appropriate support for each child's growing independence and confidence. Throughout the Fun Friends program healthy eating is encouraged. Suggestions are made to the children that they could cook at home with their families - this is a wonderful time for sharing.

### **Quality Area 7. Manage to Support Quality.**

Principles 7.4: management provides professional development opportunities for staff.

Before implementing the Fun Friends program, all staff have to attend training where they are taken through the background to the programme, the weekly sessions step-by-step, given suggestions for supporting parents and families in addition to using the group leader's training manual (and appendices) to support running the program.

**References:**

Barrett, P. (2007). *Fun Friends: The Teaching and Training Manual for Group Leaders*. Brisbane: Fun Friends Publishing Pty Ltd.

National Childcare Accreditation Council Inc. (2005). *NCAC Quality improvement and accreditation system: Quality practices guide*. (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). Sydney, Australia:  
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