



Keeping the hubs humming

Tuning into neighbourhoods

Hubs Strategy Group for Hume Communities for Children Initiative

‘Coming together is a beginning, staying together
is progress, and working together is a success.’

Henry Ford

Written by Hubs Strategy Group for
Hume Communities for Children Initiative
with LIME Management Group

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Foreword

Tuning into neighbourhoods is a great title for this document, which adds to the learnings of the Broadmeadows Communities for Children *Setting the hubs humming* strategy. The title embraces the spirit of the strategy, which is to build on local strengths and to work with children, parents, professionals and the broader community to make each neighbourhood hum its own tune.

It is great to know that after four years' endeavour the 'practice wisdom', research evidence and local, state and federal policies can work in practical, sustainable and enjoyable ways in our community. 'Working' in this instance means improving the educational opportunities for children in the six suburbs where the strategy has been implemented. It also means improved opportunities for parents to be part of a real partnership with the school and the community to create the school and the community they want. For professionals it is an invigorating opportunity to work collaboratively across the individual areas of health, education and community services. And for the community it is a chance to develop a Hub that is really local, welcoming and brings together a range of programs and services that adds value and capacity to the local community.

I hope that this document will be read by the local communities that gave it life, by the professionals who contributed enthusiastically to its development, and by researchers and policy makers on whose vision the work is based.

Documenting our local work aims to reinforce working knowledge and to demonstrate to other communities how local Hubs might work in their neighbourhoods.

Thanks to all who contributed to the journey itself and for telling the story of our journey!
Thanks to the principals and local services who have reflected on the changes they see taking place in their own practice and the impact these have on the community. A very special thank-you to the children who have participated in local events and their parents who have willingly completed surveys.

It seems clear that this is only a chapter in a never-ending story of change and development. I am looking forward to the journey and to telling the stories.

Colleen Turner
Project Manager
Communities for Children
On behalf of the Hubs Strategy Group and the Hume Early Years Partnership

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Specifically the Hubs Strategy Group would like to thank the schools, kindergartens, agencies and services involved in the project sites.

The Hub sites are:

- Meadowbank Primary School and Early Learning Centre (now Meadows Primary School and Early Learning Centre)
- Meadow Fair North and Jacana Primary School* (now Broadmeadows Valley Primary School)
- Campbellfield Heights Primary School*
- Coolaroo South Primary School and Kindergarten*
- Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten
- Hume Global Learning Village
- VisyCare Learning Centre
- Hume City Council (services located or participating in each of the sites)
 - preschools
 - maternal and child health services
 - enhanced maternal and child health services

* Supported by Brotherhood of St Laurence

Appreciation also goes to the participants involved in the Strategy Group for Setting the hubs humming. This group brought together workers from the Hubs Strategy along with other workers whose work has contributed to the learnings of these projects.

The Hubs are also supported by the work of the Hume Early Years Partnership; many of the partner agencies have run programs or have a presence in the Hubs. The partnership comprises over 30 agencies including local primary schools, federal and state governments. They are:

Parent	Brotherhood of St Laurence	Community agencies
Parent Advisory Group	Melbourne Citymission	Hume Neighbourhood House Network
Aboriginal Partnership Group	State government	Migrant Resource Centre – North West
Health	Department of Human Services	VASS (Victorian Arabic Social Services)
Dianella Community Health	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	The Smith Family
Tweddle Child and Family Health Services	Meadow Fair North and Jacana Primary School	Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG)
Sunbury Community Health Centre	Upfield Primary School	VACCA (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency)
Hume City Council	Coolaroo South Primary School and Kindergarten	Enmaraleek Inc.
Child and family services	Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten	Federal government
Director of City Communities	Meadowbank Primary School	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Maternal child health services	Meadowbank Early Learning Centre	
Preschool services	Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration	
Hume Global Learning Centre	Housing	
Child and family services	Neighbourhood Renewal, Office of Housing	
Broadmeadows UnitingCare	Merri Outreach Support Services	
Orana Family Services		
Anglicare		
Broad Insight Group		

The Communities for Children initiative is supported by the Australian Government. The project is facilitated by Broadmeadows UnitingCare.

1 Overview of the Hubs

Welcome! For the past four years, six community Hubs have been operating in the City of Hume, Victoria, as part of the Australian Government’s Communities for Children initiative (2005–09). For the purpose of this document, a ‘Hub’ is a welcoming place for families that engages key service providers to work collaboratively. A Hub can be a single location or a network of places working together to provide services, such as schools, kindergartens, maternal and child health, and other relevant agencies. Hubs facilitate connections between key services and professionals and represent a paradigm shift in the planning and practice of service provision. Services and their staff are required to rethink existing practice to move to an inclusive practices framework at a professional and community level. The six Hubs are located in seven sites and are based in central neighbourhood venues across the City of Hume (Table 1).

Six Hubs across seven locations

Table 1

<p>Meadow Heights Language and Literacy Program</p> <p>Meadow Heights Visy Cares Learning Centre (06–07)</p> <p>Bilingual workers, CALD families</p>	<p>Dallas Hub</p> <p>Dallas</p> <p>Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten</p> <p>Kinder language program, community outreach support, adult education, facilitated playgroups, Parent–Child Mother Goose</p>	
<p>Broadmeadows Early Years Program</p> <p>Meadow Fair North Kindergarten and Primary School (06–07)</p> <p>CALD families with 3-year-olds</p>	<p>The map shows the geographical layout of the City of Hume, divided into several neighbourhoods. The hubs are located in the following areas: Meadow Heights, Dallas, Broadmeadows, and Jacana. A network of four sites (Meadow Fair North, Campbellfield Heights, Coolaroo South, and Lahinch St M&CHC) is also shown, which are linked together under the 'Breaking Cycles' hub.</p>	<p>Meadowbank Early Learning Centre</p> <p>Broadmeadows</p> <p>Meadowbank Primary School, Meadowbank Early Learning Centre</p> <p>Includes community outreach support and facilitated playgroups, Parent–Child Mother Goose and Kinder Gym</p>
<p>Jacana Juniors</p> <p>Jacana</p> <p>Jacana Primary School (06–07)</p> <p>Facilitated playgroup</p>	<p>Breaking Cycles by Building Neighbourhood Hubs</p> <p>Meadow Fair North, Campbellfield Heights and Coolaroo South</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meadow Fair North • Campbellfield Heights • Coolaroo South • Lahinch St M&CHC (06–07) <p>4 sites linked together, with evaluation coordinated by the Brotherhood of St Laurence</p>	

Hubs bring together existing early years services.

In 2006 local community agencies, led by The Hume Early Years Partnership and auspiced by Broadmeadows UnitingCare, developed the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy. The Brotherhood of St Laurence oversaw three sites operating as individual Hubs (Meadow Fair North, Campbellfield and Coolaroo). The Brotherhood's role was to develop and support sites to implement a model of services working together at each site, for example, kindergarten, maternal and child health service and the first year of primary school. Other Hubs were coordinated by the local primary schools (Dallas, Jacana and Meadowbank), Hume Global Learning Centre and Hume City Council.

