



Queensland
Government
Department of
Families

Hub Action Research Project
Project brief

Office of Child Care

May 2001

1. Introduction

This project brief provides an overview of the Hub Action Research Project which forms part of the Child Care and Family Support Hub Strategy. The research project will be coordinated through the Office of Child Care in consultation with regional staff and service providers. Twelve out of the fourteen services across Queensland that have received funding through the 2000/2001 funding round will be involved in the research project over the following twelve months. The two services that received funding to assist with hub planning will not be involved in this process.

This project brief also provides detailed information about the action research process that funded services will be exploring throughout the development of their hub.

2. Background

The Child Care and Family Support Hub Strategy is part of the *Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000 – 2005* and responds to the expressed need of parents for improved access to services. In the consultation process leading to the development of this plan, working parents expressed the need for improved access to education, health and other community services for their children, especially in their children's early years.

In response to the increasing number of families with dependent children where both parents are entering the workforce, the State Government is examining new models that can better respond to the changing needs of these parents.

The Queensland Government is committed to better integration of services to meet the needs of families and the local community.

The 2000/2001 Child Care and Family Support Hub funding round provided funding to fourteen child care services throughout Queensland for the development of child care and family support hubs. It is important in the early stages of the development of these hubs that each of the 14 services can learn from each other.

There are also many other services who are keen to understand more about the process for establishing a hub and to understand the key learnings from those services already receiving hub funding. This research project will be the key mechanism for sharing information about how to start a hub, how to develop policies and protocols for the operation of a hub, and other learnings as they arise.

The fourteen services receiving hub funding include rural and remote and urban hubs, hubs which focus on school age care, hubs centred around shared community resources such as a resource library, a hub which is delivered through an In-Home care model, indigenous hubs, and a private sector hub. In addition, two services have been funded to further develop hub strategies in their target communities.

This research project will ensure that valuable information is shared across the child care and family support sector and that a wide range of hub models are explored.

3. Purpose

The main purposes of the Hub Action Research Project are to:

- publish reports on the web about the strategies and processes used to establish hubs
- provide an opportunity for services to explore an action research approach to establishing Child Care and Family Support Hubs.

The information gathered from the research project will be used to:

- inform services about the strategies and processes that could be used to establish hubs
- support continuous improvement and development in the provision of integrated services
- further understand the challenges and benefits associated with the provision of integrated child care and family support services
- inform the development of future strategies, funding programs and policies to assist in meeting the Queensland Government's commitment to ensuring better integration of child care and family support services.

4. Research approach

The project will involve services in exploring an action research approach to developing their Child Care and Family Support Hubs.

Action research is recognised as an effective process for changing, developing and improving professional practice. This approach differs from traditional research because the action research process invites democratic participation and doesn't just look at participants as "subjects". Traditional researchers look at what a group is doing and try to make generalised statements or findings which relate to answering a pre-determined research question. Action researchers are required to look at themselves in a process and reflect on what they are thinking and feeling and seek creative ways to improve what they are doing.

The action research process involves participants in reflecting on their practice, planning and taking action to address an issue, and then observing and reflecting on the consequences of the action. Ideally the process is continuous and cyclic as represented in Figure 1.

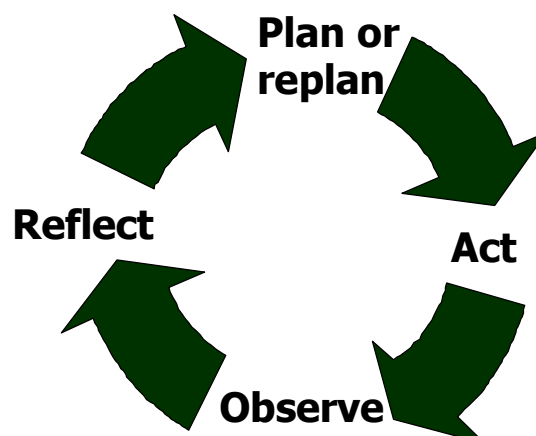


Figure 1: The action research process

The strength of action research is that the research is defined by the participants and conducted by those who want to improve their own situation. In undertaking action research, colleagues work together to find their own solutions to problems, contribute to the solution and feel ownership. Participants are 'doing' their own research which means that they are taking action and collecting information about that action for their own purposes and to improve their own situation.

The advantage of incorporating an action research approach into the development of Child Care and Family Support Hubs is that it provides support to communities and key stakeholders who are coordinating the development of the hub by providing a systematic and practical way of ensuring continuous development. Action research:

- fosters self renewal
- promotes planned change
- offers a structured process for observing a range of perspectives
- provides problem solving strategies to increase local effectiveness.

Many service providers may find that although they are not familiar with the action research process they are already using similar processes in their professional practice. The action research phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting are probably not unlike the phases that an organisation would use when a new service is being developed. The action research approach makes these phases more explicit and challenges groups to be committed to a process of constantly learning from experiences and sharing these experiences with others.

Incorporating an action research approach into developing hubs will allow service providers to investigate their own model for developing a hub in a systematic and planned way while taking account of the factors that are of particular interest in their situation and context.

