

Communities for Children

In Broadmeadows

March 2010

Final Local Evaluation Report



**Better outcomes for children families and
the community by developing stronger social
connections for families and more effective
networks for early-years professionals**

prepared by:
Broadmeadows Uniting *Care and*
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Final Local Evaluation Report

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When planning how to deliver early-years services that aim to facilitate best outcomes for young children and their families, the most salient feature for consideration is change. Broad changes in our society impact on the growth, development and learning opportunities for children, as well as the capacity of families to provide safe, nurturing and stimulating environments for children. Progressive communities are those that are constantly reviewing how services are provided to young children and their families.

The Australian Government's Communities for Children (CfC) program is an example of an initiative that requires services to engage with communities in order to respond to demonstrated local needs and circumstances. This report details the efforts of the Hume Early Years Partnership in doing this over the past four years.

The report illustrates the impact that the Broadmeadows CfC initiative has had on improving the collaboration and coordination of services. The Partnership, having initially brought services together, has further collaborated at a strategic level to influence the many different initiatives currently operating within the diverse community of the City of Hume.

Importantly, this report also illustrates impressive increases in the participation of children and families in a broad range of community activities that have been either established or strengthened through the Broadmeadows CfC initiative. A real sense of social and community connectedness is evidenced for these families and children.

I commend the work of the Broadmeadows CfC initiative and urge all involved to continue their efforts to meet the challenges at hand, and continue to make a difference in the lives of young children and their families.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Frank Oberklaid", with a horizontal line underneath.

Professor Frank Oberklaid OAM

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We acknowledge the work of the local evaluator, the Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital and its CfC local evaluation team, Myfanwy Macdonald and Leonie Symes. Cemile Yuksel, Judi Gray, Colleen Turner, Zeynep Yesilyurt and Fiona Alexander from the Broadmeadows CfC team have worked tirelessly to complete this report.

Thank you to all the parents and children who have given us their thoughtful feedback in the consultation, implementation and evaluation processes. Parents and children participated in the Service Users Study, focus groups and evaluation of the individual activities. Many also participated in the development of resources including the DVD's "Getting to Know All About You" and "Catching the Rainbow".

Thank you to all members of the Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYP) especially those of you who also participated in the long and short term working groups. An especial thank you to the Aboriginal Partnership Group and the Parent Advisory Group who worked to ensure that the knowledge and experience of parents and carers were included in planning and implementing the Communities for Children initiative in Broadmeadows, Coolaroo, Campbellfield, Dallas, Jacana and Meadow Heights.

Listed below are just some of the key workers in each strategy.

STRATEGY 1 – Setting the Hubs Humming: Inclusive meeting places for family engagement

Maureen Leahy - Meadowbank Early Learning Centre Community Hub
Catharine Hydon, Daniel Leach and Elizabeth Orr - Breaking Cycles by Building Neighbourhood Hubs
Val Karaitiana, Lynne Gunning & Marilyn Parker - Dallas Hub
Glenys Wilkinson & Denise Batchelor - Social Interaction & Inclusion project

STRATEGY 2 – Playgroups Rule OK!

Gina Dougall & Carmel Barberio - Hume Playgroup Strengthening Project
John Zika & Jeanette Hourani - Playgroup Enhancement Program
Playgroup Leaders - Hana Saumi, Emine Tan, Songul Keles, Khanh Ma, Nhung Nguyen, Malika Bendahhan, Maria Tuua, Kamar Edelbi & Ann Toma

STRATEGY 3 – Connecting Dots and Neurons: Promoting health and well-being

Suzu Pinchen, Jeanette Hourani & Nezaket Kilicaslan - Community Links
Judith Smale & Jacinta Harper - Embedding the Parent - Child Mother Goose Program
John Zika, Libby Mein & Christine Foran - DVD Resource for Parents' Skills and Knowledge: Communicating with Babies and Toddlers

STRATEGY 4 – We are ALL Community: Parents and professionals working together for the community

Anna Boland - Bilingual Storytelling in the Community
Grozdana Lukic - and Nada Pezic - Working with Parents as Partners
Karen Nicholls & Fahriye Yilmaz - Resource Distribution Strategy
John Zika, Libby Mein & Christine Foran - DVD Resource for Professionals: Cultural Perspectives on Children's Services
Bilingual Community Engagement Team - Nezaket Kilicaslan, Amal Swairjo, Muna Yazdin & Van Bach Nguyen

STRATEGY 5 – Catching them ALL: Connecting the most vulnerable and isolated into the community

Melissa Bembo - Aboriginal Partnership
Kaz McMahon, Deb Cole, Salwa Salem - Confident Parenting in Challenging Times
Lee-Anne Biggs, Helen Spence & Hanan Elzanaty - Supporting and Learning from Parents with a Mental Illness
Naomi Mc Namara and Janine Sheridan - Supporting Children who are Homeless or at risk of being Homeless.

Phil Conrick
Chair of the Hume Early Years Partnership Executive



1 Executive Summary

What's new since 2007?

The major change and good news is that Communities for Children (CfC) in Broadmeadows and across Australia will continue as part of the Family Support Program (FSP). CfC will transition to the Family Support Program over a two-year period from July 2009 to June 2011. The Australian Government is providing three years of funding to CfC providers, covering the two-year transition period and one year of FSP operation (July 2011–June 2012). The Family Support Program is aimed at 0–12 year olds and their families, to improve child development, safety and family functioning through support services for all Australians, targeting vulnerable families.

How do local findings fit within the national picture?

The results parallel the National CfC Evaluation, which identified that outcomes including more women in part-time employment, improvement in parent confidence and service coordination were occurring. The national study also indicated that there was more engagement of families generally, more engagement of disadvantaged families in particular, more soft entry points to programs where families felt welcome and more efficient use of resources with shared activities and shared professional development.

The National Study concluded that coordination between agencies can improve outcomes for children and families, as this coordination offers more consistent support. At a local level collaboration in planning and implementing the CfC program has strengthened coordination across the range of early-years services, with over 20 active partners undertaking 35 individual projects and employing approximately 100 community workers.

This Local Evaluation of the CfC program uses multiple methods that offer triangulation of results from parents, program staff and cross-sectoral partners of the Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYPP). These results, collected over a three-year period, all point in the same direction and illustrate the depth and breadth of the program. The Broadmeadows CfC site has worked with at least three thousand families, on both an episodic and programmatic basis. Parents and children involved in the program increased their social and community connectedness and that improvement was maintained or enhanced over the three-year period.

Were expected outcomes achieved?

The 2005 Community Strategic Plan developed five strategies to help achieve a wide range of outcomes for children, their families and the community. They aimed to improve the lives of children, their families and the Broadmeadows community. The majority of those outcomes were broad and difficult to measure accurately. Therefore only those outcomes that were very concrete and specific were fully achieved. One fully achieved outcome was the development of seven community hubs. So this completed outcome does not figure in the final evaluation. While progress towards the outcomes set for the evaluation

is considerable, what has been achieved in collaboration and community participation is far greater than could have been anticipated.

Thousands of children, parents and families have taken advantage of the programs, services and activities begun since the inception of CfC; for example, a recent large community event attracted 500 parents and 600 children. In addition, approximately 1500 children attend playgroups each week. Many but not all of those activities have been funded by CfC. Families who have participated in programs have been overwhelmingly positive about the effect on their parenting, on their children's development, on their own and their children's social engagement and supports. This positive effect is supported by both qualitative and quantitative data. It is also supported by qualitative and quantitative data collected from early-childhood professionals across the sectors of health, education and community services. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families and the local Indigenous community, have been primary target groups in the Broadmeadows CfC site. There has been significantly improved engagement of families from CALD backgrounds in the programs and across other early-years services.

Families have more information about universal early-years services, including maternal and child health and kindergarten, and for the most part find them easier to access. There remains a significant proportion (approx. 20%) of families who are unable to access services they need, including speech and language assistance. There are also families accessing secondary and tertiary services such as housing services and other specialised services whose situations make it difficult to access universal and community-based children's services.

One of the strong themes of the evaluation has been the importance of community leadership in 'growing a community for children'. Since the theme of emerging community leaders was identified in the interim evaluation, the site focused on identifying, training and mentoring potential leaders. In the following two years, training and networking opportunities have been provided to those leaders and to others who are emerging. Those opportunities have been enthusiastically taken up and participants report they are learning new skills and using those skills in the community. This is an encouraging indicator of developing community capacity.

Collaboration for the benefit of the children, families and the community has been fundamental to the Broadmeadows CfC site. Collaboration across the three sectors of health, education and community services has developed in scope, scale and depth in the last four years. The collaboration varies from cross referrals to meet the needs of individual families to partnership submissions for funding, coordinating and planning for regular large events to celebrate families and children in the City of Hume. The Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYPP) has driven this collaboration and in doing so has supported community participation and developed community strengths.

Each of the following five strategies has contributed to outcomes for the community, for families and for children.



Setting the hubs humming

This strategy has been effective in its aim of developing local places for active community engagement. Over four years it has developed seven local hubs, mostly in local primary schools. Those hubs are ongoing and sustainable in that contributions have been made to their continuity by each of the organisations that they are placed within.

The strategy of ensuring their school operates as a hub for community members has been taken up enthusiastically by local primary schools in a number of ways. Each school has developed early-childhood activities and encouraged parents of younger children to be part of that community by offering playgroups (often funded by CfC), kindergarten and a range of educational and social activities for the wider community. All community hubs have established adult English classes so that parents can learn English and support their children's learning. The hub projects have worked together to produce two local reports outlining their model of working together and with their communities. Those reports have been well received locally and more widely.

Playgroups rule ok!

This strategy has been very effective in its goal of increasing the number of local playgroups and adding to their quality and effectiveness. In 2005 at the beginning of the CfC project, there were approximately 50 playgroup sessions per week operating in the City of Hume. By 2009, reports to the funding body indicate there were 116 playgroup sessions taking place each week. Of those, 44 are explicitly multilingual. Overall, an average of 1550 parents and 2640 children attend playgroups each week in the City of Hume. Of these, only 7 are directly funded by CfC. By contributing to the coordination and support of playgroups, CfC has had a greater impact and sustainability than it could hope to have achieved by funding individual groups. This strategy developed a network of playgroup leaders and increased their skills and connectedness to their community and to each other. The Playgroup Network was established in 2005 and by 2009 had 102 members, all of whom had attended training and networking activities. Those community leaders generated much of the community engagement of this strategy.

As with the community hubs, the playgroups rule strategy has also benefited from the increasing collaboration of the Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYP) members. HEYP funded additional playgroups and supported both coordination training and the provision of a number of community events. Those events allowed agencies and workers to collaborate in order to hold events which themselves attracted new members to playgroups.

Over the four years, a number of specialist playgroups have been funded for children or families with more complex needs. These include playgroups for homeless families and parents with mental illness. Those groups were often more resource-intensive and required higher levels of facilitation and support, such as transport and outreach assistance between the playgroups. Again collaboration between local agencies has been a theme.

Connecting dots and neurons

This strategy has aimed to promote and improve children's health and development from conception to beginning school. Its basis is a social model of health. This strategy has covered a wide range of health and development issues and included pre- and post-natal education, breastfeeding, toilet training, parent-child attachment and inclusion of children with additional needs in mainstream programs. The strategy has been the vehicle for adding content that can be included into both community hubs and playgroups. It has been successful in doing so and has provided a wide range of education, information and intervention programs to families. Once again the twin themes of collaboration and of the development of local, often bilingual, bicultural leaders have been a key part of this strategy's success.

We are ALL community

This strategy has provided opportunities for parents and professionals to work together for the benefit of the community. It included professional development and community engagement. This strategy has been successful in engaging with thousands of local families and young children. For example, in one twelve-month period more than 20,000 parents and children took part in the bilingual story time activity. The strategy has developed the understanding that professionals are an integral part of the local community. The strategy has provided professional development to many local professionals and has particularly focused on ways of understanding and developing local community strengths and working collaboratively with the community to achieve agreed outcomes. Most recently, the strategy has re-established a parent advisory group to provide strategic advice to the Hume Early Years Partnership.