The purpose of this report is to document the learnings from the Hubs strategy in the Broadmeadows Communities for Children site to guide future development. It aims to be of value to others wishing to develop Hubs and to provide a feedback loop to policy makers on the practicalities of 'setting the Hubs humming'. It draws on the 2007 *Setting the Hubs Humming: Working together for children and their families* report as well as local evaluation reports and data collected as part of the strategy. It is anticipated that this document will be used as a resource to further build the profile of community Hubs in schools and inform a range of audiences.

Documenting the learnings from the Hubs is key.

The document outlines:

- the rationale for community Hubs
- key features of the Hubs models in the Broadmeadows Communities for Children site
- learnings and reflections from families and agencies coordinating the Hubs
- key strengths, challenges and learnings
- the future direction of this strategy.

Achievement comes from working together and focusing on community needs.

This report demonstrates the significant level of change among early years services and schools throughout the Broadmeadows area in the three years since the establishment of the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy. Two key achievements have been made. First, agencies are working differently and have a new focus on meeting the needs of their local community and providing appropriate services and programs.

Second, the collaborative activity between schools and early years services has led to a new approach where the Hubs offer support to children, families and the community as a whole: the child is viewed as part of the family and the family as part of the local community.

2 The Hubs model

2.1 Rationale

2.1.1 Key strategy of Communities for Children in Broadmeadows

Setting the hubs humming is a key strategy developed as part of the Communities for Children initiative in the Broadmeadows site. Communities for Children is funded by the Australian Government under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy from 2005 to 2009 and works through local partnerships to achieve better outcomes for children aged 0–5 years and their families.

Communities for Children is based in six suburbs in the City of Hume. Activities aim to develop a sense of belonging and support within each neighbourhood for children, parents and families in Broadmeadows, Dallas, Jacana, Coolaroo, Meadow Heights and Campbellfield (Communities for Children Broadmeadows, 2008). The initiative draws on the expertise of the Hume Early Years Partnership, comprising 30 agencies working together to promote the health, development, learning and wellbeing of local children and their families across the health, education, early childhood, family support and community sectors.

A key focus of the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy is sustained improvement and development. Relationships have been established with partnership organisations in each of the locations. These relationships are key to the continuation and development of activities provided. Local networks have been formed and will continue. In addition, school investment in terms of budgetary commitment to the Hub community liaison worker role and playgroups provides an essential resource to the school and community for integrated approaches. The Hubs Strategy Group will continue as a local resource for learning together and for future planning. However, additional resources are required to fund future Hub activities, such as playgroups and child care during adult education programs. Additional resources would also allow Hubs to develop in other local schools.

2.1.2 Link to early years policy

The Hubs strategy reflects current early years policy at the federal, state and local government level. It is a practical and relatively low-cost methodology for improvements for local children, which actively involves their families and the whole community.

At the local level, the Hubs strategy was implemented as a result of extensive community consultation conducted at the outset of Communities for Children in 2005 (Communities for Children, 2007). Over 290 parents and 50 early childhood professionals reported that language and literacy, meeting other parents, playgroups, early childhood development and parental education were key priorities for the Hume community. All have been incorporated into the Hubs over time.

The Broadmeadows area in the City of Hume is historically one of high levels of disadvantage and poverty. In 2007 the Jesuit Social Services report *Dropping off the edge: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia* (Vinson, 2007) identified Campbellfield, Broadmeadows, Dallas and Jacana as some of Victoria's 40 most disadvantaged postcodes. In an early years

Hubs provide the opportunity for sustained improvement and development.

Hubs relate to federal, state and local policies.

context, this disadvantage can result in limited access to early childhood education programs, including kindergartens and affordable child care services. The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), a population measure of children's development as they enter school, found a significant proportion of children beginning school in the Broadmeadows area was 'vulnerable' on one or more developmental domains (AEDI National Support Centre, 2008).

Hume City Council's action plan, *Hume City Family and Children's Plan 2008–2013*, outlines the following key goals:

- Accessible, high-quality, universal services

Families in Hume City have access to information, and a choice of high-quality, flexible children's services.

- Responsive services that involve the community

Service system recognises community diversity, can respond to particular needs, and encourages participation.

- Integrated service provision and planning with all our partners

Collaboration between Council, community service providers, families and children enables us to share our knowledge and strengths, and to plan and deliver seamless services.

- Infrastructure and resources are developed and adapted to meet the changing needs of children and families and can accommodate growth

Families have access to 'family-friendly' infrastructure, which is flexible and adaptable.

These goals were developed for the Municipal Early Years Plan by the Council, the Hume City Early Years Partnership and community members. They are based on priorities identified through consultation with families and early years agencies in Hume City. All of these goals relate to the development of early years Hubs, in particular, responsive services, integration of services and family-friendly environments. A practical application of this plan in Broadmeadows is the maternal and child health service working with the Hubs Strategy Group in planning the provision of their service in new flexible ways through visits to Hub sites and schools in 2009.

At the state level, the Victorian Government's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) *Blueprint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform* (Discussion Paper April 2008) emphasises the importance of community partnerships between schools and early childhood providers. Services within the local community are viewed as the key support for families to create a positive, healthy, stimulating home environment for their children. Activities such as supported playgroups can provide peer support and positive modelling that encourage the development of effective parenting. They also create opportunities for parents to be involved in children's play. According to the Blueprint, children's services and schools are partners in children's development and learning, and should draw on the diversity of Victoria's communities in supporting children to thrive, learn and grow (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008).

Hume is one of the Victorian Government's Best Start sites, which aims to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of young children from pre-birth to school.

Strengthening the role of schools as community Hubs as a natural focal point for service coordination was identified as a key strategy in the Best Start guidelines (2003) and the *Best Start Broadmeadows Action Plan* (2006).

Developing early years Hubs was included in the Victorian report of the Premier's Children's Advisory Committee, *Joining the Dots*, released in December 2004. It called for increased integration of services for young children and families to ensure vulnerable children and families do not miss out on the support they need. The report recommended:

that the Victorian Government redesign its funding for services for young children and families to promote the integration and co-location of services and progressively move away from funding stand alone, single-purpose services of any type.

At the federal level, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (2008) put forward national priorities for universal early years services, which included fostering service integration and coordination across stand-alone preschool and child care services.

2.1.3 Relevance to the local community

The Communities for Children initiative provided an opportunity to build on the existing local community facilities operating in the Broadmeadows/Hume site and develop community-centred Hubs to better meet the needs of local families. One of the strengths of the Broadmeadows community is that many early childhood programs are co-located on school sites and offer an excellent opportunity for further development of a place for families to be offered local support.

Once the Hubs strategy was underway, a needs analysis was conducted in 2007 to determine the needs of parents, their children and school staff in developing guidelines for the Hubs. The demographics of the local community surrounding each Hub were researched as well as parents' preferred programs and activities for the Hubs. The needs analysis study identified the training and education needs in areas of interest of parents, volunteers and community members to empower them to become active participants in the Hubs.