Using the action research process will involve services in the four phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting as they develop their Child Care and Family Support Hubs. Each of these phases is described below:

- **Planning** – In the planning phase, the focus is on deciding what strategies and processes will be used to establish the hub. (Service providers will have already commenced the planning phase by preparing their applications for this project.) Specifically, in the planning phase service providers might consider questions such as:
 - What are the identified needs of children and families in the local community?
 - What are the planned outcomes of the hub and how do these respond to community needs?
 - What strategies and processes will be used to establish the hub and achieve the desired outcomes?
 - How will information be collected about the effectiveness of the planned strategies and processes?
 - When will this information be collected and analysed so that it can be used to inform future action?
 - What are the possible barriers or concerns?
- **Acting** – In the acting phase, the focus is on taking action and implementing the planned strategies and processes for establishing the hub. The length of this phase will be different for each hub and will be dependent on the nature and

number of strategies and processes that the hub is implementing. Specifically, during the acting phase service providers may be involved in:

- The physical construction of the hub
 - Developing policies and protocols for the operation of the hub
 - Responding directly to the needs of the community
 - Overcoming challenges and barriers to establishing and operating the hub
- **Observing** – In the observing phase, the focus is on observing the consequences of the implemented actions and collecting information about the effectiveness of the strategies and processes that have been used to establish the hubs. The data collected during this phase should provide service providers with documentary evidence that can be used for subsequent reflection. The activities in this phase may occur after the acting phase but will most often occur concurrently with the acting phase i.e. service providers will be observing and collecting data as they are implementing their planned strategies and processes. Specifically, during the observing phase service providers may be collecting information using techniques such as:
 - Surveys
 - Interviews
 - Feedback through community meetings and committee meetings
 - Anecdotal records
 - Field notes
 - Observation notes
 - Reflective journal entries
 - Document analysis
- **Reflecting** – In the reflecting phase, the focus is on analysing the information or data that has been collected in the observation phase and using this information to propose future action. Specifically, during the reflecting phase service providers may consider questions such as:
 - Have our outcomes been achieved?
 - Have the identified needs of the children and families in the local community been met?
 - How effective were the strategies and processes that we used?
 - What will be our future action plan?
 - What challenges and barriers have we encountered in developing our hub?
 - What are the benefits of the hub for the children and families in the local community?

5. Reports

Service providers will complete a report proforma for each of the four phases of the action research process. The report proformas will require service providers to respond to a number of questions to provide descriptive information about how they are planning, acting, observing and reflecting to establish their hubs.

While timelines have been identified for the completion of the report proformas, it is acknowledged that the timelines for each hub will vary and service providers will move through the action research phases at different rates. For example, some services may have an extended planning phase if the initial action phase is dependent upon the completion of a building.

Project managers from the Office of Child Care will use the information provided on the report proformas to prepare a report for each hub to be published on the web. The reports will be published in four stages as each proforma is completed. Service providers will be asked for their feedback on the contents of the hub reports before they are placed on the web.

At the completion of the project, service providers will also be asked to complete a short questionnaire focusing on the usefulness of the action research process as a tool for establishing hubs.

6. Roles and responsibilities

The project will be coordinated by the Office of Child Care, Department of Families in consultation with regional staff and service providers. The project managers will be responsible for developing the research framework, report proformas and collating information provided by services in preparation for publishing on the web. The project managers will also have a general role in supporting regional staff and services to participate in this project and the action research process.

Nominated regional staff will be responsible for providing input into the development of the research framework and report proformas and in providing advice about the overall direction of the project. Regional staff who are resourcing funded hubs will be responsible for supporting service providers in participating in this research project and providing feedback to the project managers if a service encounters any difficulties throughout the research project.

Service providers will be responsible for completing the report proformas and for participating in an action research approach to the development of their hub. Service providers should also feel that they are able to provide feedback to regional staff or the project managers about any aspect of this research project, in particular, progress regarding set timeframes.

7. Timelines

Timeframes	Proposed Process	Responsibility
5 June 2001	Planning Phase report proforma sent to services	Project Managers
29 June 2001	Planning Phase report proforma due back to OCC	Hub Services
6 July 2001	Planning Phase information on child care website	Project Managers
6 August 2001	Acting Phase report proforma sent to services	Project Managers
31 August 2001	Acting Phase report proforma due back to OCC	Hub Services
21 September 2001	Acting Phase information on child care website	Project Managers
5 November 2001	Observing Phase report proforma sent to services	Project Managers
3 December 2001	Observing Phase report proforma due back to OCC	Hub Services
21 December 2001	Observing Phase information on child care website	Project Managers
1 April 2002	Reflecting Phase report proforma sent to services	Project Managers
29 April 2002	Reflecting Phase report proforma due back to OCC	Hub Services
17 May 2002	Reflecting Phase information on child care website	Project Managers

8. Further readings

Schmuck, R. (1998) *Practical Action Research for Change*. Hawker Brownlow Education: Australia

Kemmis, Stephen and McTaggart, Robin (1988) *The Action Research Planner*, 3rd Edition, Deakin University, Geelong.