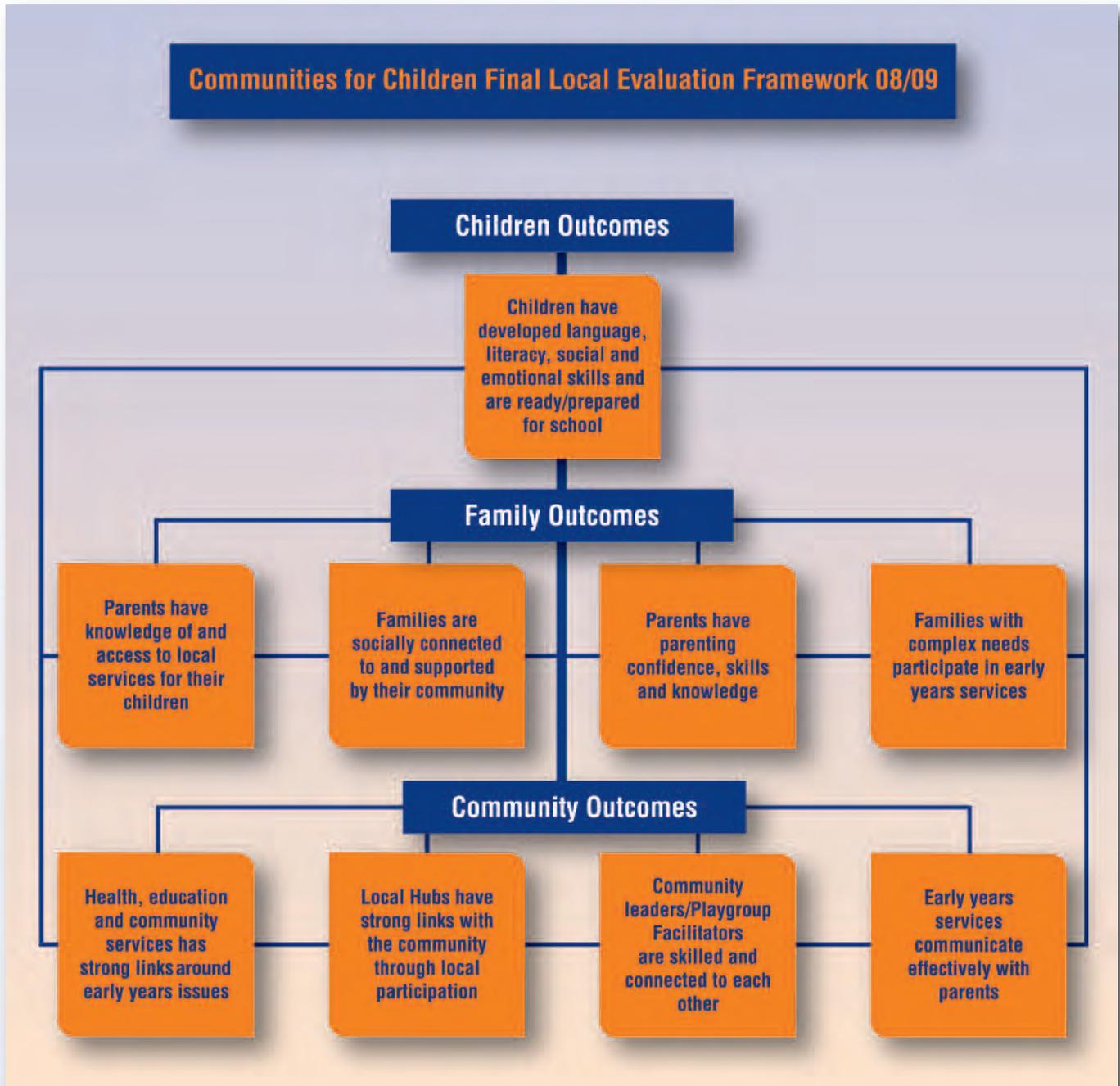
Catching them ALL

This strategy works with more complex families within a community where poverty is the norm. The majority of the Broadmeadows site is made up of families from CALD backgrounds and families living in relative disadvantage. This strategy targets families and children with secondary and tertiary system needs. It has worked with refugee families, homeless families, families with a parent with mental-health issues and with the local Indigenous population.

The strategy aimed to support families with complex needs in accessing mainstream and community activities for themselves and their children. It aimed to provide avenues for developing friendships and fun, joyful experiences for children, often within the context of challenging long-term family difficulties. This strategy also aimed to encourage specialist agencies to pool their considerable knowledge and skills for the benefit of families and children. The strategy has been successful in working with complex families to assist them in being part of the wider community and it will be explored further in the next phase of CfC.



Figure 1. CfC final local evaluation framework 08/09



What are the outcomes for Communities for Children?

Outcomes were conceptualised at a number of levels, including outcomes that relate specifically to children, those that are broader and see children in the context of their family, and outcomes that show how the wider community, including parents and professionals as well as social networks, contribute to the overall child-friendliness of the community and to children’s development within their community.

The outcome for children is reported first in this executive summary to highlight the key focus of the program and of this report – children. The outcome for children is reported last in the body of the report to show how outcomes for the community and for the family as a whole contribute to children’s wellbeing.

The framework above in Figure 1 outlines the specific outcomes conceptualised by the program logic developed for the site and reviewed and adjusted regularly throughout the program.



Outcomes for children

The central outcome for children, *Children have developed language, literacy, social and emotional skills and are ready for school*, was developed for the second half of the CfC program.

This outcome can be broken down into component parts, some of which are measurable. In addition, the final aspect, *Children are ready for school*, is itself the subject of extensive research. School readiness in Broadmeadows has been the subject of a research project undertaken by the Hume Early Years Partnership in collaboration with the Centre for Community Child Health. Much of the evidence for school readiness is drawn from that report.

Investigation of this outcome found that the overwhelming majority of parents thought their preschool-aged children had developed language, literacy, social and emotional skills as a result of being involved in CfC programs. Professionals also found that children had benefited from the activities and programs they attended. This evidence is both qualitative and quantitative. Some has been sourced from pre- and post-tests on language scales and others are based on parental and professional judgement.

Recent research suggests that social and emotional skills, as well as language and literacy skills, are the domains that most benefit children's readiness to attend school. An additional measure that is being increasingly used is attendance at early-childhood education programs. The Victorian State Government Best Start program uses this measure and so data is available for the Broadmeadows area from 2003 to 2009. The Hume Early Years Partnership has put considerable effort and resources into achieving a steady improvement in the rates of attendance at early-childhood education programs for the Broadmeadows CfC site.

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population measure that has been developed to gauge children's readiness for school. While it tests children in their first year of school, its theoretical underpinning is that the results from those children can be used to ensure system improvements for future cohorts of children. The Broadmeadows site has been involved with this measure since its inception in 2005. As yet there has been no clear population-level shift in school readiness outcomes for children in Broadmeadows. However, recently released figures for 2009 suggest that there have been a number of small improvements and, importantly, no further decline despite the world economic crisis, which has been keenly felt in the local area.

Outcomes for families

There are four outcomes in this area, covering the domains of knowledge of and access to local services; social connectedness and support; parenting confidence, skills and knowledge; and support for families with complex needs to participate in early-years services for their children.

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

Quantitative data indicates that a large majority of the parents accessing CfC activities believe that these programs are helping them to find out about other services. The findings also show that parents'

knowledge of services has increased since their participation in CfC programs and most have been able to access the services they require. However, 17% indicated that they could not receive the service they needed. This finding is important and needs further study. Individual surveys suggest that this was related to long waiting lists for some programs, including allied health, and the affordability of other programs, such as childcare.

When the broad data around service provision is interrogated a little further and knowledge and information about particular services are examined, a steady increase in knowledge of services is observed across several years and across several cohorts of parents. In general, where there is an increase in knowledge about a service, there is a corresponding increase in ease of access to that service. However, in the case of kindergarten, knowledge of the service increased at the same time as perceived accessibility of the service decreased. This may be because of increased demand, resulting in longer waiting lists.

Qualitative results from professional journals and other sources support quantitative findings. Increased access to information and community resources, including information in local community languages, was noted in the large majority of journal entries. Journals also detailed the increased range of early-childhood services available to families in the last several years. The cross-fertilisation of knowledge and information for parents about the services available for their children was noted by professionals in their journals and in the wide range of parent comments reported from surveys and in journals.

CfC has contributed to improved knowledge and access to early childhood programs at a community level. The clearest improvement of knowledge was about playgroups; this was up from 68% in both 2003 and 2006 to 83% by 2009, an increase of 18%. This is related to efforts by community partners to improve the community's and service providers' knowledge of playgroups by providing up-to-date information about each of the playgroups on the local council website. The coordination of efforts by the Hume Early Years Partnership is likely to have contributed to improved information about and access to services.

Families are socially connected to and supported by their community

Both quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence that families participating in the CfC initiative felt increasingly socially connected to each other and that participating in CfC activities had contributed to that increased social support.

An overwhelming majority (82%) of the almost 1000 respondents to the survey across activities agreed that they have found support by talking with other parents in a range of CfC projects. A smaller number of respondents reported that they felt 'somewhat' supported. Data from almost 500 parents in the playgroups strategy further consolidated this finding regarding social connections, when asked: Has this program helped you to make friends? The vast majority (81%) responded that they had made new friends.



Professionals observed and documented that meeting new people, social networking and learning opportunities, belonging to and being a part of a community, as well as feeling less isolated were among the highest priorities for families. Professional journals referred to many occasions where they have supported and helped a particular child or a family by providing direct assistance or referring them to appropriate services. The surveys and professional journals documented many cases where previously isolated parents and families had made friendships and provided support for each other.

The service users study, a smaller, more intensive survey (n=108 in year 1 and n=30 by year 3) delivered to the same families over three consecutive years, found that improvements in social support for parents are significant and sustained over time and that they keep improving for children. The implications of this finding are profound for the social cohesion of the Broadmeadows area. If the impact of increasing social support can be maintained and the reach of the program extended further into the community, then the Hume Early Years Partnership is on the way to reaching its vision of *Optimising the health, development, learning and wellbeing of children living or participating in the Broadmeadows community.*

Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge

CfC programs, groups and activities have made encouraging progress towards this outcome. Improvement in parenting confidence, skills and knowledge is interrelated to the other family outcomes. Participation in early-years programs leads to improved social support that can contribute to increased confidence, which has impacts on parents' ability to trust and work cooperatively with professionals.

It is a complex outcome to report on, because it is difficult and not practically useful to separate the domains of confidence, skills and knowledge, since they interact. This outcome reports on the myriad of micro-skills and knowledge that parents need to bring up young children. Both qualitative and quantitative data show progress when parents are supported and equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to become more confident in their parenting roles.

Programs and activities have provided parents with the skills and knowledge to learn and understand child development, behaviour management, communicating and interacting with their children, by highlighting the importance of play, reading, singing and spending more time in playful activities together.

There are a number of areas of clear improvement. Parents are much more knowledgeable about the importance of reading to their children regularly. Many learned a range of skills in making the process interesting to their children and had a sophisticated understanding of the benefits and complexities of bilingualism. Parents also learned and were beginning to implement the skills of spending time playing with their children in order both to build a better, closer relationship and also to assist in children's learning. However, quantitative data shows that parents still struggle to find the time at home to do this with each of their children.

Professionals and parents are demonstrating a greater level of trust between one another, with more parents reporting and displaying their parenting difficulties to other parents and to professionals. There have been clear improvements in the area of behaviour management of young children, with many parents reflecting on

the importance of being patient, understanding their own and their children's personalities. Fathers, in particular, benefit from understanding the importance of praising and positively reinforcing children for good behaviour. Data presented refers to the changing parenting techniques and parents' gaining a better understanding of the ages and stages of their children's development. As a result, parents are developing better relationships with their children and families, which is likely to lead to a more resilient community.

Families with complex needs participate in early-years services

Participation in an early-years service was supported for many families with complex needs who might not otherwise have participated in programs for their young children. Families who participated in the activities provided positive feedback about their experiences of the service and staff commented on the positive impact they noted on families' wellbeing.

Some of the activities in the "catching them all" strategy encountered difficulties in engaging families and children with complex needs, initially into an activity and with attendance over the life of the initiative. This was seen in particular for the *Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness* and *Supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness* where the families' life circumstances may have prevented them from participating on a regular basis.

The data suggests that the CfC initiative provided support for families and children with complex needs to participate in early-years services where they may not have otherwise. All activities made additional efforts to meet the needs of these families and to integrate them into mainstream activities and develop their capacity to be active and contributing members of the local community. It is worth noting that additional support requires additional resources and numbers in this outcome were considerably smaller than in other more universal areas. There are also more complexities in targeting for this outcome.

Outcomes for the community

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

Collaboration across sectors and silos for the benefit of children, families and the community is fundamental to the Broadmeadows CfC project. All projects across the five strategies reported in professional journals on the degree of collaboration they built into their work. There are 194 professional journal entries documenting the wide range of collaboration in the site. The scale and scope vary from cross-referral for individual families to regular large events to celebrate families and children, to partnership submissions for funding and coordinated planning for children and families in the City of Hume. Overall, the common themes from professional journals were: inclusion for all; joint planning and resourcing, influence on the home environment; and an emerging early-intervention response.

The Hume Early Years Partnership is the vehicle for this collaboration. This partnership has been active since 2003 and has expanded and deepened its role since the establishment of CfC in 2005. In 2008, the partnership agreed to expand from the CfC site, comprising six



suburbs in the south of the municipality, to the whole of Hume. This decision was taken to improve the ability of the partnership to be actively involved in planning processes for the local government area. In 2009 the partnership established an executive group to further facilitate strategic planning.

Regular surveys of partnership members were undertaken and backed up by either individual or focus-group interviews. Overall, surveys and focus groups found high levels of satisfaction with the partnership communication, leadership and decision making. Those responses remained high over three years. The HEYP is described by its members as having a joint vision, strong connections and relationships between agencies that make it possible to get actions taken quickly. Overall, the three sources of data refer to the benefits of cross-sectoral coordination and gave numerous examples of how this works in practice to impact on this outcome.

The drawbacks of participation in the HEYP included the time commitment for coordination meetings, the communication needs of a bilingual community and the high expectations of workers. However, the partnership surveys indicated that the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks. Professional journals identified how coordination and linkages can improve program design and quality and offer an opportunity to influence the home learning environment. In identifying challenges for the future, respondents commented that the partnership had not yet reached its potential in terms of joint planning and collaboration.

Local hubs have strong links with the community through local participation

Local hubs used a range of mechanisms to build community awareness and offer programs for preschool-aged children, their families and other community members. For example, Dallas Community Hub was marked out by large signs on the school fence advertising the hub and a sign was placed at the entrance to the school. Most hubs placed information in school newsletters, translated into appropriate community languages.

Hub coordinators linked parents to other families to ensure that they felt comfortable in the school environment and participated in school activities. Similarly, parents with skills were identified and encouraged to assist in program delivery, for example by providing assistance in playgroups. Staff considered ways of engaging hard-to-reach families who were not accessing activities. Major events such as Harmony Day and International Playgroup Day were held at most sites and were successful in drawing new community members and families into the hubs. Thus a strategy of active social inclusion has played a key role in developing parents' confidence to participate in local early-childhood activities.

Hubs bring the needs of the child and family together in a holistic way. Hub coordinators took into account the issue of supporting the child and parent as a unit. Staff on the hub sites were alerted to the needs of the younger children in the family and helped to support their participation. Programs such as playgroups and parenting groups were adapted and offered in specific languages, rather than having an interpreter assigned to an English-language program. An adult-education needs-analysis survey was conducted on each site with

parents, to identify future training needs. Results clearly showed an interest in English-language programs. Each hub then provided English classes for parents. Parents enthusiastically took up English classes and accredited training.

Community hub workers reported that parents have played a key role in shaping new activities and programs.

Community hubs offer a space for new programs, as parents are already engaged and tell us what programs they would like. Agencies are more efficient in setting up new activities and are approaching us with programs they would like to run. Others come and visit to see how the community works before they design their activity.