In February 2009 the Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute and Royal Children's Hospital completed a report on what is working well in schools in Broadmeadows: *School readiness in Broadmeadows: Building a culture of readiness through coordination, collaborative relationships and local decision-making*. The report outlines the work undertaken in Broadmeadows and the progress made toward developing an integrated systems approach to school readiness. One of the key findings was that schools, services and community agencies in the Broadmeadows area are committed to a holistic approach where school readiness is not just seen as an individual child's capabilities at the point of school entry, but is also dependent on the environment within which children develop during their early years before school age. These schools, services and community agencies recognise that local neighbourhoods and the family environment are significant factors regarding outcomes for children and form the foundations of school readiness. The report also found that schools, services and community agencies in this area have demonstrated a commitment to breaking down the 'silos' of single-sector programs to improve outcomes for children and families. The *Setting the hubs humming* strategy is a key example of this work.

The Hubs strategy was a direct response to community needs.

2.1.4 The importance of community Hubs: a review

Community Hubs provide an opportunity for early years services to work together in a coordinated and integrated manner. Community Hubs bring into an integrated model essential elements of existing services, including preschool services, playgroups, maternal and child health services, primary school, child care programs, adult education, staff and expertise. Hubs enable staff to work across sectors on joint tasks, such as planning joint celebration days, providing information, organising events or running programs to improve the flexibility and responsiveness of the programs to better meet the needs of local families. These tasks form the developmental stage of working toward a more integrated model.

The Hubs strategy draws on research findings that demonstrate families with complex needs can benefit from community partnerships in early childhood services (Valentine, Katz & Griffiths, 2007). Research into coordinated and integrated services has found that:

Community Hubs provide an opportunity to strengthen service coordination.

- Support for families is offered by neighbourhoods with strong social ties, as these children tend to have more pro-social skills and display fewer problem behaviours (Wilkenfeld, Lippman & Moore, 2007).
- Families generally receive more comprehensive support from integrated services due to the 'one-stop shop' nature of the centres (Bruner, 1991).
- Children are prevented from 'falling through the cracks' of service provision, especially if they experience multiple disadvantage and social exclusion (Bruner, 1991).
- Environmental risks in a given community that affect children, such as family violence and poverty, reduce when there are sustained interventions by integrated services (Bruner, 1991).
- Children are more likely to be socially connected – and stay connected – when they are involved with integrated services throughout their early childhood and into further education (Bertram et al., 2003).
- Integrated children's services contribute significantly to outcomes for children living in poverty in relation to 'their intellectual and social development in childhood and their school success, economic performance, and reduced commission of crime in adulthood' (Schweinhart, 2005, p. 5).

In Australia, the *Breaking Cycles, Building Futures* report (Carbone, Fraser, Ramburuth & Nelms, 2004) reviewed the evidence and working knowledge in relation to inclusive universal early childhood services. The initial model for the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy was derived from this report. It found that services need to:

- be affordable and well publicised
- be geographically accessible
- provide outreach and support with transport
- provide a family-friendly and culturally inclusive physical environment

- employ skilled and responsive staff working from a family-centred, culturally sensitive perspective
- promote social connectedness through informal supports
- establish strong reciprocal links with other relevant services (universal and specialist).

One way that services can achieve this is to provide ‘one-stop shops’ for families. The report discusses the benefits of co-locating or better linking the facilities that services use, by minimising transport barriers and providing a linked approach for families with multiple issues requiring access to a range of services. Schools have been used as the basis for developing local community Hubs. ‘Full-service schools’ use the school as a physical base for a range of community activities and services, both during and after school hours.

The United Kingdom Government’s Sure Start initiative is based on service coordination and co-location (Department of Education and Skills, 2008). As part of this strategy, a number of Early Excellence Childhood Centres have been established, offering one-stop shops where families and children have access to integrated care and education services delivered by multi-agency partners within one centre or a network of centres.

2.2 Key features of the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy

2.2.1 Components of community Hubs

The *Setting the hubs humming* strategy aimed to achieve an integrated approach to child and family service provision. It also aimed to increase access to programs in the simplest possible way – by locating them within easy distance for parents with young children. Each of the Hubs is unique, though all share an early years focus. While they differ in terms of location, length of operation, size and structure, the Hubs have the common aim of providing services to children and their families through a collaborative and coordinated approach in ‘welcoming places that respond to family and cultural practices’ (*Setting the hubs humming*, 2007, p. 9). Four key components of a community Hub were identified as part of this strategy:

Welcoming

Hubs are primarily places that practise the art of respectful welcome. They demonstrate the capacity of the community ‘institution’ to be a mechanism of social inclusion. The Hubs seek to connect families with opportunities inside and outside the Hub itself. They are multi-functional and endeavour to meet the needs of those families they know and those who visit. They also follow up on families who may not be accessing programs to understand why, and what may support their access in the future.

Formal and informal information sharing

Hubs are places where families of a local community/neighbourhood access information about services and support. They are family focused and identified as places where children are central. The information exchanged is formal and informal and changed in content to reflect the needs of the families in the community.

Hubs are welcoming places providing jointly planned service delivery.

Local community meeting places

Hubs are local community meeting places: family places with space available for participation and education (e.g. English language classes and playgroups). They are mostly located within walking distance for local families and their location is easily identified. The Hubs are in logical neighbourhood locations with services either co-located or within a short distance from one another. They are ideally near public transport, allowing for participation in the community beyond the Hub. Workers and volunteers know their community well and act as advocates for its citizens, bringing resources and facilities within easy reach.

Access and social inclusion

The concept of a Hub is grounded in improving access and social inclusion and the underlying principles of community development. Hubs build positive connections between children, families, neighbourhoods and communities. Hubs embrace diversity and work hard to create a sense of belonging for all. Hubs:

- are responsive to changing needs in the local community
- attend to child, family and community needs simultaneously, as these often cannot be separated
- build community and school readiness: schools and communities are developing the concept of being 'ready for the local children and families' rather than waiting for needs to be identified in an already disadvantaged community
- support children and families in the formal transition to preschool and to school from the home setting.

2.2.2 Target group

The target group for the Hubs is broad, inviting all children aged 0–5 and their families living in the local area to attend and participate in Hub activities. Engaging families who were finding it difficult to access services, including CALD and Indigenous families, was a priority. The strategy also engaged all relevant early childhood stakeholders to join the Hubs, including council-run and community-based kindergartens, playgroups, maternal and child health services, local Neighbourhood Houses, family support services and education providers.

2.2.3 Hub workers

The Hub community liaison workers are an integral part of the development of the Hubs. The Hubs strategy concentrates on supporting and extending the skills of the project workers through a professional development program designed along community development principles. While the title of the role varies from site to site, the common element is the work each performs in engaging families into the Hubs. The project worker's role is to:

- introduce families to the Hub
- encourage effective collaborations and joint activities of services that further engage the community

The Hubs target all local families and services.

Hub workers play a key role in establishing and maintaining the Hubs.

- network with appropriate services to develop formal and informal ways in which services might work together to engage children and their families
- establish regular local network meetings and build relationships with service providers in the area and those interested in providing additional services
- build and maintain relationships with schools and other service providers
- coordinate joint planning and resource sharing at a service delivery level (e.g. prep and kindergarten teachers planning a joint children’s week activity at the Hub sites), programs offered for parents and children together (e.g. interaction enhancement programs like Parent–Child Mother Goose, playgroups)
- implement inclusive and social-engagement strategies, such as a phone call or personal contact to engage families
- identify barriers to participation (e.g. make sure things are within walking distance and accessible by pram and there is an opportunity for families to communicate in their first language)
- maintain a focus on the type of activities developed and offered in the local Hub sites
- document the local practice insights (referred to in this document).

