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Making sure that our centre has a solid plan for the future is one of the most important things for me in my role as Director of this service. Foremost, it is essential to demonstrate best practice in the management of the service to meet the requirements of the service agreement guidelines for funding. We are required by DEEWR to have a service workplan which must be submitted to enable release of our annual financial grant from the government. Our yearly plan is aligned to this. It helps us to identify a set of priority goals and ensures that we are meeting our own expectations in terms of the service philosophy, but also includes the requirements under the National Law and Regulations for children's services and the *National Quality Standard*. Our plan is quite detailed and sets out our targets and goals, who is responsible for delivering on the goals and the time frame for achieving them. We review our plan every quarter to make sure we are staying on-task.

The plan is a good way to communicate to our licensee—the local council—what we aim to achieve and to open up conversations with them about the sorts of resources we require to achieve the goals. It is an important communication tool for setting out how the council can best support us, and because it is presented professionally they are more likely to take it seriously. As a staff we talk about the plan early in the new year so we can plan for the children's program and any professional development that we might need. The plan allows for collaborative input and consultation with Group Leaders (monthly meetings) where we look at the Quality Standards and check progress on any goals that may have potential barriers. Group leaders bring one issue of concern and the group discusses these and decides on further action. The plan also helps us to complete our quality improvement plan (QIP) and ensure that we are constantly focusing on future improvements to the centre.

At TICCC we believe in providing the highest quality of education and care. A plan is critical to sustain high-quality care. In reviewing the plan regularly we are mindful of our Mission of *Sharing, Caring and Learning. The sharing of skills and knowledge, the quality caring and nurturing of children and the ongoing learning by the children, their family and the educators.*

The plan keeps us focused on just how we can achieve this mission. Currently we are focusing on the National Quality Standard with a particular focus on leadership. One of our biggest challenges on TI is recruiting and retaining qualified staff. Our plan helped us to highlight this area of concern and forced us to investigate ways to increase our number of qualified staff. We gained access to funding and resources under the Indigenous Remote Area Strategy. This strategy recognises that remote communities do not have a pool of qualified professionals immediately available to fill vacancies as they occur. Specifically, we find it difficult to find staff with group leader experience. Retention of qualified staff in any service is critical in sustaining quality of care. We have included in our plans over recent years a goal to become directly involved in training early childhood staff for these leadership positions. One of our first strategies within this was to ensure that all staff are at the least enrolled in a Certificate III in Children's Services. We established a partnership with the local high school and introduced the Certificate II to school students so they can begin their study at school. We also offer work experience placements for these students at our centre. This has led to job opportunities and possible career pathways in children's services and further education for many students who might otherwise not study beyond high school.

As a further part of this plan, I attained my Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and together with a local Registered Training Organisation (RTO), we can now deliver both the Certificate III Traineeship and the Diploma directly to our staff. We can also access the relevant funding to offer traineeships. I have been released from my role of Director for two days each week to teach these trainees and mentor them in the workplace. This has also provided the opportunity for one of the senior staff to move into the Acting Director's role two days per week. This means that another person is being up-skilled and mentored in this important leadership role. The idea of this training partnership came from our annual plan. After much discussion about the difficulties we were having with recruiting qualified staff we investigated ways to resolve the problem. It is a lot of hard work but worth it if we can have high-quality staff working with our children.