



CENTRE FOR

Community  
Child Health

## **A snapshot of evaluation results from the 'Sharing a Picture of Children's Development' strategy**

**(The full evaluation reports described below are available from the Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne, and have been funded by the Australian Dairy Corporation.)**

'Sharing a Picture of Children's Development' ('Pictures') is a communication framework for child care staff and parents launched nationally in March, 2000. It includes a coordinators manual, five parent booklets and posters. In September, 2002, a further development of the coordinators manual was added to promote healthy eating in young children (1-5 years). This resource 'Relaxed and Social: a positive approach to children's healthy eating', includes a booklet for staff, a parent booklet and poster on five ways to support relaxed and social meal times. All resources have been a joint initiative with the Australian Dairy Corporation and are now available on the web.

### **Introduction**

As of March, 2003, the 'Pictures' coordinators manual has been requested by over 60% of the child care services in Australia (2,480). The three years of evaluation data from the 'Pictures' project provide useful insights into the current practices of child care centres in regards to parent-staff communication and the sharing of health and developmental information.

### **Methodology**

Between 2000-2003, written surveys were sent to long day care services at five time intervals, and follow up telephone interviews were conducted with a selection of centre coordinators and parents. The response rate to the surveys ranged from 30-50%, which is considered as very high in the child care sector.

In February, 2001, the first survey of all long day care services in Australia documented current practice in parent-staff communication, awareness of the 'Pictures' resource, use of strategies included in the communication framework and changes in practice in parent-staff communication.

In July, 2001, results documented the level of usage of the resource by services that had not used it the first survey, from a sample of 127 long day care services. Further samples of 23 centres were randomly selected to take part in detailed telephone interviews.

In March, 2002, all child care centres in Victoria and South Australia were surveyed on their response to the 'Relaxed and social' resource. A smaller sample of these services was followed up in a second survey five months later to learn how the resource had been used, factors that affected take up and changes in practice as a result of using the resource.

## Some indications of the impact of the ‘Sharing a Picture of Children’s Development’ resources

In February, 2001, the results indicated 33% of the sample (n= 1758) had requested a copy of the resource, with 18% using some component of it. In the first 6 months since the launch, 12% of services had changed some aspect of their operation as a result of using the resource.

In July, 2001, a sample of 127 child care coordinators indicated that over eighty percent found the coordinators manual to be helpful, to very helpful in their work, with over half reporting they had made changes to service operation.

Common changes made in services were:

- Reviewed current practice in parent-staff communication
- Changed the way written information about child development was provided to parents
- Used the resource as a guide to running interviews with parents
- Changed the way developmental records were kept and used
- Increased the number of parent-staff interviews.

**TABLE 1: Helpfulness of ‘Pictures’ resource in supporting activities**

Activity	Frequency (%)	
	2000	2001
Motivating staff to improve communication with parents about child development	67	86
Initiating discussion with parents about their child’s development	56	68
Making observations and developmental records available to parents	55	82
Preparing for accreditation	55	85
Conducting one-to-one interviews with parents	54	95
Establishing links with other child health services	36	42
Improving staff confidence to raise issues	N/A	91

July, 2001, results from the table above indicate the helpfulness of the resource in conducting one to one interviews and improving staff confidence to raise issues with parents.

The July, 2001, Evaluation reports, *“most respondents had made and observed changes in communication as a result of using the information in the resource. The majority of respondents found all components to be helpful and that the major impact was it supported an increase in parent-staff communication and was suitable to use with all parents.”*

### Overall conclusion

***“The evaluation indicates that when properly utilised, ‘Sharing a Picture of Children’s Development’ is a valuable resource that has the potential to make significant positive changes in the way that centre staff and parents relate to one another.”***  
***(2001 Evaluation report)***

## Evaluation of Relaxed and Social resource

In August, 2002, 512 services in South Australia and Victoria were sent the package of 'Relaxed and social' resources and 30% returned written surveys. A small number of parents were interviewed over the telephone. The January, 2003, Evaluation report indicated that 75% of services (n=156) were using some aspect of the 'Pictures' communication framework. A very high proportion (85%) were planning to use the new 'Relaxed and Social' resources to respond to parent concerns such as fussy eating, food allergies, motivating children to eat healthy food and eating enough dairy foods, fruit and vegetables.

The areas where the resource was most useful (more than 60%) were:

- Initiating discussions about healthy eating with parents
- Dealing with fussy eating
- Motivating children to eat healthy food
- Eating enough fruit and vegetables
- Eating enough dairy foods.

## Comments by staff

A selection of comments by staff illustrates the impact of the resources;

*"Parents are more willing to approach staff as staff have the resources and information."*

*"Better focus for all staff at meal times, casual staff are made more aware of mealtime expectations."*

*"The resources were very valuable as they reinforced staff's knowledge. Some parents aren't convinced by verbal communication and they need to see it in printed form."*

## Parent comment

The following comment by a parent indicates a positive response;

*"It is because of the centre that she eats as well as she does. Some of the menus they offer introduces her to new food like tuna. There is fruit I don't even know she eats."*

## Overall conclusion of the 'Relaxed and Social' resources

***"Overall, the evaluation of the new 'Relaxed and social' resource has convincing outcomes. The messages regarding healthy eating are being promoted via posters in the foyers, booklets in the homes and staff rooms, fact sheets in centre newsletters, parents observing practices in their centres, and via the children's day to day experiences." (2003 Evaluation report).***