2.2.4 Hubs Strategy Group

The Hubs Strategy Group was formed as a reference committee made up of representatives from each of the community Hubs. The purpose of the group was to provide an opportunity for Hub workers to connect and share development strategies. The Hubs Strategy Group is also joined by:

- maternal and child health management
- non-government agencies, including The Smith Family, Melbourne Citymission and the Brotherhood of St Laurence
- kindergarten staff (including team leaders)
- playgroup coordinators
- school principals.

This group works together to develop the Hubs and plan for sustainability in the longer term. The group identifies key activities, ways of working, and components of the Hub sites. The group also shares learnings across the different Hub sites. A community Hubs model (Figure 1) was developed by the Hubs Strategy Group, as was the previous version of this document.

2.2.5 Action research

The strategies development was based on the principles of action research. Action research is ‘action which is intentionally researched and modified, leading to the next stage of action which is then intentionally examined for further change, and so on’ (Wadsworth, 1991, p. 63). Action research encourages those involved in an initiative or program to participate in reflective

The Hubs Strategy Group oversaw the initiative.

The strategy encourages reflective practice.

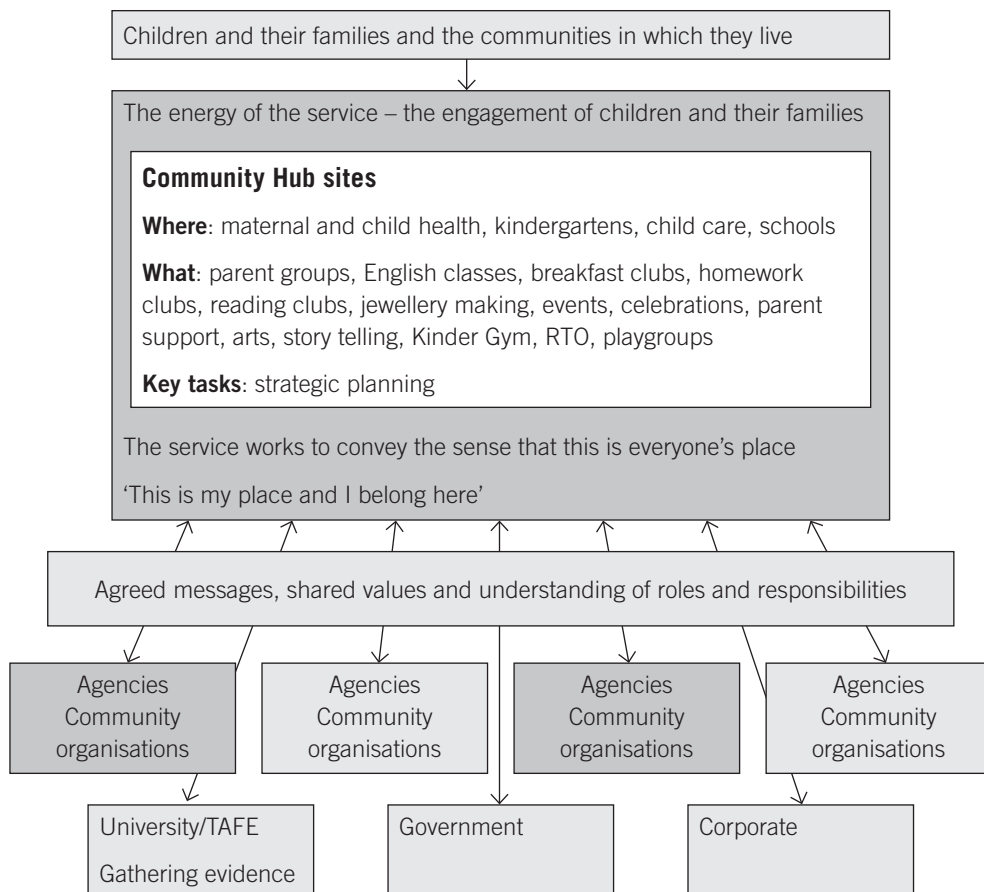
practice, allowing change and understanding to occur together. Action research aims to improve practice, address problems and promote ongoing learning throughout an initiative.

Ongoing reviews of the decision-making processes occurred at each Hub. The Hubs Strategy Group and project workers are involved in this reflective change process.

2.2.6 Evolution of the Hubs model

Figure 1 presents the community Hubs model developed by the Hubs Strategy Group.

Figure 1 Community Hubs model



Underlying the model are the following two key concepts:

Integrated child and family Hubs model: Community Hubs make it easy for families to access information and services by being positioned locally in the communities in which children and their families live or participate. Ideally they provide families with one point of access to many services, programs and activities.

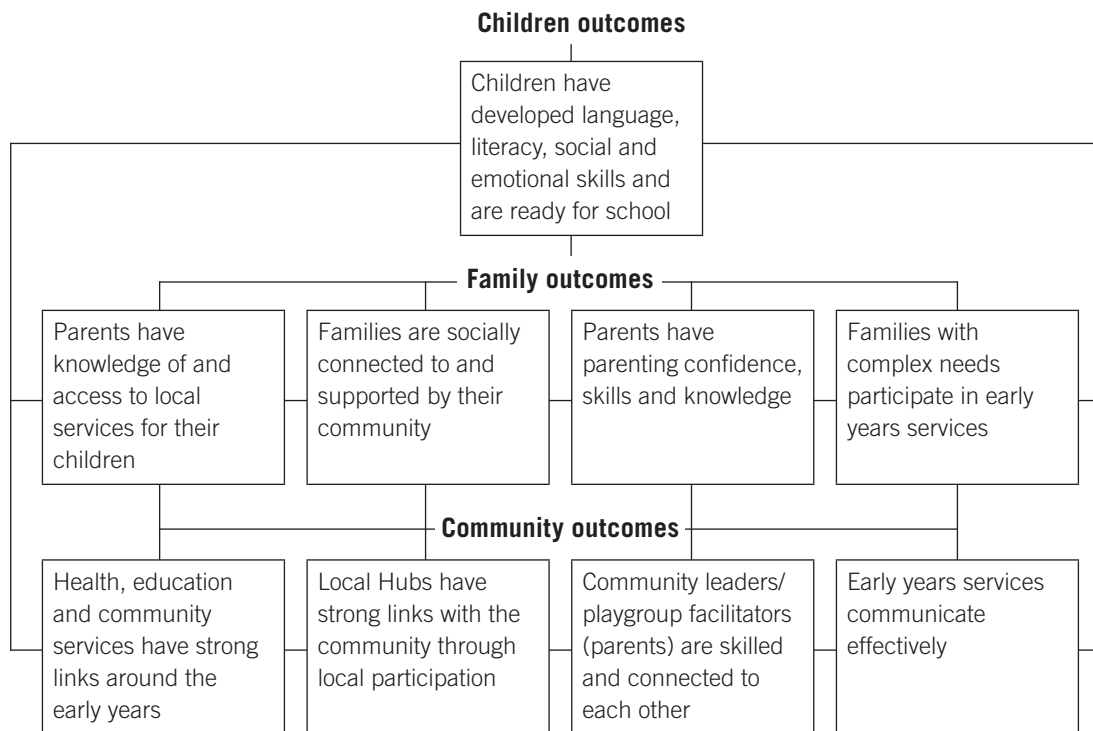
Growth of community Hubs: Services have engaged children and their families and a level of trust has developed. The Hub is viewed as ‘everyone’s place’. Through partnerships and relationships developed among service providers at the Hubs, there is an increased capacity to connect with, attract interest from and influence large external bodies, such as universities and TAFE institutes, government departments and businesses.