(Community hub worker)

Community leaders are skilled and connected to each other

Community leaders in this context are defined as members of the community who are leading or teaching in the area of early-childhood programs, including playgroups and storytelling and coordination of local CfC community hubs. In the 2007 Local evaluation interim report, 21 local bilingual community leaders were identified as having become active and skilled in the community. Those community members and others from the relevant networks were provided with professional development opportunities to become skilled community leaders. Two programs have developed and are providing accredited training through the local TAFE. Existing teams and networks have been strengthened with more regular meetings and an additional network. This is an encouraging outcome for the developing local community capacity and for the sustainability of local enthusiasm for early-years work.

This outcome is related to increasing community education and network building in networks that are related but not identical to CfC networks, including neighbourhood renewal volunteer networks in the Broadmeadows suburbs and the group work network established by the local women's house.

Early-years services communicate effectively with parents

Early-years professionals working in Broadmeadows have been provided with opportunities to increase their capacity to communicate effectively with parents and these opportunities have contributed to their awareness of and willingness to adopt evidence-based approaches that facilitate and foster positive communication, such as a strengths-based, partnership approach.

The communication skills of early-years professionals are important in the work they do with families. In Broadmeadows, many parents are more comfortable speaking a language other than English and this may be particularly the case in communicating or receiving complex information. Early-years professionals in Broadmeadows have received information and education on cross cultural communication and strengths-based training. This report indicates that parents and professionals are developing more trusting relationships and this is a positive sign of improved communication. To date there has been only a little direct feedback sought from parents about professionals' communication skills. This is an area that could be further explored.



Where to from here?

While the CfC program has been very successful in the Broadmeadows site, it now faces a number of significant challenges, as well as a range of opportunities. Like CfC sites across the country, the program has engaged large numbers within the local community, including service providers and community leaders, as well as families including parents of young children. Again, like many other sites, Broadmeadows CfC has improved parenting outcomes and outcomes for children involved in programs ranging from playgroups to parenting programs to literacy programs. While the engagement has been impressive, partners in the site acknowledge that there are still many families who have not benefited from any exposure to early-years programs and activities. The challenge now is to ensure improved outcomes for future cohorts by embedding successful strategies into ongoing programs and activities that will benefit families with young children into the future. This is an important issue since it appears very likely the area will continue to be disadvantaged according to socio economic indicators and each year children are born and families with young children move into the area.

Within the planning and implementation of CfC in Broadmeadows there was a considerable focus on developing and documenting innovation and effective practice including a focus on sustainability. The Broadmeadows site developed a range of resources aimed at families, practitioners and policy makers. Those resource include a series of children's books in community languages, cross cultural and multi lingual parenting resources and a range of community reports documenting useful and sustainable service models. Four models of practice are now included in the Promising practice series of the Australian Institute of Family Studies

In 2009 the CfC program across Australia received further funding under the new Family Support Strategy. The revised CfC program will work with families from conception through to the transition to high school. This is a significant change and a significant challenge. In the Broadmeadows site, the target group of children will effectively double and clearly, less resources will be available for the original 0-6 age group .

A further change of emphasis for the future is the Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)'s interest in a stronger focus on vulnerable and isolated families within the already disadvantaged communities targeted for CfC. The current project is well placed to undertake more intensive work with some families, because of its history of working with the range of health, education and community service agencies in the site. However intensive engagement is very likely to be more resource intensive and without additional resources the reach of the program would be diminished.

Priorities identified by local stakeholders include targeted programs for Indigenous families and access to allied health services for families in particular, speech pathology and psychological services.

While there are a number of challenges for stakeholders in the Broadmeadows CfC site, there are also a number of exciting current opportunities. Significant infrastructure projects are planned or underway. Broadmeadows will become a central activities district and as such will be a focus for commercial and government activity. The Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration program has been in place for several years now and new schools will open over the next two to three years. Each new school will include a focus on preschool years.

A large-scale consultation with the local community for the next phase of CfC in Broadmeadows has confirmed that the current directions of the program are in line with family and professional priorities. The majority of parents have confirmed health/nutrition and language/literacy as their top two priorities. Affordable, fun education programs were the third priority for parents and an important priority for children. Professionals made language/literacy and support for families with complex needs their top priorities. Those priorities will be an important focus for the next three years of CfC in Broadmeadows for families with children aged 0-12.

The application of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in the City of Hume has been a valuable tool for cross-sector community planning for the Hume Early Years Partnership. It has assisted with the allocation of additional resources for children and families.

In summary CfC in Broadmeadows has achieved a great deal; including actively engaging large numbers of the target community, providing programs, services and activities that meet the communities expressed needs and further assist in improving children's social and emotional well being and readiness to meet the exciting challenge of attending formal schooling. This has been achieved by the community including parents and service providers working together to identify and meet joint priorities for the benefit of children.

The immediate challenge is to embed those achievements into the community to ensure families with young children in Broadmeadows continue to be supported. An additional challenge has been set to continue to support children and families through the years of middle childhood to the important transition to secondary school. In addition local stakeholders are aware that not all families are accessing support and programs currently provided. At the same time there has been a policy shift towards less universal and more targeted programs and services.

The HEYP local partnership is enthusiastic about meeting those challenges into the future. A partnership approach will continue to enable multiple layers of community, local government, state and federal government strategies to be mobilised locally and coordinate child, family and community-level initiatives.



2 Background

The Communities for Children (CfC) initiative is supported by the Australian Government and aims to improve outcomes for children and families in areas identified as 'disadvantaged'. Forty-five communities across Australia have been chosen to participate in the initiative, in which non-government organisations are funded to act as 'facilitating partners' to develop and implement – in partnership with the local community – local strategies to achieve better outcomes for children aged 0–5, families and the community. Funding is administered through the Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

In 2004 the Hume/Broadmeadows site was chosen to participate in CfC. The site was allocated \$3.5 million for the period March 2006 to November 2009. Broadmeadows UnitingCare is the lead agency in consortia with Orana Family Services and Dianella Community Health. A proportion of that funding, 4% or \$98,000 over four years, was allocated to local evaluation. That funding supported the development of local evaluation processes and the evaluation partnership with the Centre for Community Child Health.

In February 2009, the FaHCSIA Minister announced that CfC will continue until mid 2012 under a new Family Support Program designed to target 0–12 year olds and their families. The Family Support Program aims to work with and support families and nurture children to enable them to better manage life's transitions and contribute to building stronger, more resilient communities (FaHCSIA website, retrieved 2/10/09). The Family Support Program also aims to address the fragmentation of current children's, parents' and family services by bringing a range of existing FaHCSIA programs together within a single program. This will give service providers increased opportunities to deliver integrated and holistic family-focused, child-centred services.

As with all CfC sites, the project is guided by a community-based partnership committee, known locally as the Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYPP). The HEYPP is a formal partnership with a partnership agreement and a set of priorities, actions and projects. The HEYPP was established in 2003 to lead the Best Start program funded by the Victorian Government. Both CfC and Best Start programs share similar objectives and strategies to enhance the lives of young children and operate in the same geographical location. It has been valuable to report and include Best Start evaluation findings throughout this report.

The HEYPP has a current membership of over 30 agencies across the health, education and welfare sectors. The Partnership is made up of local non-government agencies including Broadmeadows UnitingCare, Hume City Council, Dianella Community Health Service and a number of local primary schools. The large, multidimensional agencies send more than one staff member to meetings in order to include all appropriate program areas. Community health and local government are routinely represented by more than one person across a number of program areas. For example, Hume City Council may be represented by the manager of Family Services and the manager of the Hume Global Learning Village (the library). There are nine agencies involved from the community sector, including those offering family support programs.

Since the interim report in 2007, the HEYPP agreed it should broaden its focus from the southern suburbs surrounding Broadmeadows to the whole of Hume. This decision was taken after considerable discussion and debate about the implications. Issues included the considerable increase in geographic size and the inclusion of interface areas of very high growth, which could potentially take the focus away from the entrenched poverty evident in the southern suburbs.

The Partnership HEYPP reinstated an executive structure in 2009. Again there was considerable discussion about the implications and about the membership of the executive group. Nominations were called for in the three areas of health, education and community services. The role of representatives is to explicitly represent the sector and not the agency from which representatives are drawn. Each of the three levels of government is represented. The executive is explicitly responsible to the larger partnership and reports regularly. This partnership structure provides coordination and leadership and encourages capacity-building from smaller agencies and schools. The structure provides momentum for improved social capital and provision of formal and informal early-years activity in Hume.

The Broadmeadows site, like other CfC sites, followed a number of stages in its implementation:

- conducting a comprehensive community consultation to inform a Community Strategic Plan (CSP) that would identify local priorities
- reframing priorities into strategies and developing activities that contribute to improved outcomes for the community, families, parents and children; this was documented as a Community Strategic Plan
- documenting details of activities in an annual Service Delivery Plan (SDP)
- implementing strategies and activities
- conducting an evaluation within the national and local evaluation frameworks.

A key part of developing the CSP **was consultation** with parents and early-childhood professionals, which was undertaken in mid-2005. Over 300 parents and early-childhood professionals were surveyed in this process. The priorities that the parents and professionals identified for children in Broadmeadows were:

Parents

1. Health and nutrition
2. Language and literacy
3. Meeting other parents
4. Playgroups

Professionals

1. Health and nutrition
2. Language and literacy
3. Early-childhood development
4. Parenting education

The CSP was approved by FaHCSIA in December 2005 and activities became progressively operational throughout 2006. The strategies and activities outlined in the CSP focused on strengthening the community to allow opportunities for children and families to develop beyond the life of the funding, while building on the strengths of the community and existing organisations, networks and resources. The strategies and activities were also subject to the following overarching national key principles:



- parents and professionals as partners: supporting parents and families
- sustainability of effective new initiatives
- collaboration and refocusing of existing resources to improve service access for families
- improved child outcomes: healthy young families and early learning and care
- child-friendly communities.

Twenty-three activities were contracted in early 2006 and became progressively operational from February 2006 as staff were recruited and the activities commenced. The project funded 35 activities provided by 25 community partners in the period 2005–09. Community partners across the education, health and welfare sectors delivered activities.

In 2009, the process was repeated, with the continuation of CfC funding under the new Family Support Program, following new guidelines and principles. Consultations were held with 355 parents and caregivers, 82 professionals and 65 children to identify new priorities, particularly for the expanded age group of 6–12 year olds. The results of this consultation will assist the HEYP to make decisions about the strategic targeting of new activities.

An introduction to the community

The Broadmeadows CfC site forms a small geographic corner of the City of Hume. The site is based 20 kilometres north-west of the centre of Melbourne and includes the neighbourhoods of Broadmeadows, Campbellfield, Coolaroo, Dallas, Jacana and Meadow Heights. The site has a history of a strongly collaborative service delivery. The central suburb of Broadmeadows is itself a hub for services throughout the large urban fringe municipality of Hume. The site is a vibrant multicultural centre with many strong well-established community groups which are articulate, skilled and active in working for and with their communities.

The CfC site is physically small and densely populated. In 2006 there were 4,324 children under 4 years old living in the Broadmeadows area and 11,132 in the City of Hume. This is approximately a third of all children in the municipality, while the geographic size of the site is less than a quarter of the municipality. The area has relatively high population growth as a result of natural growth and new arrivals, and a very culturally and linguistically diverse population. The City of Hume has the third highest rate of new arrivals from countries where English is not the primary language, including Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon, arriving under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program. The target area has a large proportion of residents speaking languages other than English at home; 56% of families within the site speak a language other than English at home. There is a small but significant and growing population of Indigenous families moving into the area.

The neighbourhoods that make up the site have long been subject to significant economic disadvantage and demonstrate associated vulnerabilities, including higher than average rates of unemployment, lower incomes and the need to access subsidised housing. Campbellfield has been identified as one of Victoria's ten most disadvantaged postcodes (Vinson, 2007) and Broadmeadows statistical



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local area (including Dallas and Jacana) is ranked as the first most disadvantaged area within Victoria out of 79 metropolitan statistical local areas by the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), making it one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Australia (ABS, census 2006). The 2009 Victorian Government's school performance summaries also indicate that majority of the schools in the catchment area are in the highest category of disadvantage.

The unemployment rate of Broadmeadows is more than double that of Hume City, with averages of 18.7% and 8.4% respectively. Neighbourhoods in the target area receive close to half the total number of Centrelink payments (Parent Payment Partnered and Disability Support Pensions) for the City of Hume.

Disadvantage indicators are also evident for young children, including lower than average attendance at preschool programs (Best Start access to preschool report, 2007) and higher than average levels of developmental vulnerabilities present when children begin school (CCCH, AEDI–Hume City community profile, 2007).

The overall rate for attendance at maternal and child health centres for the target areas is lower than the rate for the whole of Hume. The rate of breastfeeding at 3 to 6 months in the target area was lower than that of Hume, which was itself significantly lower compared to the rest of Victoria (Best Start statewide evaluation report, 2006). However, there was no difference in the immunisation rates at any age between Hume and the rest of Victoria. The Best Start statewide evaluation report (2006) showed that access to maternal and child health centres has improved in the targeted area. In addition, maternal and child health services are looking at working in new ways to engage families in local schools/hubs to encourage follow-up appointments and to assist schools and parents attending activities with child assessments.

There are a number of early-childhood initiatives operating alongside CfC in the Broadmeadows site which are funded by local and state governments. These include:

- Best Start: a Victorian Government strategy for early-years services
- Growing Communities/Thriving Children: a Victorian Government initiative for rapidly expanding communities
- Innovations/Hume Integrated Family Services: a state-funded local response to families at risk of child abuse or neglect



- Schools Redevelopment: the merger and rebuilding of 13 primary schools in the local area
- Neighbourhood Renewal Program: a Victorian program to empower and revive significantly disadvantaged communities
- Municipal Early Years Plan: a local government response to planning in the early-years service sector
- Early Start Kindergarten: a Victorian Government-funded program to improve access to kindergarten for children known to child protection at three years of age
- Australian Early Development Index (AEDI): a tool for assessing local early-childhood strengths and vulnerabilities across a number of domains.

