

One centre's answers to OHS

This term we interviewed Joan Gains, the manager at Clifton Street Children's Centre on their interesting approach to OHS. Joan has been centre manager for 11 years and has many years experience with the 'occupational hazards' faced by workers in the children's services sector.



A staff member demonstrates the use of a hose tap.

1 Describe your centre

We are fortunate to be located in parklands and our play yard looks out onto an oval and parkland. We have been open for 15 years. We currently have 40 children per day, including a 15 place funded integrated 4 year old kindergarten program, and employ 14 permanent staff.

2 What OHS challenges have you faced and how have you dealt with them?

Like all Early Childhood centres, we work constantly with unstable, awkward and repetitive tasks. Last year we had an in-house work shop where we completed a risk assessment for many of our manual handling tasks. This involved identifying all the tasks we do regularly that involve manual handling. After assessing the risks, we brainstormed ideas to eliminate or reduce as many of the potential risks that we could.

Some of the strategies that have been implemented are:

We have a very diverse team including staff ranging in height from just 4 feet to over 6 feet.

- Adult seating. We have an adult padded lounge chair or a couch in each of our play rooms and on the veranda. Perching spots around the yard where staff comfortably sit for a few minutes while supervising or interacting with children.
- The purchase of sturdy portable ladders that are in conveniently located spots around the centre.
- Reviewed our roster to pair up staff of similar height to set up the outdoor area.

To reduce unnecessary lifting:

- We replaced our sink taps with veggie sprayers (hose taps) to fill buckets, water trolleys without lifting heavy containers (see photograph opposite).
- Shed storage is always a nightmare. We have hutch doors on the outside for boards.
- Reviewed our program set up and identified that we don't need to re-arrange the whole room on a regular basis to deliver a stimulating program.
- Children can be good at packing up floor toys. So can a broom for scattered blocks.

We wanted to remind each other to work safely and maintain healthy day to day practice

- We took digital photos of each task with brief reminders underneath and put them up around the centre where the tasks were likely to occur.
- Included safe practice in staff and reliever orientation. The orientation book also includes colour photos of desired practice.

Staff well-being

- Code of conduct.
- Clear meeting guidelines.
- Opportunity to discuss and brainstorm difficulties with children or families in an appropriate setting.
- A few workshops and information around staff wellbeing ie 'healthy eating', 'quick core strength exercises', 'relaxation', 'dealing with difficult conversations'.