3 On the journey

The six Hubs operating under the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy each took a slightly different approach to working toward the same outcomes for families and service coordination. The local evaluation framework used to measure the effectiveness of the Communities for Children strategies included the outcomes outlined in Figure 2.

The Communities for Children evaluation worked toward child, family and community-level outcomes.

Figure 2 Communities for Children final local evaluation framework 2008–09



The child, family and community outcomes outlined above underpinned the evaluation of the entire Communities for Children initiative in Broadmeadows. Projects operating under the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy were assessed in relation to five ‘strategy-level’ outcomes:

- Children have developed language, literacy, social and emotional skills and are ready/prepared for school.
- Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children.
- Families are socially connected to and supported by their community.
- Local Hubs have strong links with the community through local participation.
- Health, education and community services have strong links to the early years.

Outcomes of all Communities for Children Broadmeadows projects can be found in the 2007 *Local Evaluation Interim Report*. The final evaluation is currently in progress with a report due for release later in 2009. This section reports on some of the significant outcomes for the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy from current data, and draws on the experiences of families, school principals, Hub project workers and strategy group members.

Parents reflected positively on their experiences with the Hubs.

3.1 Outcomes

Outcome 1: Children are ready/prepared for school and have developed language, literacy, emotional and social skills

Some significant findings in relation to this outcome include:

- Children have developed skills, such as listening, socialising and engagement with books/stories and songs. This is increasingly supported in the home.
- Children have an increased level of comfort in the school setting and less separation anxiety, with some children having two to three years' experience at school before they start.
- There is more communication around early years services and their benefit to children and parents, and increased access to this through bilingual workers along with increased access to preschool activities.

One principal stated that, 'This year we have seen our enrolments improved because parents want a one-stop shop. In the past three years we are bringing more and more parents with young children through the school with this approach'.

Outcome 2: Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children

Some significant findings in relation to this outcome include:

- Families know where to find support services by attending the different Hubs and meeting workers there. This outcome has been achieved through the presence of services in the Hubs; for example, English language programs for parents and maternal and child health visits for children. Hubs also translate information into community languages.

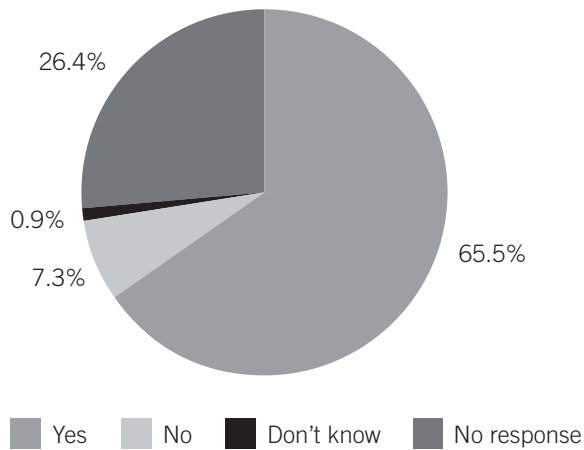
Outcome 3: Families are socially connected to and supported by their community

Some significant findings in relation to this outcome include:

- Parents reported meeting socially outside of organised activities, connecting beyond their current social networks, being treated as a person and not 'as a second-class person because I don't speak English', an extra support network being available in times of need through their involvement.
- Children's social skills have also increased.

Surveys were conducted with community members in 2007, 2008 and 2009 about their involvement in the Hubs (n=110). They were asked whether they felt connected to their local Hub. Overall, responses were positive: most participants said they felt connected to their Hub (65.5%; see Figure 3).

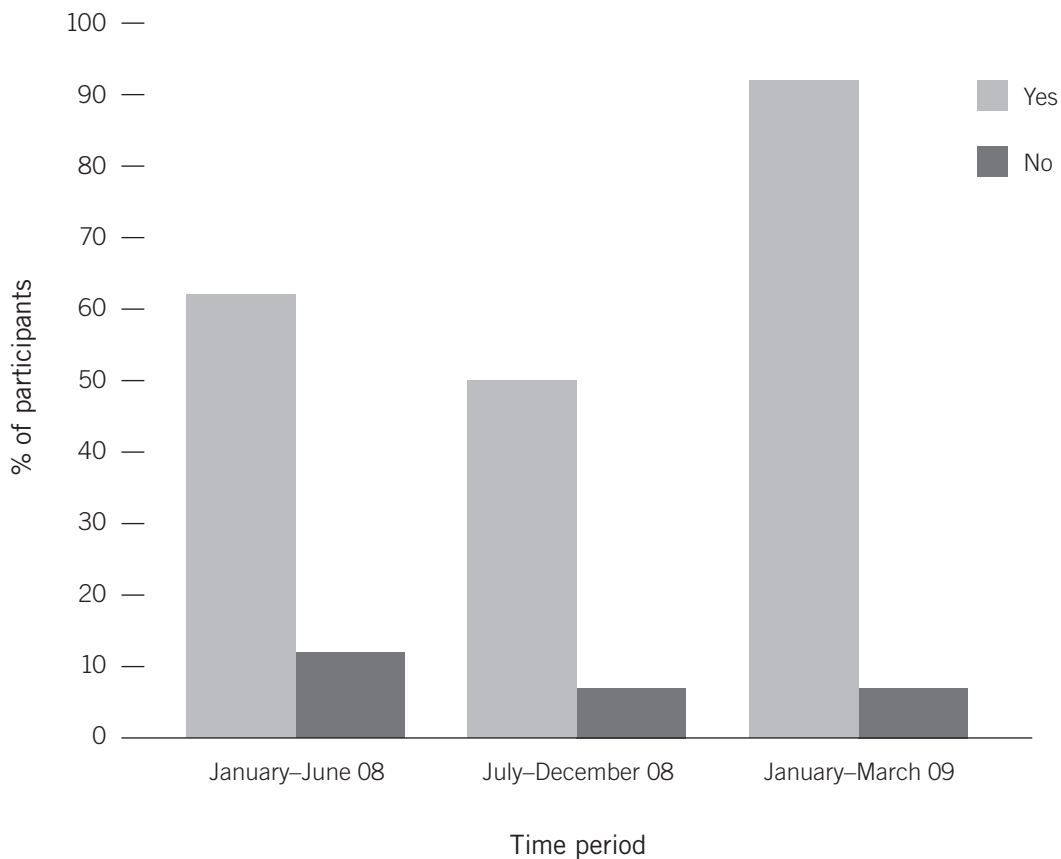
Figure 3 Do you feel connected to your Hub? (n=110)



When I first came here I pretty much wasn't speaking to anyone. Now that I come to the kinder I know that I've met a few friends. Like, we've actually become friends, like we'll go sometimes to the shopping centre and that is quite good. (*Local Evaluation Report*)




The proportion of participants who felt connected to their Hub changed over time (Figure 4), with more parents feeling connected in 2009 than in 2008.