In 2005, the AEDI was chosen as one of the main indicators of improvement or decline for children in Broadmeadows. Since then, schools in the City of Hume have been involved in four waves of data collection in 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2009 and contributed to the new format of the AEDI for children with English as a second language.

The conduct of the AEDI in the City of Hume has been a valuable tool for cross-sector community planning for the Hume Early Years Partnership. It has assisted with the allocation of CfC resources for children and assists the HEYP to plan and influence educational, health and wellbeing outcomes for young children and families. Overall, the recent (December 2009) AEDI results raise concerns in a number of areas and show small improvements in others. However, the data available to date is not detailed enough to include in this report. Community results will be available in March 2010 and the HEYP will conduct a community forum in early April 2010 to discuss the implications of the results.

Achievements 2005–09

In the first three years of operation, CfC in Broadmeadows was successful in achieving a high level of community engagement and improved knowledge of and access to universal services for children and families in Broadmeadows. As outlined below, thousands of families participated in early-years activities, many of which were developed and provided by CfC.

In 2008, the site formed a local parent advisory group to guide and provide feedback to the Hume Early Years Partnership. The group meets once each school term to discuss the services that families access, what is working well, what they would like to see improved and what additional programs would support their parenting and the development of their children. Group members are advocates for their communities, taking the importance of early-childhood education back to their networks, as well as promoting access to and engagement in Hume's formal and informal programs for children and families.

CfC established five new community hubs (at Meadow Fair North Primary School, Campbellfield Heights Primary School, Visy Cares Learning Centre at Meadow Heights, Coolaroo South Primary School and Dallas/Upfield Primary School) to support families with young children in their local area. Existing community hubs at Meadowbank

Primary School and Lahinch Street Maternal and Child Health Centre continue to provide a variety of family-friendly activities. The hubs strategy working group developed two documents outlining the local hubs' service model and disseminated them to the local community and more broadly. These documents have provided valuable information in further developing the role of local community hubs.

Playgroups continue to be a very successful activity among both parents and their young children. The playgroup sessions in the City of Hume increased from 55 sessions per week in 2005 to over 116 sessions in 2009, with approximately 1500 children involved weekly. This expansion allows families to access groups that meet their needs. When surveyed, parents were overwhelmingly positive in relation to the programs they had attended and the benefits those programs had had for their children and for their own social supports, parenting knowledge and skills.

Bilingual storytime in the community continues to be another extremely popular activity among families, attracting a total of 56,364 children and parents between February 2006 and June 2009. This participation is both regular and episodic. Many families attend more than one session during the course of the program. The sessions are provided in Turkish, Arabic, Singhalese, Vietnamese and Assyrian.

The site has been able to share what has worked well to add to the local and national evidence base about working with young children and their families in disadvantaged communities. The learnings have been presented at several local and national conferences.

How do you grow a community for children? was the theme of the local early-years conference held in June 2008. The conference was organised by the Migrant Resource Centre North-West, together with the Hume Early Years Partnership team. Feedback from the conference was very positive, with local and nationally recognised presenters.

In April 2008, the site presented three papers at the Family and Community Strengths Conference in Newcastle. These included *Playgroups rule*, *Building community connectedness at Broadmeadows* and *Working in partnership with Booris in Hume*.

Four CfC activities, including Breaking cycles by building neighbourhood hubs, Early-years language and literacy enrichment program, Childcare links and Bilingual storytime in the community have all been accepted as Promising Practice Profiles (PPP) by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). This recognition contributed to the cross-strategy national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Community Strategy (2004–09) on what worked at the Broadmeadows CfC site. In addition, the site was invited by AIFS to co-present on the Breaking cycles by building neighbourhood hubs PPP at the NIFTEY conference in Melbourne in February 2009.

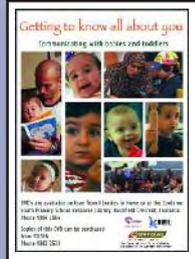
CfC activities have developed a range of high-quality resources for children, parents and professionals. The site funded the resource distribution strategy activity to house resources at a central distribution point and to establish a borrowing system. These resources are listed in the tables below and they are available for loan from the Resource Library at Coolaroo South Primary School, one of the CfC hub sites.



Table 1. Resources for parents

Resources For Parents

'Getting to know all about you'



A DVD resource for parents on communicating with babies and toddlers. The DVD highlights the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication by both parent and baby through voice, music, touch and movement, and emphasises the importance of play.

'Burndap Bopop: Good little kids'



The Aboriginal Partnership Project, in consultation with the Indigenous community, produced Burndap Bopop – Good little kids for families. This resource includes messages for parents about understanding their child's feelings and emotions, tantrums and self-control, enjoying play time at home and stories from parents.

Getting Started: Making decisions and the right choices for YOUR CHILD and YOU about early years children's services



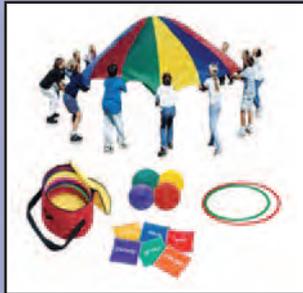
This booklet was written by parents for parents as a guide to provide families with information about early-years services available in the community.



Table 2. Resources for children

Resources For Children

Playgroup Physical Activity Kit



A physical activity kit was produced and distributed to all playgroup leaders. The kit highlights the importance of physical activity and play. The kit includes a parachute to run with, jump and hide under, hula-hoops in assorted colours to twirl, and balls in red, green, purple and yellow to throw, catch, kick and chase. The kit includes a physical development DVD featuring local families talking about using the kit to learn physical skills.

Oral Language and Literacy Kits



Oral language & literacy kits were designed to help parents to enhance children's learning through play. The focus is on improving language development for children of preschool age. There are 23 themed kits made up of toys and instructions for parents translated into Turkish & Arabic, to practise words and concepts at home, in both English and the children's and parents' first language.

Samoan Songbook



A Samoan songbook was developed in partnership with local Samoan community leaders to support the language and literacy skills of Samoan children. The songbook was produced as part of a series with the previously developed Turkish and Arabic songbooks.

'Let's Play Together' Resource Kit



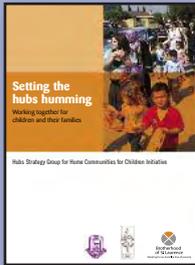
'Let's play together' is a social interaction and inclusion resource kit developed to promote social play and assist children in school readiness. This resource comprises five different kits filled with activities and equipment. Themes include building and construction, pretend play, books and pictures, music, dance and drama, and games. The kit also contains an 'ideas book' (in English, Turkish & Arabic) to assist families and services to make their own social play resources.



Table 3. Resources for professionals

Resources For Professionals

'Setting the Hubs Humming: 2007' 'Keeping the Hubs Humming: 2009'



Early-years hubs represent a shift in thinking and practice towards the provision of services in increasingly inclusive ways. Setting the hubs humming documents this model as a new way of thinking and working together. The model was developed in collaboration by the agencies involved in the local community hubs.

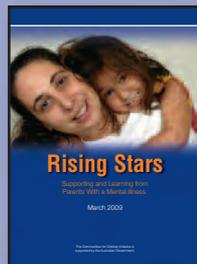
This second report written by the Hubs Strategy Working Group adds value to the initial Setting the hubs humming document and aims to share practice wisdom to guide the development of future hubs and provide feedback to policymakers on the practicalities.

The Australian Community Psychologist



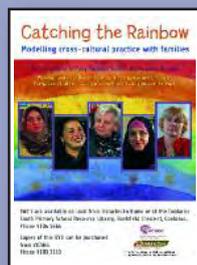
This special issue presents papers that contribute to the evidence on community collaboration and the complexities inherent in place-based interventions and research. The journal showcases Communities for Children in Broadmeadows, Victoria, as a case study into place-based intervention and research. There are three articles in the journal relating to Broadmeadows.

'Supporting and Learning from Parents with a Mental Illness: Rising Stars'



This is a report of 'Supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness' activity learnings for early-years professionals. This activity used a combined community-development and therapeutic approach to engage and support parents with diagnosed mental illness from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their young (preschool-aged) children.

'Catching the Rainbow: Modelling cross-cultural practice with families in Hume' DVD



This DVD resource for professionals was produced to promote culturally sensitive service provision in early-years services.



Methodology

The Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) was engaged as the local evaluator for the Hume/Broadmeadows site in 2005. A participatory evaluation approach was used by which CCCH, in its role as local evaluator, provided consultative support to the facilitating partner and community partners in evaluating their own strategies and activities. The benefits of employing a participatory approach were that the evaluation utilised local knowledge and helped build the capacity of the facilitating partner and community partners in terms of evaluation and strategic thinking.

Data collection for the local evaluation began in early 2006 as projects commenced and the last data-collection point was March 2009. An interim report was produced in 2007. Findings from that interim report informed changes to activities, strategies and outcomes for the final two years of CfC in Broadmeadows.

A large quantity of data was collected from service users, mostly parents and carers, as part of the local evaluation process that informed this report. In addition, a wide range of qualitative data was collected

from professionals working with parents and with children. This data included case studies of family and community change in a number of contexts. All data collection was carried out by community partners implementing the CfC strategies/activities with support from the facilitating partner.

The evaluation methodology consisted of five key tasks: (1) developing and monitoring the evaluation framework; (2) developing a range of data-collection tools; (3) working with community partners to collect data using those tools; (4) analysing the data; (5) documenting progress towards outcomes.

1. Developing and monitoring the evaluation framework

The local evaluation framework was based on a program-logic model (Figures 2 and 3 below) and included the development of expected outcomes of the strategy, objectives, local indicators and evaluation tools. An evaluation framework was developed for each strategy by the local evaluator (CCCH) in partnership with the facilitating partner and relevant community partners.

Figure 2. Broadmeadows local evaluation outcomes

Humming hubs	Playgroups rule	Connecting the dots and neurons	We are ALL community	Catching them ALL
<p>Outcomes:</p> <p>Local hubs have strong links with the community through local participation</p> <p>Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children</p> <p>Families are socially connected to and supported by their community</p> <p>Children are ready/prepared for school and have developed language, literacy, emotional and social skills</p> <p>Health, education and community services has strong links around early years issues</p>	<p>Outcomes:</p> <p>Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge</p> <p>Children have developed new skills (e.g. language, literacy, social, emotional & physical)</p> <p>Families are socially connected to and supported by their community</p> <p>Community leaders/Playgroup Facilitators (parents) are skilled and connected to each other</p> <p>Health, education and community services has strong links around early years issues</p>	<p>Outcomes:</p> <p>Parents are knowledgeable about early childhood development and related issues</p> <p>Parents are both skilled and confident in their role as parents</p> <p>Children (babies) have developed new skills (communication and social skills-age appropriate for babies 2 year olds)</p> <p>Health, education and community services have strong links around early years issues</p>	<p>Outcomes:</p> <p>Early years services communicate effectively with parents</p> <p>Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children</p> <p>Fathers/Mothers/Carers are engaged with their children in care and social play situations</p> <p>Children have developed new skills (language and literacy skills)</p> <p>Health, education and community services has strong links around early years issues</p>	<p>Outcomes:</p> <p>Families with complex needs participate in early years services</p> <p>Families are socially connected to and supported by their community</p> <p>Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge</p> <p>Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children</p> <p>Health, education and community services have strong links around early years issues</p>

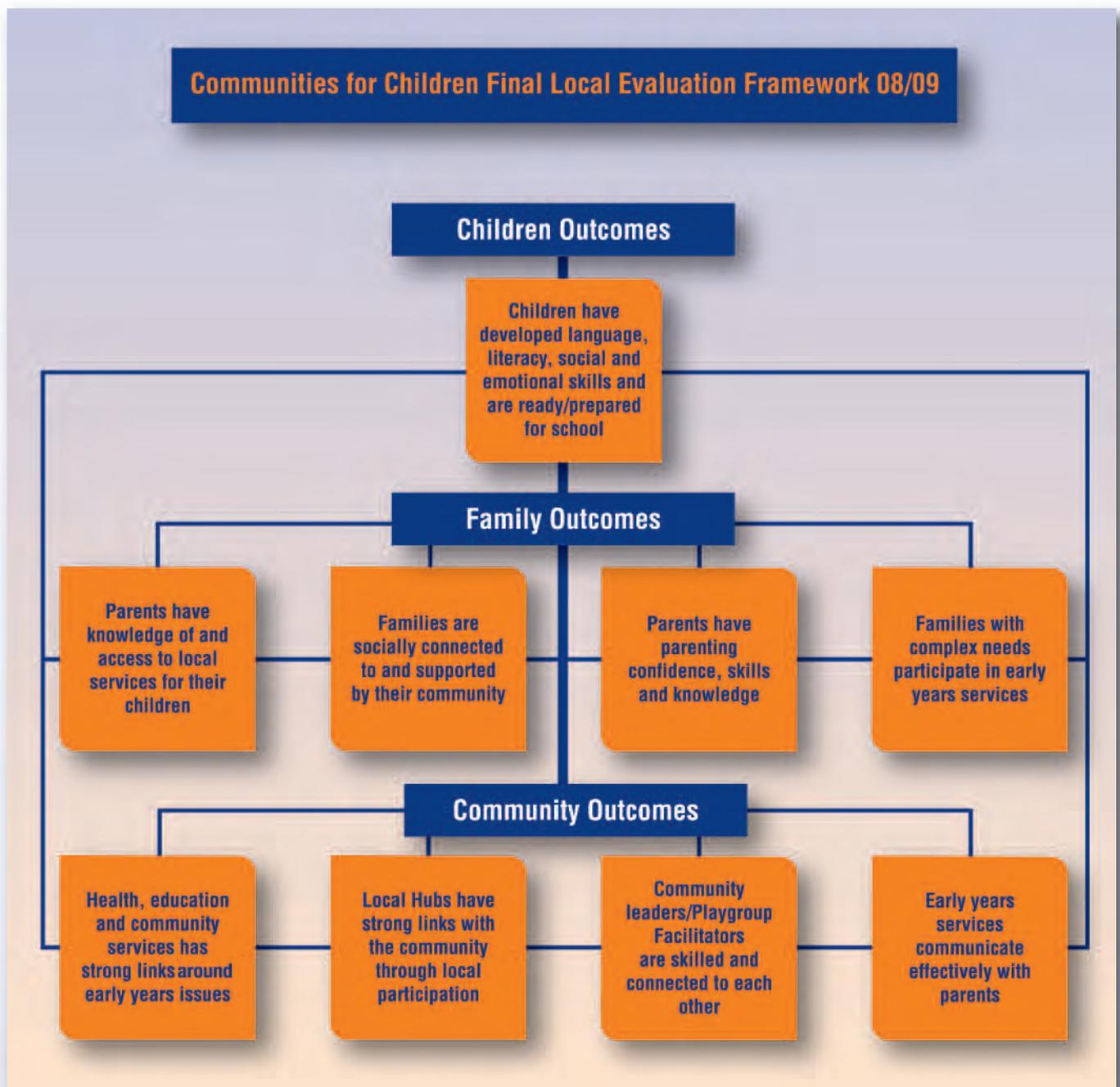


In the 2007 interim local evaluation report, the evaluation framework highlighted the impact and effectiveness of the *strategies*. While it remains important to consider how effectively the strategies have impacted on the community, families and their young children, it is also important to measure how the strategies are progressing towards achieving expected *outcomes*.

