What is documentation?
Documentation is a term used to describe all the different ways you can record information about your work, children, the service and the outcomes that are achieved. Documentation in OSHC includes information useful for staff, families and others such as the sponsor.

Why is documentation important in OSHC?
Documenting information about the children, the service and the outcomes is important for many reasons. Documentation is:
• evidence of your work with children
• part of the accountability processes
• information to use in planning
• helpful for communicating with families, the sponsor and the local community
• useful for evaluation of the service.

Preparing documentation
Written notes about children are the most obvious method of documentation. It is difficult to find the time in a busy service to take long and detailed notes about children, and so a simple system is needed. Some OSHC staff use a small notebook or set of post-it notes to make brief notes as they work and observe. It is important to make them as you go, because if you wait until after the children have gone home, you are likely to have forgotten key information. Encourage all staff to make these notes.

The short notes taken on the spot might look like this:

Jai seems to understand the how to play the new board game and he helped Danny, Belinda and Pete to work out how to play it. (12/4/04)

Melanie and Nicky enjoyed working on the computer together today. Melanie said that her dad helped her to learn how to play the game at home. (1/6/04)

Some of the older children were very noisy this afternoon and were not interested in what we had planned. (24/10/04)

Paste or staple these notes into a book and use them to plan the next day or for the next week. In the above examples, staff might plan for Jai to be the ‘teacher’ for the new board game over this week until more children understand the rules. The observation about the older children reminds staff that they need to rethink, in consultation with the older children the activities or experiences they planned. Staff might also remind them about the policy on noise levels.

Other forms of documentation include:
• a program poster which gives an overview of what is happening over a week
• regular observation notes about the indoor and outdoor environment
• photographs of the children’s work and participation in activities
• video recordings of special events such as a concert or a play
• examples of children’s work or artistic creations
• the words of the children written down and presented with other documentation. For example, a child’s words about a painting are placed next to the painting: ‘I painted my mum and our dog called Lily.’
• written policies
• other records such as enrolment forms

What happens with the documentation?
Some of the documentation, such as the observations made about the children, are not displayed for others to view. However, you might use documentation when you are discussing a child’s participation in the service with a parent. This type of documentation is kept in a safe place to protect children’s privacy.

You could use samples of children’s work and words as a display on a notice board for children, staff and families to look at and discuss. Change these displays regularly and try to make them attractive through using coloured paper behind the work, large headings or labels, and ensuring they are neatly pinned. Invite families and children to comment about the documented work on display. These comments may help staff to feel affirmed and can provide further ideas for planning.
Photograph albums or scrap books with photos and the children’s explanations about a special event such as excursion or a special visitor are a good way to document what happened, what the children learned and how they responded. Children like to ‘read’ these books and they can become part of a permanent record of the OSHC service. Encourage older children to help produce these books or albums. Children gain much pleasure in looking back over things they did in previous years in the same way that families like to spend time looking at family photograph albums.

Having the program documented can be helpful for staff when they have to write reports for the sponsoring body or for other agencies and authorities, as the information is already collated and available. Newsletter items can also be taken from the documentation material.

A final word on documentation

Documenting the work in OSHC services is part of your professional responsibility to sponsors, families, children and the community. It is a way of reminding staff and others of the complexity and importance of your work. Using documentation as a basis for program planning makes the work easier because you are not making decisions ‘in the dark’. Documentation can be an important part of the evaluation of the service.

Links to Shared visions

Chapter 6: Observation (entire chapter)
Chapter 8 (entire chapter)

Questions and reflections

1. Documentation for families
   What information is readily available for a parent to read?
   What would a parent learn from this information?
   Is it enough?
   How could you improve both the amount and the content?

2. Documentation for children
   Are the children’s words and work documented through displays or in books?
   Is there documentation that the children can read or look at?

3. Documentation for staff
   What records and information do you have on every child?
   What documentation do you have on the children who are full-time or come very regularly? Select one child who attends full-time and take notes on their participation in the service every day for two weeks. Try to get notes from indoor and outdoor play and at different types of activities and at routine times. If there are other staff in the service, they can help take these notes. At the end of two weeks, use the following questions to think about what you have observed:
   • What does this child like to do every day?
   • What are their interests?
   • Who do they like to play with the most?
   • How do they contribute to the group?
   • What skills do they display?
   • What new insights did you gain about this child?
   • Did you learn anything about the child’s school, family and community experiences?

After thinking about all these questions, identify one area of development or skill that you could extend or enrich. How will you do this?