Figure 4 Do you feel connected to your Hub? Comparison of three time periods



The experiences of three families attending the Meadowbank Early Learning Centre are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Reason for coming	Reason for staying	Outcomes	
		for children ...	for parents ...
<p>Parent one</p>  <p>Mum and three children (one playgroup, two primary school age)</p> <p>First contact was with the playgroup</p>	<p>Found it welcoming and a place to make new connections</p>	<p>Playgroup environment helped reduce separation anxiety</p> <p>Improved child's confidence</p>	<p>Connected to volunteer opportunities</p> <p>Linked to training in child care</p> <p>Currently facilitating groups and playgroups</p>
<p>Parent two</p>  <p>Mum and three children (playgroup, primary and secondary school age)</p> <p>New to the area with no connections</p>	<p>The approach taken by the worker (initially over the phone) encouraged participation</p>	<p>More prepared for school</p> <p>Confident and familiar with surrounds</p>	<p>Connected to volunteer opportunities</p> <p>Linked to training in child care</p> <p>Currently facilitating playgroups for Arabic and English-speaking parents</p>
<p>Parent three</p>  <p>Mum and one child (primary school age)</p> <p>Looking for a more stimulating playgroup environment</p>	<p>Impressed with the playgroup and the variety of activities for children and parents, especially linked activities with the school</p> <p>Was motivated and inspired to return</p>	<p>Acquired skills to assist starting school</p> <p>Change in behaviour – more patient</p> <p>Ability to follow instructions and participate in social settings</p>	<p>Learnt benefit of structure and routine</p> <p>Gained practical parenting tools</p> <p>Learnt to support play experiences to enhance learning</p>

As a result of participating in the Hub:

- Parents were comfortable approaching teachers about any concerns they had, with some reporting friendships that developed with teachers.
- Most friends and social connections they had were made through the school.
- Parents' skills were acknowledged and fostered by the school Hub.

On playgroups ...

'It's a major stepping stone in the confidence builder... it's the foundation to bigger and better things for sure.'

Quote from parent interview

Outcome 4: Local Hubs have strong links with the community through local participation

Significant findings regarding this outcome include:

- Greater links with the local community have been made by schools. School staff reported parents feel welcome and comfortable on the school site.
- School staff reported learning the importance of seeing the child in the family context and working with the parent and child together holistically.
- Five schools have opened up classrooms for parent-run playgroups as well as English and computer classes.
- Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten refers to the school as 'Dallas Community Hub' and has large signs on the fences advertising the programs in the Hub.

Outcome 5: Health, education and community services have strong links to early years issues

Significant findings regarding this outcome include:

- developing a common goal, such as working on early literacy and oral language and transition to school programs
- modelling of good practice in parent engagement to other Hub sites
- developing a code of conduct for parents at one of the Hubs that is shared with others
- linking with the Let's Connect team so all workers know each other and their wisdom is shared
- linking with Broadmeadows Neighbourhood Renewal team around community engagement
- linking with kindergarten teachers and playgroup leaders
- linking with maternal and child health services.

As part of this model's development interviews were conducted with a number of key contributors to the Hubs, including school principals, maternal and child health managers and local council kindergarten coordinators and members of the Hubs Reference Group.

From the principals:

- Spreading the early years focus (e.g. the importance of kindergartens and playgroups) throughout the schools is important.
- Integrating oral language and play-based curriculum in school is a key ingredient for learning.
- A broader awareness in the school about the impact of adult learning on children's outcomes and the overall importance of life-long learning is essential.
- Schools are better prepared for families generally, understanding that the child's and family's needs often present together and cannot be separated by separate funding models. Teaching staff are seeing the benefits of parents being in the building and sharing their aspirations for their child with staff.

Hubs led to improved service coordination.

Having a 'critical friend' external to the school has been a positive experience. Developing relationships external to the education system has provided an essential point of contact for network information and opportunities. Through this increased access to professionals, schools are better prepared for families.

- Networking has provided direct contact and support from a broad range of agencies.
- Three of the schools have made significant changes to create more space for families (e.g. providing a demountable building, sharing staff rooms for parents to socialise, creating adult learning spaces, moving the prep class closer to the kindergarten).
- Having a parent liaison or community development role at the Hubs has increased access to resources, speakers, classes and many other local opportunities.

The principals observed a number of positive impacts on children, parents, school staff and early years services involved in the Hubs:

Positive impacts
<p>For children</p> <p>A link has been created between kindergarten, playgroups and schools, children are better prepared and comfortable in the school environment. One school reported approximately 75% of prep children had attended kindergarten on arrival at school as opposed to 50% three years earlier.</p>
<p>For parents</p> <p>Parents are seeing the importance of connecting children early to activities and the impact this can have on their development. The level of parent participation has grown, with parents having a presence in the school. Parents have an increased level of confidence, which has been built through a process of building trust and relationships. A link between the level of parents' confidence and children's confidence was also observed; children had increased confidence in the environment when their parents were more at ease. Through participation at the school a pathway is developed for participating in community life, training and education, volunteer opportunities and employment. The school benefits from parent participation and developing community leaders and parents benefit from additional support available at the schools.</p>
<p>For schools</p> <p>School staff are seeing the benefits of having parents involved in the school and the impact parents have on their children's education when they have the confidence to participate. Many schools have embedded or are embedding this practice into school. For staff this involves taking a collective responsibility for all children and parents attending the school (not just in their year level) including before the children reach school.</p>
<p>For services</p> <p>Early years services are seeing schools as a place to meet families in an environment where they are comfortable. Schools are hosting more externally run activities (e.g. parenting sessions, parent education) and being approached more often to host a variety of events. For many of the schools it is now a challenge to cater for additional activities with limited space. There has been increased contact and communication between the school and services which have developed relationships, a greater understanding, respect and trust of agencies and contributed to a feeling of being less isolated in the school's work with families.</p>

Hubs mean life-long learning.

From the maternal and child health manager:

- Maternal and child health services are preparing to pilot new ways of engaging families in schools to encourage follow-up appointments and to assist schools and parents attending activities with child assessments.
- As part of the pilot, the maternal and child health nurse will attend the school on an arranged basis to provide information and education, attend parent meetings and groups, discuss children's development issues and be available for questions/appointments.
- The relationships developed with the schools have provided a first-hand understanding of the complexity of meeting the needs of families in schools.
- Connecting with the Hub networks has provided an opportunity to hear the school's need for the maternal and child health service.
- The maternal and child health service and schools have reported an increased understanding of what the other can do and how they may best work together, with pathways and transitions being developed between the services.
- A key challenge has been 'breaking into' some schools. However, the Hub relationships and meetings have been an important way of making this connection, an important element to the maternal and child health service in general.