In the interim local evaluation report, progress was documented under each strategy. In the final report, the format has been reframed to focus

on outcomes and include evidence from any activity which contributed towards these outcomes. This has maintained a focus on an outcome-based evaluation and acknowledged that the CfC strategies were the means by which progress towards these outcomes was to be demonstrated. In some cases, outcomes that were similar across more than one strategy were re-worded into one outcome. Progress towards each of the nine outcomes is reported in detail in Section 5. The revised outcome-based framework is presented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. CfC final local evaluation framework 08/09





2. Developing data-collection tools

Evaluation tools were developed for each activity to collect data about progress towards outcomes. The tools were either qualitative (including parent surveys, facilitator observations and journals, focus group responses, case studies and interviews with group facilitators or participants) and/or quantitative (including pre-/post-surveys, document analysis and attendance records).

3. Working with community partners to collect and report data

Community partner agencies who delivered activities were expected to collect very detailed data on those activities. It was important that data was provided to the facilitating partner in a form that assisted the overall analysis of data, as well as allowing reports on the efficacy of individual activities. The Centre for Community Child Health and Broadmeadows UnitingCare provided a number of information and training activities to support community partners in providing complex and high-quality data from professionals and families.

Data was provided on a quarterly basis to the facilitating partner. For community partners and for local families, the regular collection of data relating to the programs they attended was a new part of the early-years service system. Community partners worked with CCCH and the facilitating partner to ensure that families were comfortable with providing feedback and other more personal demographic data to inform the evaluation. Much of the data was collected on a face-to-face and individual basis. Families in this CfC site often do not read or speak English fluently. Having local bilingual workers ensured data collection was complete and accurate. In general, there were insufficient resources to translate data-collection tools into the range of languages required. However, high response rates were achieved and maintained for much of the data collection.

4. Analysing the data

The data collected by community partners within activities and across activities was analysed to show progress made towards agreed outcomes for children, families and the community. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from families and professionals. There was a significant amount of data and one of the challenges has been to analyse that data in ways that are comprehensible across a number of activities.

Quantitative data was entered in Excel templates and analysed by the Centre for Community Child Health using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). During the analysis, data was separated and analysed against the nine outcomes outlined in the evaluation framework.

Common themes that emerged consistently throughout the data were identified. Common themes for all data sources were compared and, where a common theme was identified in two or more data sources, this was identified as a 'key' theme. The nine outcomes are reported in Section 6 of this report. Each outcome section reviews relevant research evidence, findings from the interim local evaluation report, analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, followed by discussion of all data findings.

A range of associated local data, including the *Ross Trust: school readiness in Broadmeadows report*, the *Best Start three-year-old parent surveys* and the *Australian Early Development Index*, has been included in this report to further describe progress towards outcomes for parents and children.

A number of local reports of activities and strategies have been produced in the period 2006–09. These reports have contributed to local evidence and have been a valuable resource for this evaluation. The reports include: *Setting the hubs humming documents*, *Rising stars: supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness* and *the Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report*. These reports have contributed to this final report to document progress of the Hume/Broadmeadows CfC initiative up until June 2009. The local reports and resources produced through the CfC program are listed in the achievements section of this report.

The evaluation also included two additional key tasks aimed at measuring change in the domains of partnership efficacy and outcomes for families and children. A review of community partners was undertaken by CCCH using the Partnership self-assessment tool questionnaire (Centre for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health, 2007) and conducted with members of the Hume Early Years Partnership in 2006 and 2009. This review is reported in the community outcome *Health, education and community services have strong links around early-years services*.

Three rounds of a site-wide survey of parents (the service users study) were undertaken between 2006 and 2009. The service users study was developed by the Social Policy Research Centre for the National Evaluation of the Stranger Families and Communities Strategy. The tool was modified slightly for local use. The outcome of this survey is reported in the family outcome *Families are socially connected to and supported by the community*.

5. Documenting progress towards outcomes

Table 4 lists the expected outcomes of Hume/Broadmeadows CfC and indicates which activities contributed to each of the outcomes.



Table 4. Progress towards outcomes by activities

	Setting the Hubs Humming: Inclusive meeting places for family engagement	Playgroups Rule OK!	Connecting Dots and Neurons: Promoting Health and Well-being	We are ALL community: Parents and professionals working together for the community	Catching them ALL: Connecting the most vulnerable and isolated into the community
	Meadowbank Early Learning Centre Community Hub	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Building Cycles by	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Dallas Hub	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Social Interaction & Inclusion				
	Playgroups among CALD communities	✓		✓	✓
	Hume Playgroup Strengthening Project	✓		✓	✓
	Playgroup Enhancement Program	✓		✓	✓
	Community Links	✓		✓	✓
	Embedding the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program	✓		✓	✓
	DVD resource: Communicating with Babies and Toddlers			✓	✓
	Playgroups among CALD communities	✓		✓	✓
	Hume Playgroup Strengthening Project	✓		✓	✓
	Playgroup Enhancement Program	✓		✓	✓
	Community Links	✓		✓	✓
	Embedding the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program	✓		✓	✓
	DVD resource: Communicating with Babies and Toddlers			✓	✓
	Bilingual Storytelling in the Community	✓		✓	✓
	Working with Parents as Partners	✓		✓	✓
	Resource Distribution	✓		✓	✓
	DVD Resource: Cultural Perspectives on Childrens Services	✓		✓	✓
	Aboriginal Partnership Project	✓		✓	✓
	Confident Parenting in Challenging Times	✓		✓	✓
	Supporting and Learning from Parents with a Mental Illness	✓		✓	✓
Community Outcomes					
1. Health, education and community services have strong links around early years issues	✓				✓
2. Local hubs have strong links with the community through local participation	✓				✓
3. Community leaders/ playgroup facilitators (parents) are skilled and connected to each other		✓		✓	
4. Early years services communicate effectively with parents	✓			✓	
Family Outcomes					
5. Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children	✓			✓	✓
6. Families are socially connected to and supported by their community	✓			✓	✓
7. Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge	✓			✓	✓
8. Families with complex needs participate in early years services					✓
Child Outcomes					
9. Children have developed language, literacy, social and emotional skills and are ready/ prepared for school	✓				✓



National evaluation findings

The local evaluation is closely linked to the national evaluation of CfC. The national evaluation was carried out by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales and the Australian Institute of Family Studies using the Stronger Families in Australia (SFIA) study to evaluate the impact of CfC. National evaluation data was collected from 2004–08 and reported at a national aggregate level for all 45 sites in 2009. A summary of the findings are presented below. Further information is available at <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au>.

The national evaluation aimed to measure progress towards four national priority areas:

- healthy young families
- supporting families and parents
- early learning and care
- child-friendly communities.

The national evaluation study was based on a three-wave longitudinal study of 2,202 families living in 10 communities where five sites had a CfC program and the other five sites did not have a CfC program and so were selected as control or contrast sites.

The findings presented small but statistically significant evidence that CfC had positive impacts on outcomes for children, families and communities. The positive impacts were strongest in the *Supporting families and parents* and *Child-friendly communities* priority areas. This was related to the high proportion of CfC activities which aimed to support parenting (one in five or 22%) and child-friendly communities (24%; Flaxman et al., 2009).

Positive findings and trends

Findings on parenting

The national evaluation findings provide evidence to support the proposition that CfC has assisted and supported families with young children. Parents who participated in the study reported less hostile or less harsh parenting practices. The findings also confirmed that parents were more effective in their parenting roles, suggesting that CfC activities have contributed to increased parenting confidence.

Findings on children

While the study found relatively few effects of CfC programs on child outcomes (early learning and care), statistical significance was found in children's perceptive vocabulary achievement and verbal ability. It was observed that children who participated in CfC activities (such as playgroups) and/or to the programs their parents attended made considerable gains in their cognitive development. The positive effect of CfC programs on children's early literacy skills is critical for their literacy success in school.

There were also positive significant effects of CfC on children from 'not hard to reach' groups, reporting fewer emotional and behavioural problems.

Findings on community

There were significant findings on community-based outcomes in three areas: employment, participation in community-service activities, and social cohesion.

It appears that CfC had an effect on reducing joblessness, as the study found fewer children living in jobless households. This has been linked to increased employment of mothers, suggesting that their increased community engagement and participation in CfC activities assisted them to develop strong networks of relationships, leading them to employment opportunities.

The national findings indicated that more families engaged and participated in community-service activities such as volunteering and had higher levels of social cohesion in their community. This was particularly seen in mothers with low education (Year 10 or less) and low-income families. Evidence around increased participation and increased social cohesion suggests that CfC activities contributed to improve communities for young children and their families.

Findings on service coordination

There were positive trends for having service needs met for hard-to-reach families, households with mothers with low education (Year 10 or less) and low-income households. The findings indicated an increase in the number, focus, capacity and reach of services in the 45 CfC communities in terms of access, service coordination, innovation and delivery.

Negative findings and trends

The national evaluation reported significant negative findings in two priority areas: *Supporting families and parents* and *Health of young families*.

There was some evidence suggesting that CfC had a negative impact on the general health and mental health of mothers with low education. Similarly, there were negative findings reported on the physical health of children with mothers with low education. The negative effects of CfC on parental and child health is explained by CfC activities having raised parent awareness of health and children's development, through their contact with health professionals and others, which may then lead them to recognise undiagnosed conditions or child developmental issues.

While the findings presented positive trends around the service needs of 'hard to reach' groups being met, service needs were significantly less likely to be met for parents from 'not hard to reach' groups. The evaluation report suggested that the cause of this trend may be due to CfC engaging families who were not accessing services previously.



3 Local Strategies

Five strategies were developed from the evidence base of effective interventions, local professionals and community expertise gathered from the original community consultation. These strategies have been continued for the life of the program to date. Each of the 35 activities conducted by CfC in Broadmeadows is included in one of the five strategies. Activities within strategies worked together as working parties of the larger partnership group.

Each CfC strategy and its activities relates to one of the five national priority areas to improve outcomes for children and their families. The strategies and national priority areas were:

Setting the hubs humming – early learning and care

Playgroups rule ok! – supporting families and parents

Connecting the dots and neurons – healthy young families

We are ALL community – child-friendly communities

Catching them ALL – family and children's services work effectively as a system

Strategy 1: Setting the hubs humming



Families participating in Hub activities

Strategy overview

This strategy aims to contribute to a greater sense of belonging for children and families, local services and the community as a whole. The hubs established are dynamic child and family services set within a universal early-years framework and offer a responsive range of activities to meet the diverse needs of the community. The strategy draws on research findings which demonstrate that high-needs children and families benefit from community partnerships in early childhood that mobilise resources at a local level, to better meet young children's needs (CCCH & Good Beginnings Australia, 2003; Katz & Valentine, 2007). Community hubs bring essential elements of existing services, including preschool, playgroups, primary school, childcare programs, staff and expertise, into an integrated model.

There have been numerous calls for schools to become less isolated and more closely connected with the communities to which their students belong (Edgar, 2001; Hiatt-Michael, 2003). In Broadmeadows over the last four years, local early-years service collaboration has improved access to services and increased the number of programs offered to families.

The Broadmeadows site has a range of local community facilities and centres that act as community learning hubs. Services delivered by Hume City Council and primary schools are already co-located in each of the six suburbs of the Broadmeadows site. Primary schools have indicated an interest in engaging with the parents of younger children. There remains significant potential to make local facilities more active and develop 'humming hubs' for the community through joint planning, cross-referral, sharing of resources and information, and co-location of activities, which involve community members in these sites. The key reference for activities in this strategy is the Breaking cycles, building futures report (Carbone et al., 2004). Learnings from this strategy also inform the work of the global learning strategy of Hume City Council promoting lifelong learning, and the primary schools redevelopment in Broadmeadows.

Activities funded under this strategy have an early-learning, language and literacy focus. Most involve bilingual workers, opening up communication to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) parents (particularly Arabic- and Turkish-speaking) and promoting the benefits of early-childhood programs. These workers are also able to advise service providers about how to ensure existing programs are culturally relevant and inclusive of all parents. Many of the activities from other local strategies, in particular Connecting dots and neurons and Playgroups rule ok!, will be delivered within the community hubs, thus meeting the needs of parents and families within the neighbourhood.

Activities funded under this strategy included:

Jacana Juniors (Jacana Primary School – activity completed June 2007)

This activity provided a playgroup and developed leadership training for parent volunteers. The activity was enhanced through cross-cultural materials, inclusion in the playgroup network and participating in the Sing and Grow or Parent-Child Mother Goose programs.

In 2009, as part of the Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration Project, Jacana Primary School amalgamated with Meadow Fair North Primary School and is now part of Broadmeadows Valley Primary School.

Meadows Early Learning Centre – linking hubs (Meadows Primary School – previously known as Meadowbank Primary School)

This activity builds on existing programs to further strengthen links between families, community groups and support services. It relies on on-site partnership arrangements with local agencies, parents and volunteers to meet the individual needs of families attending. Family information and developmental programs (such as playgroups, Parent-Child Mother Goose program and kinder movement program) have been delivered on-site at Meadows Primary School. The program encourages the involvement of children who may not otherwise have participated in a formal learning program and links families with a range of relevant services.



