

RESEARCH BRIEFS

Evaluation of QEC's Day Stay Program for Mothers with Infants and Toddlers

About Day Stay

The Day Stay program aims to develop parenting competence, confidence and enjoyment so parents or caregivers nurture and protect their children and enhance their family's health and development.

It offers a full day of intensive support and advice to parents experiencing less complex parenting difficulties, such as feeding, sleeping and managing difficult toddler behaviours. Up to six parents can attend and receive a mix of individual and group work including one-on-one coaching, guided practice and advice, and group discussions.

Staff adopt a strengths-based approach to engage with families in a sensitive way that identifies strengths and builds on current parenting practices.

The research

In 2003, Victorian Parenting Centre (re-named the Parenting Research Centre) evaluated the program to explore its positive affects on:

- psychosocial wellbeing (depression and anxiety) and satisfaction with parenting for mothers who attend the program; and
- changes in child behaviours.

Identified changes were measured at a six-week follow up to see if outcomes were maintained.

The effect of timing was also examined using two study groups separated into mothers who attended QEC either 1) within 14 days, or 2) more than 21 days after making a booking.

Research was limited to examining the impact of behavioural interventions only for infant sleep disturbances.

The research project was funded by QEC.

What we found

- Most parents came for help with infant sleeping and settling problems. Other reasons included problems with feeding, tantrums and general non-compliant child behaviour.
- Depression and anxiety levels fell and parental satisfaction rose in parents who attended with these improvements maintained over time.
- Child behavioural problems improved; incidents were less severe and happened less often.
- Attending parents showed signs of improved parenting and achieving their parenting goals.
- Parents who waited longer to attend a program benefited less than parents with shorter waits.
- Parents who do not complete the program suffer more anxiety and stress overall than attendees. Their wellbeing is less improved than those who attend.

Key points

The Day Stay program provides positive outcomes for children and families through timely intervention provided by early parenting education and support.

Overview of program outcomes for families

- Parental wellbeing and behaviours in young children improve.
- Early intervention increases the extent of improvements that families can achieve, helping young children get an even better start in life.



Issues

Considerations for early parenting service providers and professionals:

- Limited resources prevent some parents accessing QEC services in the most advantageous timeframe. However, through its assessment process, QEC can prioritise cases and identify those requiring urgent assistance.
- It is difficult to determine if or how parents apply skills learned in the program to other challenging aspects of parenting. This requires further, in-depth research.

Next steps

QEC plans to focus on reducing waiting times and acknowledges that further investigation is needed to fully understand how and why longer waiting times affect program outcomes. The situation is not simple as attendance delays also result from a family's own circumstances that are out of a service provider's control.

Future research should include a long-term follow up period to determine to what extent program gains are maintained by parents and factors that affect these outcomes.

Find out more

Access this research report for free from the QEC website at <http://www.qec.org.au/publications.htm>

Fast facts

TO BE REPRESENTED GRAPHICALLY TO MAKE IT STAND OUT →

Overall demand for QEC services rose by 38.7% between 2003 and 2006

DAY STAY ATTENDANCE

Location	2003-2004 Families	2004-2005 Families	2005-2006 Families
Noble Park	686	689	730
Wangaratta	53	47	55
City of Kingston	143	149	146

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING ADVICE FROM QEC

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
For telephone advice only*	1500	1785	3121
Residential stays	547	562	608
Day stay (families)	686	689	730

* Increased telephone advice is attributable to growing demand for services and QEC's fixed capacity for places in its Day Stay or Residential programs.

SOURCES OF REFERRAL FOR DAY STAY PROGRAMS

Source	2003-04 (n= 686)	2004-05 (n= 689)	2005-06 (n= 730)
Maternal Child Health Nurse	49.4%	56.6%	50.5%
Medical Practitioner (GP, Paediatrician, Specialist)	5%	4%	5%
Hospital & Community Nursing	3%	1.45%	0.3%
Community Agency (Family Support, Housing, Multicultural Resource Centre, Women's Refuge)	2%	1.5%	1%
DHS Child Protection	0.14%	0	0
Other early parenting centre	1%	1%	1%
Other QEC program	0.4%	0.6%	1.5%
Self, family, friends network	19%	17%	22%
Other (includes unknown)	20%	18%	19%