From the team leader of Hume preschools:

- Greater sharing and linking has occurred between preschools and schools.
- The schools' understanding of the role of preschool in school readiness has increased.
- There is an increased focus on the transition from preschool to school. All preschools are now expected to connect with local schools. Preschools are able to attend schools for library time and to use other resources, such as gyms. School visits are acknowledged as part of the program of the preschool to assist transition.

Despite these advances, the following challenges arose:

- getting people together from schools and preschools
- deciding on who takes on the responsibility to fill the gaps
- getting agreement between agendas
- getting action can be slow at times due to processes and different organisational structures.

The Hubs have been an essential part of planning this change of approach in maternal and child health services.

Links between preschools and schools were formed.

Clear communication and collaboration underpinned the Strategy Group.

From the Strategy Group:

- Clear communication processes at all levels, from senior executives to community workers, is paramount. Informal and formal processes for communication were used to promote a two-way exchange of ideas and a range of communication strategies was used.
- Group members believed that collaborative partnerships formed as a result of the Hubs had enabled cost-effective management of shared resources and personnel.
- The personal attributes of the workers involved had a hugely positive impact on the strategy with access to high-quality bilingual facilitators as key to coordinating the range of initiatives in the Hubs.

3.2 Hub case studies

Case Study 1: Coolaroo South Primary School and Kindergarten

A Hub project worker assisted a preschooler’s mother to access support.

Through the school’s involvement in the Hubs strategy, it has formed a local services network, including a close connection with Westmere Preschool, something that had not previously occurred. This network is attended by local services and is chaired by the Coolaroo Kindergarten teacher.

The story could end here ...

The network is the foundation that enables the work to occur.

A non-English-speaking family attending the preschool asked the preschool teacher for help. The teacher had difficulty understanding the family’s needs so rather than contacting an external body, the teacher contacted Coolaroo’s community liaison officer, who speaks Turkish, for assistance. The teacher then sought permission from the family to pass on the details.

Linking to an external agency at this point would have been an appropriate option; however, utilising a local network has increased the local support for the family presenting.

Parent participation is the key to making schools community Hubs.

The mother was clearly distressed and unsure of what help she needed. There were communication barriers and the mother felt she needed a support worker to assist her accessing services. The liaison worker spent time phoning organisations and services to obtain information that could help.

The school could not help directly but could assist by sourcing information in the parent’s language.

In the next interaction the mother stated that she had mentioned her issues to Centrelink and that they had arranged a meeting with the Department of Human Services (DHS). The mother was concerned and regretted mentioning it to Centrelink, fearing they would remove her children from her. The liaison worker offered to attend the meeting casually to ensure that the mother felt comfortable. The mother phoned the Hubs worker when Centrelink arrived and attended the house to find a representative from DHS, Anglicare and a Turkish psychologist. The Hubs worker introduced herself and spoke to the mother who felt comfortable with the situation. Following the meeting, the liaison worker reassured the mother and they spoke of strategies to use in future, for example, to ask for an interpreter.

The school provides a base for ongoing communication and enables the parent to access ongoing support.

Hubs provide an opportunity for parents to build confidence and skills.

As a result of this process of engagement, the mother has attended all transition sessions, made friends with other parents and is now happy and comfortable in the school environment. The school is now the first point of contact for the mother if she has any concerns. She has said that she ‘would never have had the courage’ to pursue her needs without this assistance, while her daughter describes the liaison worker as ‘okuldan teyze aradi’ (the Aunty from School).

The parent and child have become engaged in the school as a source of support and education.

Case Study 2: Meadowbank Primary School

The principal of Meadowbank Primary School believes parent participation is key to the success of the program. At this Hub, parents volunteer and participate in their child's education, helping to run the Hub (called the Early Learning Centre or ELC). The ELC takes a strong role-modelling approach with parents to model positive interactions, behaviour guidance, healthy eating and more along with showing parents how they can encourage learning through play.

The staff room was opened for parents' use, such as reading the paper, having a coffee and talking to other parents. This was about bringing parents into the school and making them feel welcomed. In effect, the school provided space for the community to use as an extension of their community.

The principal described a slow change over the years in the culture of the school to be more inclusive of parents. The Hub worker has contributed to this and the approach is penetrating the culture of the school with other staff taking on similar roles. The principal sees this as an important part of the school being ready for parents and children.

Case Study 3: Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten

Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten set up a community Hub. Located in a building in the school grounds, the Hub provides a place where parents can drop in for advice, support and educational opportunities. The idea behind this Victorian Government initiative is that primary schools have two functions: to teach children and to act as a community resource and support for their families.

By looking after the needs of parents, the Dallas Community Hub is creating stronger families in which children can thrive. The Dallas Hub coordinator says: 'We empower parents. Many of our children come from low-income, immigrant or disadvantaged backgrounds. We provide them with practical support as well as social opportunities to create a sense of community'. The Hub offers adult English language classes for parents, programs to reskill parents for employment and parenting courses. It also hosts two playgroups each week that enable parents and young children to engage in social learning experiences.

One parent who had sent all seven of her children to Dallas Primary School became involved with the school only after the community Hub was established. This parent has now completed her Certificate II, which she hopes will lead to employment. According to the Hub coordinator, 'The Hub slowly brings [parents] back into the world. It leads on to a lot of things ... The Hub is the bridge between the school and the community. There are some people here who would be lost without it'.

4 Key lessons and learnings

4.1 Key strengths

Several key outcomes for families and services have emerged from the Hubs model. The Hubs Strategy Group overseeing the initiative was surprised at the level of change that has occurred as a result of the Hubs work over the past four years. The degree of cultural shift among schools to being more inclusive of families and seeing the importance of a community context was unexpected. The collaborative approach among schools and early years services has been a significant achievement. Both changes have led to an increasing participation in programs and services in the Broadmeadows area. A key learning from the strategy has been how to engage those considered the most 'hard-to-reach' families. This has occurred through making schools and early years services a 'better fit' to the local community.

Key strengths for families were:

- The Hubs are, according to a parent report, now welcoming places that provide opportunities for families to develop and identify links to other relevant support services if needed.
- Increased participation in Hubs (schools and early years) programs has occurred due to the 'better fit' of these activities to family needs.
- Programs and services are offered at the neighbourhood place where parents meet, rather than parents trying to access services and confront transport and language barriers.

Main strengths for services were:

- The ability to build on work already done in terms of developing early years Hubs was an asset, particularly for the Meadowbank Early Learning Centre.
- The Hub project worker role at a number of schools was critical to the success of the Hubs strategy. The workers demonstrated a clear understanding of the strategy's expected outcomes and were flexible, effective communicators able to develop a sense of trust among the local communities.
- Joining up workers across sectors of community playgroups, schools, kindergartens, family support services and early intervention was invaluable.
- Access to high-quality bilingual facilitators was key to providing programs that parents and children wanted to attend.
- Careful planning at the outset and defining a shared vision across the Hub sites and articulating a common purpose among service providers were vital.

The level of change achieved among schools and early years services was unexpected.