The hub operates services as a means of early intervention to address barriers for isolated and CALD families to more actively and fully support their child's lifelong learning opportunities. In addition, the program creates a stepping stone to broaden the social networks for families and initiates links to other social support services.

Outside the school gates (2007) by Dr Deborah Warr from the University of Melbourne documents the innovative model used within the MELC and has informed the work of the hub strategy.

Breaking Cycles by Building Community Hubs (*Brotherhood of St Laurence*)

This activity established locations or precincts as neighbourhood hubs. The activity supports service integration across three hub sites (Meadow Fair North, Campbellfield and Coolaroo) which are actively engaged in networking and combined service delivery of activities such as open days for families and children. The basis of this work is engaging key players, including schools, kindergartens and maternal and child health centres, to work collaboratively.

The activity calls for staff and services to reflect on their approach and align new strategies with an inclusive practices framework. This activity documented the learnings of this model *Setting the hubs humming – working together for children and their families within the Hubs Strategy Group*. In 2009, the next documentation of this model *Keeping the hubs humming – tuning into neighbourhoods* was published to add to the initial learnings and share the practice wisdom.

In 2008, this activity was acknowledged as a Promising Practice Profile by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/CfC_breaking_the_cycle.html).

Meadow Heights Language and Literacy Program (*Hume Global Learning Centre – activity completed July 2007*)

This activity used bilingual workers at Visy Cares Learning Centre hub to work in partnership with existing services to provide a language and literacy program to Arabic- and Turkish-speaking families. The programs provided stepping stones for new parents and families with young children to access services and engage with their local community.

Broadmeadows Early Years Program (*Hume City Council – activity completed December 2007*)

This weekly activity program increased participation of three-year-old children from CALD families in formal early learning. The activity supported a smooth transition to preschool and primary school for participating children and their families. The program also assisted families to connect with each other and services in the area.

Dallas Hub (*Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten*)

This project builds on the Early years language and literacy enrichment program, formerly under the auspice of Upfield Primary School (project completed June 2007).

The Dallas hub strengthens links between families, community groups and children. The project employs a part-time coordinator to develop additional activities and coordinate services within the hub precinct of Dallas/Upfield. The coordinator works with schools, parents and early-years service providers to develop a range of early-years activities for the precinct.

The project also employed a part-time speech pathologist to implement the language and literacy program for children at kindergarten and their parents. This aimed to improve parents' skills and capacity in developing their children's oral language skills, by using oral language and literacy kits developed by the program to reinforce learning in home environments.

Social Interaction and Inclusion (*Broad Insight Group – activity completed June 2009*)

This activity developed the Let's play together resource, which promotes social inclusion of young children (3–6 years) from diverse backgrounds and levels of ability in community activities such as kindergarten, childcare, community groups and at home with friends and family. This resource is especially appropriate for use in a community setting and so forms part of the hub strategy.

The resource is comprised of five different kits (building and construction; pretend play; books and pictures; music, dance and drama; games) filled with activities and equipment that have been proven for promoting social play. The resource also contains an Ideas book (in English, Turkish and Arabic) to assist families and services to make their own social play resources.

Strategy 2: Playgroups rule ok!



Creative Play at Playgroup

Strategy overview

This strategy aimed to meet the need identified by parents in the 2005 consultation to provide informal parenting support, information about services and a vehicle for increasing socialisation of parents and children.

Playgroups support parents by offering an informal, non-stigmatising environment for the development and practice of parenting skills (Plowman, 2004). They are also a venue for the provision of a wide range of information and education for parents. Sure Start (Sure Start



Unit) and initiatives in Canada and the United States indicate that local, community-based initiatives are attractive to families and sustainable in that they provide the ability to increase parents' knowledge and skills around parenting, communication and play. In addition, there is extensive evidence that playgroups are a way of enhancing early child social, emotional and cognitive development before school (Plowman, 2003; Sneddon & Haynes, 2003; Yuksel & Turner, 2008).

In Victoria, playgroups are part of the early-childhood landscape and are becoming more widely recognised within the early-years service system as a way to link newly-arrived, socially-isolated and marginalised families to universal services and primary schools. In 2009 there are more than 116 playgroups running each week in the City of Hume.

The strategy is an important universal linkage point within the early-years service system in Broadmeadows for both vulnerable families and those who may not access mainstream services. In this site, 41 playgroups are facilitated playgroups. Facilitated playgroups generally have an open and changing membership and are led by a designated facilitator who provides structure and direction to the group. Playgroup facilitators are becoming key workers in the early-years services system and are an important source of referral, education and support for parents (Dadich, 2008).

The Victorian Department of Human Services' Best Start program has also funded playgroup development in Broadmeadows, in addition to the CfC funding. The Playgroups rule ok! strategy works closely with the City of Hume to ensure the sustainability of playgroup activity across the local government area.

Activities funded under this strategy included:

Playgroups for Parenting among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups VICSEG New Futures Training)

This activity provides six supported playgroups that target Lebanese, Iraqi (Shi'ite and Assyrian/Chaldean), Samoan, Vietnamese and Turkish (and has previously included Chinese and Somali) communities. The activity aims to engage a greater range of local early-childhood professionals with ongoing playgroup programs, which in turn encourages a greater level of contact between key services and families from diverse backgrounds.

Playgroup sessions take place weekly during school terms for up to two hours. The activity provides opportunities to each group for some excursion/enrichment activities, such as storytime at the library, Romp and stomp at the Museum and visits to the Zoo or Children's farm, as well as participation in the National Playgroup and Children's Week activities each year.

Hume Playgroup Strengthening Project (Banksia Gardens Community Centre)

This activity is implemented through a community partnership of local agencies including the Neighbourhood House network, mainstream and CALD specific agencies. The activity seeks to improve service coordination and takes up a collaborative approach to reshape, enhance and add value to the early-childhood service system.

The activity employs a community development worker to coordinate all playgroups in Hume, regularly update the playgroup database, incorporate speech and language strategies into playgroups, train and support playgroup facilitators, and link universal service providers into playgroups. The project has helped establish playgroups in local primary schools to complement existing resources and has developed and resourced a playgroup facilitators network.

The activity has increased the number of playgroup sessions from 55 in 2005 to over 116 sessions in 2009 across the City of Hume with approximately 1500 children involved each week.

Playgroup Enhancement Program (Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups VICSEG New Futures Training)

This activity adds value to existing playgroups by providing a physical activity program. Kinder moves for parents and children to develop and enhance their confidence, motor, emotional and social skills. Physical activity sessions are conducted on a weekly basis in three hub sites including a new hub each term.

The activity seeks to develop culturally appropriate training and support materials for playgroup facilitators and parents, focusing on developmental milestones and behaviour management. The project developed a physical activity resource kit for parents and playgroup leaders. The kits include a number of materials to assist with active play including: parachutes to run with, jump and hide under; hula-hoops in assorted colours to twirl; balls in red, green, purple and yellow to throw, catch, kick and chase; all contain the physical development DVD *Finding their feet* which features local families talking about using the kit to learn physical skills.



Strategy 3: Connecting dots and neurons



Connecting parents and toddlers

Strategy overview

This strategy aimed to promote situations where services and parents work together to enhance the development and wellbeing of children. The activities within this strategy focused on prevention and early intervention. Evidence shows that the involvement of community members in health-promotion activities creates more effective outcomes (Llewellyn-Jones, 2001). This is particularly true in early childhood, where the role of parents is pivotal to the health and wellbeing of children. Within this strategy, professionals were encouraged to understand the needs of families relating to their child's development, and accept and work with the agenda set by the community. Therefore it was considered vital to this strategy that parents were provided with the information and support necessary to prevent and/or address any issues that impact on the health and development of children in Broadmeadows.

What happens to children in the early years has consequences right through the course of their lives. The evidence shows that the most effective time to intervene is early childhood, including the antenatal period (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This strategy, *Connecting dots and neurons*, takes a preventative approach by targeting identified areas of need for babies and toddlers. It concentrates on culturally complex health and development issues, such as breastfeeding, that may require opportunities for sensitive discussion in places that are familiar and offers support to parents, for example, within a local childcare centre.

In Broadmeadows, parents and early-years professionals clearly indicated that health and language development were among the highest priorities for children in the site (CfC consultation, 2005). This strategy aims to encourage parents and professionals to develop shared understandings of the holistic needs of children. Early intervention and prevention strategies have been found to be particularly effective when delivered in a culturally responsive way (Department of Family and Community Services, 2004).

The activities funded under this strategy included:

Community links (*Dianella Community Health, previous auspice – Women's Community Links at Broadmeadows – Royal Women's Hospital*)

The activity provides four (two for Arabic and two for Turkish mothers) 10-week programs of post-natal education and support during early motherhood. The program comprises structured and unstructured sessions incorporating guest speakers providing information about parenting and children's issues, including healthy nutrition for mother and baby, breastfeeding, health and wellbeing, women's health, settling baby, child safety, child development, first aid, as well as services and resources within the local community. The program provides socialising, networking and sharing experiences and stories of early parenting with other mothers.

Early years language and literacy enrichment program (*Upfield Primary School – activity completed July 2007*)

This activity supported oral language and literacy enrichment through employment of a speech pathologist to work with small groups of parents and children in kindergarten, childcare and playgroups, to educate parents to support language development with their children. The program targeted families with children in the kindergartens in Upfield and Campbellfield.

In 2006, the program developed oral language and literacy kits with 23 themes including picnic time, shopping, clothes, animals of the wild, farm animals, sport, transport and food. Children learned not just names, but also actions, verbs and concepts of space and place, which are important parts of school assessments in the first year of school. The program encouraged parents to be their child's first teacher, in preparing them for school by practising words and concepts at home in both their first language and English.

In 2007, this activity was acknowledged as a Promising Practice Profile by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/CfC_eyll.html).

Together, we can make a difference (*Broad Insight Group – activity completed July 2007*)

This activity aimed to ensure that the service system works cooperatively to identify and support children with additional needs and their parents as early as possible. The activity worked collaboratively with early-years services to increase their commitment to the active involvement of all children and their parents into mainstream early-years services.

Childcare links (*Melbourne City Mission – activity completed December 2007*)

This activity provided information sessions to parents of children attending childcare centres and staff working in those centres. The activity aimed to increase knowledge and provide practical strategies to promote positive parent-child interactions and improve child health and development, as well as enhancing communication between parents and childcare services. Topics for information sessions included toilet training, encouraging healthy eating, school readiness and encouraging positive behaviour.



In 2007, this activity was acknowledged as a Promising Practice Profile by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/CfC_child_care_info_connect.html).

Developing physical independence (*Broad Insight – activity completed July 2007*)

This activity provided education for parents about toilet training children. It was an educational/prevention strategy facilitating open discussion of an often taboo, culturally sensitive subject and aimed to ensure that children are independent and confident in this important area. The activity provided group sessions, one-on-one consultations, educational resources including books, videos and toys and practical resources such as nappies and pull-ups.

Breastfeeding support for families (*Tweddle Child and Family Health Service – activity completed July 2007*)

This activity assisted mothers in establishing and maintaining breastfeeding through an outreach model including information and support. The activity employed a part-time lactation consultant/nurse who provided home visits and breastfeeding education to secondary students, ante- and post-natal women and playgroups.

ATSI antenatal and postnatal women's social support group (*Dianella Community Health Centre – activity completed December 2007*)

This activity provided a social support group for young women accessing antenatal and postnatal programs. The program aimed to achieve increased access to local health, education and welfare services and improved antenatal/postnatal experiences, knowledge and wellbeing for ATSI women and their families.

The program provided information sessions led by a range of local and state-funded allied health, social health, Indigenous health, maternal health and health promotion agencies. The program employed an ATSI young parent to coordinate the group and provided free transport.

Embedding the Parent-Child Mother Goose (*PCMG*) program (*Melbourne City Mission*)

The PCMG program teaches parents to communicate with their babies by singing and rhymes. Singing has been shown to calm babies. The program promotes strong bonds between children and parents. The PCMG program has expanded through recruiting and training local parents to be new facilitators.

The activity works with staff already trained in the PCMG program who are currently working across local initiatives and activities including playgroups, bilingual storytime, preschools, family support, maternal and child health, and early intervention. Many of these staff can run the program in community languages. In addition, the program provides ongoing support, training and supervision to the already established PCMG teachers/facilitators network.

Encouraging breast feeding in diverse communities (*Tweddle Child and Family Health Service – project completed June 2008*)

This activity aimed to work from foundations of an earlier CfC activity Breastfeeding support for families. In particular, it aimed to negotiate the transfer of a successful locally relevant service model to local government for ongoing benefits beyond the CfC funding period. It also sought to profile the service model that has been well received in a 'vulnerable community' through an international peer-reviewed journal. Both outcomes build on the local experience of a statewide breastfeeding support service, but the outputs will be independent of earlier work.

DVD resource for parents' skills and knowledge: Communicating with babies and toddlers (*Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups VICSEG New Futures Training – activity completed June 2009*)

This activity produced a DVD resource for parents, "Getting to know all about you", aiming to increase parents' understanding of the importance of voice, music, touch and movement for early brain development, bonding and emotion, and behaviour guidance for babies and toddlers. The DVD is translated into several community languages and will be used in community settings such as hospitals and libraries, as well by community service providers working with parents of young children.



Strategy 4: We are ALL community



Working together to enhance children's well-being

Strategy overview

The strategy identifies, celebrates and builds on local strengths and therefore encompasses a diverse range of project possibilities. This strategy aims to provide opportunities for community members and professionals to work together for the benefit of the community and especially that of children.

This strategy has the central goal of developing a more child – and family-centred community. It works to educate professionals to work more collaboratively with parents to develop the service system in ways that suit the needs of parents, children and families, rather than simply streamlining the delivery of services. To be effective, services need to build on the local strengths of early-childhood workers, parents and children, and be locally relevant and accessible to the community. Collaborative strategies are the most cost-effective means of promoting and enhancing development in children (CCCH, 2007).

