

## Running or Stumbling?

### In Search Of Inspiration In School Age Care

#### *Some people are never satisfied...*

We wanted standards, we wanted protections, we lobbied for regulation, recognition and most importantly a baseline standard across Australia for all children. On January 1 2012 that came into place. Now OSHC does not fight to be at the table of Government; we have a valued place there.

So, why so glum? Perhaps we have forgotten what it was like 'in the good old days'. Let me refresh your memory, because I was there...

Once we were a resilient bunch, operating out of car boots and an old colleague Majella McClean from Albury (where are you now Majella? I miss you) summed up her experiences when asked about access to running water – "Running water? Yes, our running water is me with a bucket running back and forward from the tap in the school yard to do the washing up each afternoon!"

The term OSHC was not known, when you went to parties everyone thought you were a baby sitter, parents referred to you as babysitters, programs were inspiring but ad hoc ranging from services with highly creative and inspired programs to others that were children sitting at rows of tables colouring in while staff chatted, blowing whistles to get children's attention and some ducking out for a cigarette; once I watched as a staff member lit up in front of me. My own 34 year old nephew still recoils in horror at the mention of before and after school care, such was his experience that he would never send a child there again.

The employment of staff was hit and miss. One colleague recalls attending an interview and when she asked when do I start, the reply was, "Kids arrive in an hour, can you go meet the bus?".

There were no agreements or surety regarding venues and in the majority of the cases an OSHC service could be held in the canteen annex or anywhere the school had a spot including places where the toilets were so far away that children were rostered toilet time or could not go to the toilet after dark as there were no lights.

Our budgets were small with limited ability to purchase anything major and we knew all the best ways to create something out of nothing. We held recycling days and "recession

the process to control us.

Regulations are the baseline we needed and NSW is the last of the Australian OSHC sector to have them. There is nothing in the regulations that we were not already doing as standard practice in an OSHC service or that we were not already liable for. Suddenly in writing it becomes overwhelming.. and the fancy legalistic jargon that accompanies it mystifying. "My Time, Our Place" outcomes and practices are what we have been doing for years... except now it is in writing. Many of the

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buster crafts" to share ideas with colleagues. Our mask making was out of paper and the introduction of plastic milk bottles caused a rush on new ideas with koalas and Bart Simpson masks being created as well as pot plant holders, pen holders and candle holders...

If you are nice to me maybe one day I will show you again how to make something out of nothing. ***But perhaps the message I send to you today is that we have now got something... don't turn it into nothing by getting lost in the process.***

We can lament the "good old days", but I remember the good old days and those of you who were there were lamenting them then as there were serious issues impacting on services and children.

Stand tall, the NQF is a positive thing and will bring with it the resolution of many issues we had in those "good old days"- but we need to control the process and not allow

constraints being applied are put there by a lack of knowledge about the process and the opinions of those selling products or services.

We still have a responsibility to seek out the inspiration and creativity of children and to innovate. We have a responsibility to maintain our playfulness because OSHC time is playtime.

Do not let school age care become boring by seeing the NQF as something that IS our practice because we fear it. Don't let the overwhelming urge to over document become the norm by the fact the majority of services are mimicking an early childhood setting that is not sustainable or enjoyable for school age children. We now have the foundation of support in legislation, and the future of how we implement our practice is ours to shape. It is time to be brave and ambitious.... Time to reclaim the inspiration that we had when we had nothing, and run with it.