

Interview with an OHS Auditor

In November 2009 we interviewed Carl Davis, an OHS auditor for VCOSS whose job was to take a comprehensive look at an organisation's health and safety culture.

1 What is an OHS audit?

An OHS audit or advisory visit is a short but hopefully comprehensive look at an organisation's health and safety culture.

2 What is the role of an OHS auditor?

The role of the auditor is to discuss all aspects of the organisation's health and safety with staff, examine the risks involved in their jobs, physically inspect the workplace and try to suggest ways that improvements can be made that will help make the environment safer.

3 What usually happens when you come to a kindergarten, preschool or early childhood service to perform an audit?

On arrival at a children's service centre I explain that *We need to talk* and talk we do. Talking is the main part of these visits. I need to know what problems they have. I need to discover what policies and procedures they have in place for OHS. I think some staff are surprised at the things we discuss but they are usually very constructive chats. We then do a tour of the physical premises and identify any obvious problems and discuss ways to overcome them.

4 What are some of the main safety issues at kindergarten, preschool or early childhood service?

The main safety issues at kindergartens etc. are the usual suspects. Manual handling, poor office environments, poor storage, unsafe ladders and stress to name a few. The staff do a fantastic job but occasionally take risks to get the job done, such as climbing on chairs. The children's areas are almost always very safe. It is the staff areas that are the problem.

5 What feedback and reports do you give to the services?

They get immediate feedback during the visit on those things that are working well. The nature of the report they receive after the visit is by its nature a constructive feedback document which doesn't allow us to give pats on the back. They certainly all deserve one though.

6 Have you any examples of best practice policies that can be adopted in other centres?

There are lots of examples of best practice out there. For instance, using office type adjustable gas lift chairs in the play room areas. There are centres with excellent storage facilities which take a lot of the strain out of the job, of course some centres simply do not have the money or the facilities.

7 How can a centre arrange an OHS audit?

Victorian businesses with up to 20 employees can register for a free 3 hour session with an independent consultant. To arrange a visit they should contact VCOSS by calling Marina Henley on 9654 5050 or visit either the VCOSS website www.communityohs.org.au or the WorkSafe website www.worksafe.vic.gov.au > Safety & prevention > Small business.

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