Social capital has direct benefits for individuals and communities, including improved health and greater wellbeing according to self-reported survey measures, better care for children, lower crime rates, and improved government-regions or states with higher levels of trust (OECD, 2001). This strategy aims to explore and develop what family-centred practice means within the community.

Activities provide opportunities for community members to have their say, for professionals and community members to collaborate to develop community initiatives and for shared training for parents and professionals. The strategy works to enhance the delivery of services by responding to the informed priorities of parents, rather than service delivery being dictated by professionals.

The activities funded under this strategy include:

Parents as partners (*Migrant Resource Centre North-West – activity completed July 2007*)

This activity provided a training program for early-childhood professionals, including cultural competence, strengths-based approaches and working in partnership with parents.

CALD fathering (*Migrant Resource Centre North-West – activity completed June 2008*)

This activity promoted the value of fathers playing an active parenting role and provided opportunities for the fathers of young children to meet on a weekly basis. In 2006–07, the activity formed an Iraqi fathers' group and in 2008 an Assyrian/Chaldean fathers' group.

Developing local capacity (*Crossroads, Salvation Army – activity completed July 2007*)

This activity developed the skills and resources of emerging community leaders and community groups, to enable them to work independently within the community, particularly engaging with the Assyrian community. It assisted in the establishment of an Assyrian community support group.

Managing the money (*Migrant Resource Centre North-West – activity completed July 2007*)

This activity provided information and training to young and newly formed families on issues about the costs of raising children, basic budgeting and income support services for families. The activity provided information sessions to parents through the Assyrian/Chaldean, Arabic, Turkish, Chinese, Somali and Samoan playgroups and the Iraqi fathers' group.

Bilingual storytime in the community (*Hume Global Learning Village*)

The activity provides first-language (Turkish, Arabic, Sinhalese, Vietnamese and Assyrian) and cultural experiences to young children and their parents through storytelling. The program aims to engage CALD families in literacy and language activities and encourage parents who may not speak English to participate in sharing books and songs with their children. Songbooks in Arabic and Turkish have been developed to support the program, so that services, parents and children can use them to learn songs in the preschool programs and at home.

The project employed a community literacy and engagement officer in collaboration with Hume City Council preschool team leaders, maternal and child health coordinators and childcare services.

In 2008, this activity was acknowledged as a Promising Practice Profile by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (http://www.aifs.gov.au/cafca/ppp/profiles/CfC_bilingual_storytimes.html).



Working with parents as partners (*Broadmeadows UnitingCare – previous auspice Migrant Resource Centre North-West*)

The activity provides early-childhood professionals and others who work closely with families with relevant information, research and best-practice models to guide service planning and delivery. The activity held a two-day early-years conference in June 2008 for practitioners in the area and developed a website.

In 2008, the activity established a Parent Advisory Group (PAG). PAG members act as spokespeople from their community group/s and bring any issues to the advisory group that they would like to see addressed by the Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYPP). The PAG meets once each school term. Parents have been recruited from playgroups and HEYPP agencies. The PAG works to share information with parents about what programs are available and how to better meet the needs of children.

Parent participation (*Migrant Resource Centre North-West – activity completed June 2008*)

The activity produced 1000 high-quality Samoan/English songbooks. The songbooks are provided to local community leaders for distribution via a range of networks. Books were also made available to the library (Hume Global Learning Village), to bilingual storytellers, playgroup leaders and families with young children.

Resource distribution strategy (*Coolaroo South Primary School*)

This activity developed a resource centre for the distribution of materials developed and collected through the Hume Early Years Partnership. Resources for children, parents and professionals will be housed at a central point and distributed, returned and maintained by the school. Resources include, but are not limited to, language resource kits, playgroup resources, printed material and publications, and DVDs/CDs.

The activity has also developed additional language and literacy resources (8 sets of up to 22 kits per set). The kits aim to develop oral language, cognitive and communication skills for children in kindergartens through play-based activities. The kits include instructions for use in English, Turkish and Arabic.

DVD resource for professionals: Cultural perspectives on children's services (*Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups VICSEG New Futures Training – activity completed June 2009*)

This activity brought together parents, early-childhood staff and children's services in the City of Hume to make a DVD resource for professionals. The DVD *Catching the Rainbow: modelling cross-cultural practices with families* aims to assist services to develop programs that effectively engage families from diverse cultural backgrounds. The DVD is designed to be used as a staff professional-development tool and to inform program development and planning.

Strategy 5: Catching them ALL



Promoting children's strengths

Strategy overview

It is understood that all children, families and communities have enormous strengths and capabilities. Activities in this strategy aim to work with children, parents and families to recognise and build on these strengths.

This strategy recognises that some members of the community need more support and assistance than others. The National Reform Agenda for Early Childhood identified that the most vulnerable and isolated children in the community do not get a good start (Council of Australian Governments: National Reform Agenda, 2007). The strategy is designed to incorporate activities that address families and children with complex needs, with the aim of integrating participants into mainstream and community activities and developing their capacity to be active and contributing members of the local community. This strategy works collaboratively with relevant state and local government programs and projects.

The Broadmeadows site has many families who have multiple and complex needs. Those families are more likely to be linked into secondary or tertiary support services, including housing support, family support and emergency relief. This strategy aims to 'catch them all' by providing additional support where needed. Activities in this strategy are sensitive to the sometimes-intensive needs of families who may be in crisis or encountering a difficult transition, for example, newly-arrived immigrant families, families experiencing a housing crisis or families whose children are displaying challenging behaviours.



The strategy activities are:

Outreach support to isolated and newly arrived Arabic-speaking families (*Victorian Arabic Social Services – activity completed July 2007*)

The activity aimed to build the parenting skills and capacity of Arabic-speaking families who are isolated and newly arrived by providing outreach training and support to assist them with their parenting roles and connecting them with local services and resources. The activity ran mothers' groups which provided parents with information about the school system, early years and child development.

Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless (*Merri Outreach Support Service – activity completed June 2008*)

This activity aimed to improve access to and coordination of support services to homeless and 'at risk' families through a range of interventions that resulted in improved outcomes in early-childhood health, development and wellbeing through both outreach and playgroup activities.

The weekly playgroup provided opportunities for social connectedness at a time when vulnerable families would be otherwise isolated. The support network often provided families with renewed confidence and the capacity to request and search for other services in the community.

The outreach component of the project was particularly important in supporting the wellbeing of children. Through regular home visits, the worker engaged with families on the issues of child development and early-childhood health and wellbeing, and assisted families to access specialist services when needed.

Aboriginal partnership (*Broadmeadows UnitingCare – previous auspices Narana Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Care and Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency*)

This activity continues to build on the partnership with the Aboriginal community established by Best Start, by coordinating regular planning meetings of agencies active in Indigenous early-years activities. The partnership holds two ATSI family days per year to provide a fun day for families with their children to celebrate positive parent-child relationships and bring the community together.

Confident parenting in challenging times (*Orana Family Services*)

This activity aims to prevent the exclusion of children who are displaying challenging behaviours from preschool and childcare settings. It seeks to increase the ability of parents to reduce behavioural difficulties. The activity is delivered to parents through parenting programs running during each school term and secondary consultations with professionals.

The project conducts four confident parenting programs consisting of six sessions per term in English, Turkish, Vietnamese and Arabic. The program covers: being a responsive parent; encouraging positive attachment; promoting children's language and development; helping children appreciate rules; and managing tantrums, misbehaviour and problems. The project provides introductory sessions and booster sessions 2–4 weeks after the final session to follow up on how new parenting strategies are working and to offer further support and consolidate learnings from the program.

Supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness (*Anglicare*)

This activity provides service coordination, partnership and networking to facilitate sustainability for services which focus on the needs of families where parents have a mental illness. The activity has a practical element that allows parents and children to take part in social and emotional support to break down isolation and share problems and problem-solving strategies, while providing other opportunities for recreational activities and improving linkages to mainstream mental-health and community-based health services.

The activity developed a sustainable local network for families with parental mental illness, while simultaneously providing a joyful socialisation experience for children and their families through playgroups and social activities. The activity facilitated three specialist playgroups for families experiencing depression, anxiety or other mental illnesses and made referrals to other services as required. As with all other programs, early-years professionals also visited and provided information on a range of different topics.

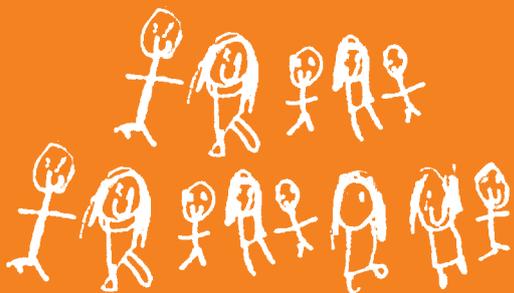
The activity documented the learnings of the program. The document "Rising stars: supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness" reports on the combined community-development and therapeutic approaches to engage a group of families with diagnosed mental illness from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Working in partnership for BOORIS in Hume (*Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency*)

This activity documented and presented the model of partnership and shared stories and ideas with other ATSI partnerships and groups. The activity also presented at the fifth Australian family strengths conference in Newcastle, NSW. The activity also set up a physical-activity group for ATSI families.

4.1

Outcomes for the community





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

Background

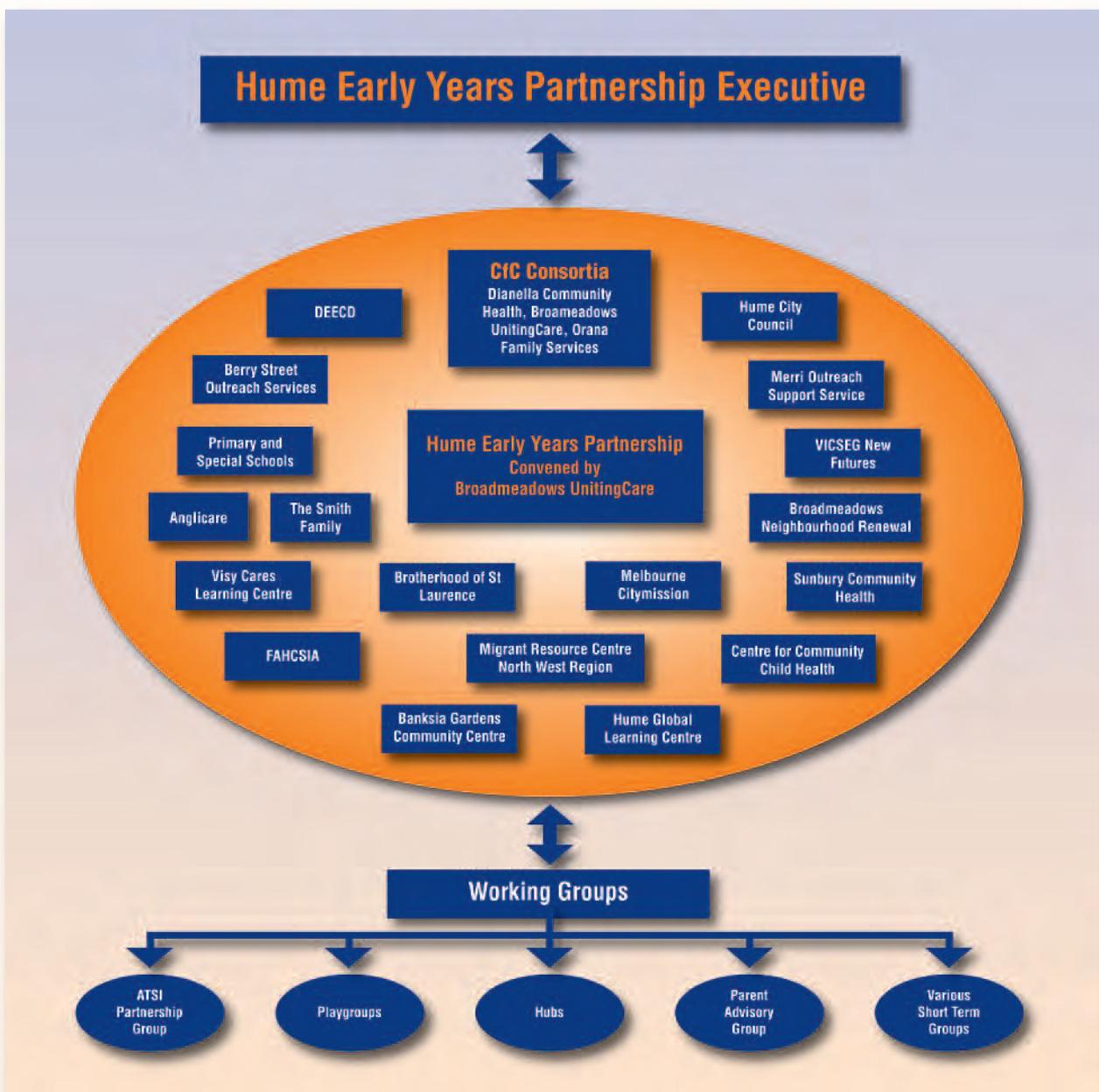
This outcome focuses on the strength and depth of local collaboration and partnerships across sectors to support families and children around early-years issues. The development of a community partnership or committee was a condition of the funding and accountability of the Best Start and CfC programs.

The Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYP) is the governance structure for CfC and for the Victorian Government-funded Best Start program

and has been operating for seven years beginning in 2003. The HEYP has also provided a structure to implement the latest national and state-level early-years initiatives and policies such as: the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development educational blueprint; Best Start action plan; and the Council of Australian Government (COAG) national early childhood development strategy.

The HEYP and its working groups and partner relationships are the primary vehicle to improve coordination and collaboration across the health, education and community services sectors in Hume. Figure 4 below outlines the partnership structure and its working groups.

Figure 4. The Hume Early Years Partnership and its working groups





The Hume/Broadmeadows community has a long standing commitment to collaborating with local agencies to reduce the impact of social disadvantage. Hume City Council promotes a community-wide focus on human rights, social justice and lifelong learning. There are many active professional networks. Alongside these strengths, there are the challenges of low incomes, poor housing and social isolation within a culturally diverse community.