4.2 Key challenges

Challenges for services:

- providing early years services through Hubs is a new way of working for many service providers, which can present complexities
- meeting high community expectations
- fitting with existing programs, particularly school-based
- scepticism and resistance to change
- embedding a welcoming philosophy into the whole of school
- meeting demand of local families and finding space to accommodate parents and activities.

Challenges for families:

- fluctuating parent attendance due to weather, festivals etc.
- increasing demand of regulations for providing child care an issue for schools in terms of registered spaces and qualified staff
- separation anxiety initially a major issue as some parents very reluctant to leave their children
- language barriers.

4.3 Key learnings

The following are the key learnings from the Hubs strategy, important points for those interested in future Hub work:

- Allow time to set clear objectives and develop a partnership with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Recognise the importance of the Hub worker role and allow funding to support this.
- Regular professional development is important for professionals working in a new paradigm.
- The commitment of key players is an important factor.

5 Conclusions

Considerable progress has been made as a result of the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy:

- **Local Hubs have strong links with the community through local participation**

The community context of the schools and early years programs was recognised as a key issue in delivering relevant services, leading to an increase in participation in activities by families.

- **Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children**

The Hubs provide a one-stop shop for parents with multiple activities and programs on site and a community liaison worker available to make referrals to other support required.

- **Families are socially connected to and supported by their community**

Through the Hubs, families have formed relationships with one another and Hubs have become welcoming places for families to visit.

- **Children are ready/prepared for school and have developed language, literacy, emotional and social skills**

The programs offered at the Hubs encourage child development and familiarise children with the school setting prior to commencing primary school.

- **Health, education and community services have strong links to early years issues**

The Hubs provide an opportunity for schools and early years services to work together as truly collaborative services.

Overall, the achievements of the *Setting the hubs humming* strategy have surpassed the expectations of the Strategy Group in terms of the level of change among schools and early years services. That change has led to increased participation in programs by families who are usually referred to as 'hard to reach'. Two key achievements have been made. First, agencies are working differently and have a new focus on meeting the needs of their local community and providing appropriate services and programs. Second, the collaborative activity between schools and early years services has led to a new inclusive rather than separated approach where the Hubs offer support to children, families and the community, where the child is viewed as part of the family and the family as part of the local community.

Keeping the Hubs humming

The Strategy Group's journey has seen great success. The need to develop the approach of these projects further has been recognised and well documented. There are still many more opportunities to learn about integrating services for children and families by developing Hubs. While the learnings of this Strategy Group and all its contributors have much to offer this dialogue, the group is also eager to implement ongoing learnings from this exciting approach. The Strategy Group looks forward to 'keeping the Hubs humming' as the projects transition to a new phase of funding.

The Hubs have led to significant change among schools and early years services.

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Play kids thriving

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A PROGRAM established to tackle intergenerational poverty has Broadmeadows area has become more sharing and confident with helping children's playgroups for Communities for Children. The four-year Federal Government initiative established in 2008 sees an explosion of children's playgroups in the southeast of Victoria. As reported in a major study program for number of children. Now, a almost five years on, the program is thriving.

PLAYGROUP

What parents said about the influence of playgroups on their child's development:
"My child has become less aggressive. He's not fighting with siblings."
"My child is more confident and didn't know how to share. Now he shares more toys."
"My child is more confident and didn't know how to share. Now he shares more toys."



Kamar Edelbi with her children Emmeh, 4, and Ayah, 3.



Community psychologist, Dr. Emma Parker, said the program has helped children get used to school and getting to school. She said, "The program is helping in any way."

More than job skills



LEARNING job skills has broken down barriers and forged new friendships between women at the Dallas Community Hub. A year after the hub opened at Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten, the first group of women has been awarded Certificate II in Community Support Services. The 15 women, who attend the hub once a week, said the course had increased their confidence. They have now started studying for their food handling certificate and will begin a four-month course in children's services in February. Hub coordinator Marilyn Parker said the bond between the women of different backgrounds was remarkable.

Schools abuzz with action

New migrants on right course

THE English skills of recently arrived migrants, including Sana Mustafa and Susan Sorbi (pictured), have received a boost with the opening of a new community learning hub at Dallas Primary School. The hub, which is affiliated with the Dallas Community Hub in Wilford St. Broadmeadows, targets parents from Dallas Primary, as well as those

with children at Uppfield and Broadmeadows primary schools. Courses run there by the Home University of the Third Age (HUTA) include cooking, Scrabble, weekly coffee club, and more. The principal Valerie Valerius said the response has been excellent. "It's all about to continue."

SEX Home schools are buzzing with action, thanks to an award-winning community collective. The Humming Hubs' collective was Highly Commended at the Early Years Awards on October 22 for their commitment to the Early Years Partnership, turning primary schools into vibrant community centres. Partnership member Colleen Turner said the group, comprising school staff, board care workers and parents, were a recognition of the school's success. "It was really the school's success," she said. "We're proud of our school, Humming Hubs, and the high level of commitment in a range of areas."



Fahriye Yilmaz, Colleen Turner, and Marilyn Parker.

EARLY LEARNING FOR ALL AT COMMUNITY HUBS

Families with young children need all the support they can get, especially when faced with social isolation, economic, cultural and language barriers. In 2008 the Federal Government's Communities for Children (CFC) initiative was introduced in the Broadmeadows area to provide children and their families with the support and services they need to thrive. These local community hubs focus on helping children to succeed in school and in life. They provide a safe and supportive environment for children and their families to connect with other families in their neighbourhood. Together they can access cultural, social and physical activities, including playgroups, health services, English and literacy programs, and more. The integrated nature of hubs supports the child's learning and development.



Culture with class

STUDENTS will share their differences in a multicultural day today. The students at Meadowfair and Jacana Primary School who cover more than 20 ethnic groups, will come to school in their traditional costumes for a day of music, fun and activities. For the first time, the event will include a show featuring Indonesian, Turkish, Assyrian and styles.

COOLAROO SOUTH PRIMARY SCHOOL

One of Coolaroo South Primary School's main objectives is to prepare children for school by developing their language, literacy, emotional and social skills through a range of Early Years Programs.

The aim of the program is to promote play (especially between mothers and their children), as well as communicate and share with other children.

Coolaroo's Playgroup and Kindergarten Project are successful examples of how combining learning and play can assist with a smooth transition to school. The projects also aim to bring families and children closer together. As Fahriye Yilmaz, Community Liaison Officer at Coolaroo South Primary School, explains: "We have approximately 15 children from different backgrounds coming to our playgroup sessions each

week. The aim of the program is to promote play (especially between mothers and their children), as well as communicate and share with other children. Coolaroo South Primary School's Kindergarten is part of the Communities for Children (CFC) project and delivered to the school by VICSEG (Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups). Designed to promote the importance of physical activity to children and their families, the program is also proving to be an excellent way of improving the children's social skills. "It's only been three years since the CFC project was developed at Coolaroo



Artwork and paper flowers. Kids enjoying playgroup time at Coolaroo South Primary School.

Primary School, and we are already beginning to see the benefits of having a community hub onsite," says Colleen Turner, CFC Project Manager.

For more information contact Fahriye Yilmaz, Community Liaison Officer at Coolaroo South Primary School on 03 9309 1664 or email yilmaz.fahriye@fedemul.vic.gov.au.

