

OSHC STANDARDS SA /NATIONAL STANDARDS

Background:

In 1995, the State Ministers for Community Services and the Commonwealth Minister (at a meeting in Alice Springs in July) signed off on National Standards for Out of School Hours Care. At that time all states and territories agreed to oversee the full implementation of those standards by 1998. The ACT was out in front as they already had regulations for OSHC. It was also agreed at this time that the Standards would be reviewed in 2000 – this has never happened.

In SA, DECS was the department with the general oversight of children's services and so there was discussion around how the implementation of the standards would be addressed.

The National Standards were clear that there should be two staff present at all times. In SA it was recognised that there was a considerable number of services where at some time of the day there was a single staff person working in the service and the implementation of the National Standards would have financial consequences for some of the services that were already vulnerable. To address this, DECS developed Standards for Services that operated with a Single Staff member at any time. These standards contained clauses that ensured that service operators implemented additional safety measures for the improved safety and well-being of children and staff.

Therefore, in preparing to roll out the National Standards, it was decided to incorporate the Single Staff Standards. This was done locally without any approval or agreement from the group that had signed off on the Standards although we can presume that progress reports may have been given at subsequent meetings. The OSHC Standards SA then came into being and the explanatory notes were written, checklists developed and the system was ready to be tested via consultation from September 1998. At the time of writing the explanatory notes, every attempt was made to use language and intent that was already in use in the Childcare Regulations.

After statewide consultation and some testing of the validation process, the full implementation of the OSHC Standards SA began at the beginning of the 1999 school year. SA had met the agreed target.

The monitoring of the Standards was undertaken by the Licensing and Standards Unit of DECS. Officers would visit services with checklists and if compliant the service then received a certificate of compliance. This process was streamlined over the years and officers had an agreed target of visiting services (both announced meetings and unannounced meetings) 3 times in 2 years. The system was working well and widely accepted until funding cuts changed the process at the beginning of 2004. It's really been down hill ever since as many services pay lip service to the process.

New operators applying for CCB places sign that they will agree to meet the national Standards. It is only a tick in a box and no check is made. Similarly the achieve accreditation from the NCAC to meet the quality assurance principles services should be meeting the National Standards but the question is not clarified in any way by those validators.

Several attempts have been made to introduce a regulatory framework for OSHC services but this usually becomes too hard as OSHC does not fit well into either the existing Acts – Children's Services Act or the Education Act.

Who knows where the future will take this all.

The OSHC Association SA (Inc) supports the implementation and monitoring of OSHC STANDARDS SA /NATIONAL STANDARDS. Given that the Association was actively involved with the development of the OSHC Standards SA, we favour that version being widely promoted as the minimum requirement to operate an OSHC service in SA.

The Association is committed to maintaining the scope for small services to operate with only one staff person as required. Our members recognise that to do this is more difficult for employees as it is often a less stimulating environment for both children and adults. We would recommend that where possible operators consider single staff operation as a short term plan or as something that occurs at the beginning or end of the day.

Operators of new services must submit an interim self assessment before they commence operating and after the first year of operation must be fully compliant – this will allow time for new services to develop the essential paperwork.

The Association has a preference for external monitoring of the standards and asks that there is support to assist services to meet the Standards.

If external monitoring is not possible, then the process for self assessment of services against the Standards is a process that must be formalised and a process of reprimand instated when services blatantly fail to comply with the process. The responsibility to meet the Standards is a responsibility of the Operator and not the employees.

The reprimand process should be of a general nature and as such be relevant for services on state school sites as well as all others. It may be as simple as any service which has not submitted its self assessment after 12 weeks is reported to the NCAC and DEEWR.

For management purposes (at service level) we would ask that there is an annual date by which all services must submit the Self Assessment. This date should be widely advertised in several formats e.g. DECS and Association web sites, OSHC Bits and an email.

Once a service has completed a self assessment which has been signed off by departmental personnel, the services receives a certificate of compliance that is also endorsed by the OSHC Association SA. This will enable the certificate to be displayed for families, and other personnel who are checking the service's compliance with requirements – either state or federal.

The Association will endorse and support processes to improve the current practice and will be available for consultation and discussion relating to any changes.

The Association also requests that as a matter of urgency that be a review of the Standards. Given that they are SA Standards that incorporate the National Standards, there would seem to be no reason why they cannot be changed. If this is not so can SA call for consultation with the other states or territories that do not have regulations for OSHC and with NOSHSA to improve and modernise the National Standards. If and when such a review is undertaken the Association wishes that it is noted that a minimum child: staff ratio of 1:12 at all time is included. The current excursion ratios may stay as they are currently.