Partnerships and collaboration are occurring between agencies at a local geographical area and at a neighbourhood level within the City of Hume. These include:

- the Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYP), its executive and its working groups (refer to Figure 4 above)
- professional networks such as the Hume Child and Family Services Network
- neighbourhood-specific networks such as Let's Connect in Broadmeadows and Coolaroo Child and Family Network.

Strategies related to this outcome

Health, education and community services *have strong links around early-years issues* was an expected outcome of all five of the following CfC strategies:

- Setting the hubs humming
- Playgroups rule ok!
- Connecting the dots and neurons
- We are ALL community
- Catching them ALL

Evidence relating to this outcome

A key motivator in bringing stakeholders together is the opportunity to work in ways that create solutions to problems that no single partner, acting alone, could achieve. Collaboration is an empowerment process and one that can encourage systems to change (Winer & Ray, 2004).

There is a continuum of development in partnership work that begins with linking and coordination between partners, develops into collaborative and finally into more integrated activities and programs across partner agencies. When community partnerships are working well, more effective community problem solving can occur, which offers considerable benefits for disadvantaged communities (Lasker et al., 2001).

Cross-sector partnership research suggests that broad-based membership is crucial to partnership success, with members including layers of workers within each organisation and representatives from the community affected by the interventions (Mattessich et al., 2001).

Different types of teamwork are required between agencies, including multi-disciplinary (health and education), interdisciplinary (working with child and family simultaneously) and transdisciplinary (across several disciplines where traditional roles are expanded with sharing of responsibilities, information and training; Winer & Ray, 2004).

The Best Start statewide evaluation report describes the concept of partnership synergy, highlighting that this way, partners are able to

obtain more accurate information, see the big picture, break new ground and understand the local context. The report states, “working in this way, members of the partnership can more effectively build on community assets, provide programs that are more tailored to local conditions, connect multiple services, programs, policies and sectors and attack problems from multiple vantage points simultaneously” (Dunt et al., 2006).

Programs that target the child and the parent have stronger outcomes for the child’s long-term development than those that focus on the child only (Homel et al., 2007).

Interim evaluation report findings

The interim local evaluation report 2007 highlighted how the level of engagement with the activities and partner agencies increased through regular meetings, networking, service coordination and collaboration.

The Playgroups rule ok! strategy reported how it had established and strengthened partnerships with over 75 agencies across the health, education and community services sectors. The report found that these linkages between agencies improved referral pathways, sharing of resources, partnerships in seeking funding and collaboration in jointly planning activities and events for families and children. Networking, relationship building and the benefits of working in partnership with other CfC activities, early-years services and other agencies were reported by all activities as a key approach to effectively working with families with young children around early-years issues.

The interim report also reviewed the partnership and collaboration between the community partner agencies who had received CfC funding. This review looked at the dynamics of relationships between the HEYP team and the community partners. Results of the survey suggested that community partners rated the team highly on the areas of effective communication, meetings and overall performance.

Community partners reported that through the strategy group meetings they had increased their awareness and knowledge of other agencies and the individuals who work within those agencies. This has led to stronger connections between community partners. Community partners reported that there were no feelings of competition between community partners and that there was a real sense of ‘who are we here for’, that is, parents and children. Another community partner reported that the level of collaboration with other agencies had shifted from “information sharing and occasional program management” to “more systemic service collaboration”.

Final report findings

The quantitative and qualitative data relating to this outcome is presented separately below, followed by a discussion of all the data in relation to outcome 1: *Health, education and community services have strong links around early-years issues*.

Findings are drawn from quantitative data from a survey of partnership members conducted in 2006 and repeated in 2009. In 2009, a focus group was conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health to draw out qualitative responses from partnership members. The second primary source of qualitative data is 194 journal entries from 10 project workers across all strategies.

4.1 Outcomes for the community



Partnership self-assessment survey

The partnership self-assessment tool was conducted with the HEYP in 2006 and 2009. All HEYP members were invited to participate in the survey and one response from each agency was requested. A focus group was conducted at the April 2009 HEYP meeting by the Centre for Community Child Health. In 2009, the HEYP consisted of 30 agencies and schools, with 21 partners active in attending meetings regularly. The number of member agencies of the HEYP remained fairly constant from 2006 to 2009, with some members withdrawing and others joining. Further members are to be recruited from 2009 to reflect the expanded whole-of-Hume focus of the partnership.

The partnership self-assessment survey is used in cross-sectoral health partnerships in Victoria and other CfC sites to assist community partnerships take action to improve their collaborative process. The survey covers nine key topics: synergy; leadership; efficiency; administration and management; non-financial resources; financial and other capital resources; decisionmaking; benefits and drawbacks of participating in the partnership; and satisfaction with participation (Centre for the Advancement of Collaborative Strategies in Health, 2007).

Findings of partnership self-assessment surveys and focus group

A total of 14 participants completed and returned the survey in 2006 (representing 67% of the active partnership membership). A total of 13 people completed and returned the survey in 2009 (representing 62%

of the active partnership membership) with a mix of participants from the health, education, early-childhood and community sectors including family support in each sample. The samples were not matched.

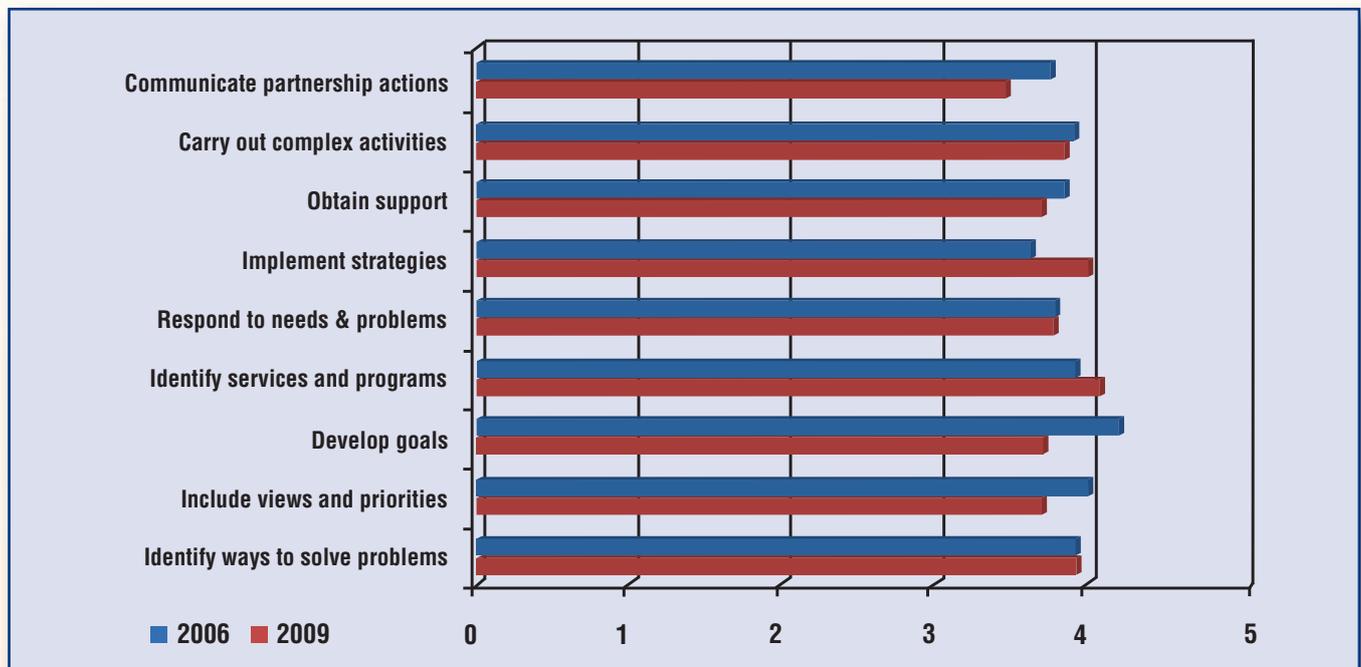
Overall, the findings from the partnership survey suggest that the partnership was successful in all of the nine key areas listed above, with the average rating for all questions being at least 3 (the mid-range of good/somewhat well) and the vast majority of average ratings being 4 (the upper-range of very good/very well). All nine areas presented consistent results across the two time points.

A breakdown of the findings according to the four most relevant topics (synergy, leadership, decisionmaking and satisfaction with the partnership) from the nine topics in the survey is presented below:

Synergy

In both years, in response to the question “By working together, how well are these partners able to identify new and creative ways to solve problems?” the average rating was ‘very well’. The average rates for “Communicating partnership actions to people in the community” and “How these actions will address problems that are important to them” fell from ‘very well’ in 2006 to ‘somewhat well’ in 2009. In 2009 the average rate for *Developing goals that are widely understood and supported among partners* was less than reported in 2006. In 2009, the average rate for *Implementing strategies that are most likely to work in the community* increased from that reported in 2006 (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5. Synergy



4.1 Outcomes for the community

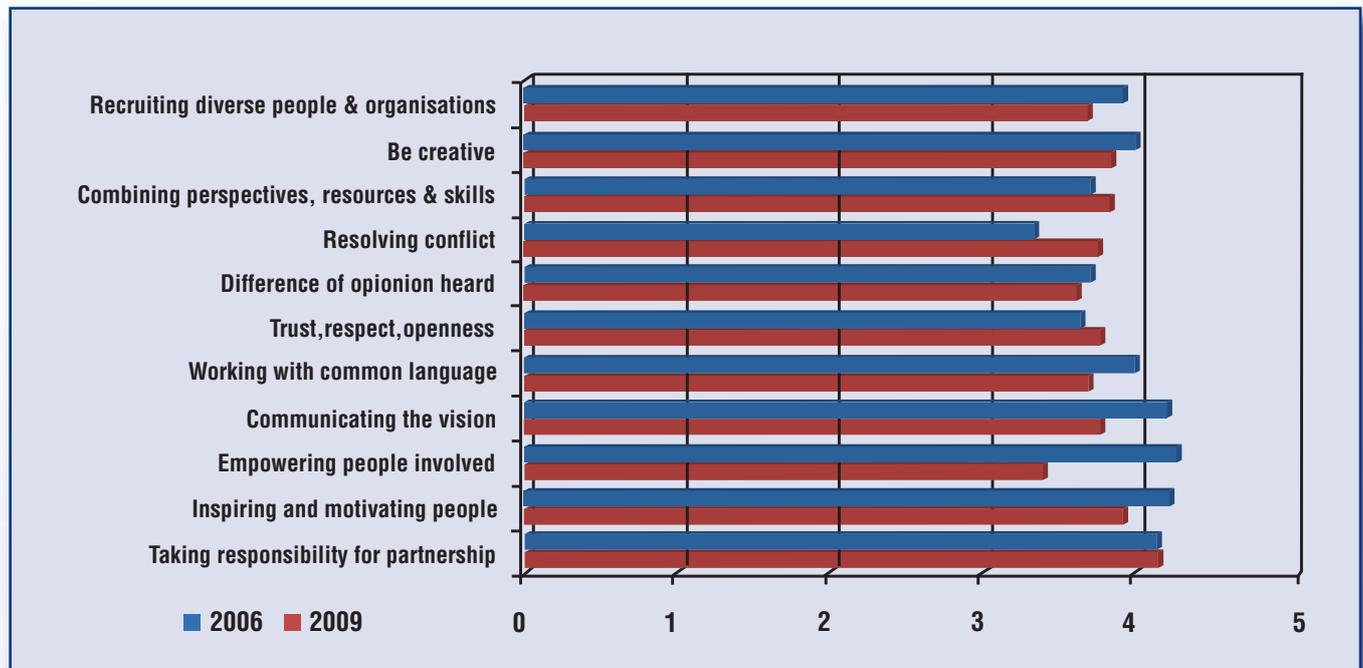


Leadership

In both years, when asked to rate the total effectiveness of the partnership's leadership, all responses relating to this aspect of the partnership – apart from two – were rated 'very good'. In 2009, the average rating for Empowering people involved fell from 'very good' to

'good'. This was the only rating that decreased, yet it is notable that this was the most highly rated aspect of leadership in 2006. The average rating for Resolving conflict was 'good' in 2006 and improved to 'very good' in 2009 (see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6. Leadership



Decision making

In both years, when asked about decision making processes in the partnership, the average rating for How comfortable are you with the way decisions are made? was 'very comfortable'. The average rating for How often do you support the decisions made by the partnership? was 'most of the time'. The average rating for How often do you feel left out of the decisionmaking process? was 'almost none of the time'. There was general consistency of the ratings between the two survey dates.

Satisfaction with participation

The satisfaction with participation rates remained constant over both years. When asked to rate their satisfaction with the partnership, the majority for each aspect of respondents' satisfaction was 'mostly satisfied.'

Conclusions: partnership survey

The survey findings suggest that the partnership has been successful and has been maintaining a consistent effort over the last two years of operation. The aspects of the partnership that require partners to effectively work together, including synergy and decisionmaking, rated highly among respondents in both surveys. Those aspects of the partnership that sustain members over time and provide the foundation for the partnership including leadership also rated well.

Qualitative findings

A partnership focus group was conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health with nine HEYP members at a partnership meeting in April 2009; facilitators were not present. Participants represented a cross-sectoral spread across the education, early-childhood and community and health sectors.

Emerging improvements for the early-years service system in Hume

Positive changes in the way agencies work together were grouped along the following common themes:

- a united approach, working to the same outcomes
- relationships are based on goodwill and considerable trust and respect
- more established relationships are able to get things done quickly
- philosophy of welcome to new partners and the belief that HEYP is not exclusive
- coming together to meet the needs of families and communities more effectively and assisting with cross-agency referral
- reaching out to new families through major events during the year

4.1 Outcomes for the community



- a better understanding and exposure of service gaps that need to be addressed
- community agencies working more effectively with schools
- expanding the influence of HEYP to extended networks across Hume and Victoria.

Meeting community needs more effectively

We are able to meet families' needs through cross-agency referral during those events (e.g. National Playgroup day); because we (the workers) know each other, we can introduce families to other organisations which means that families get direct contact/introduction to the service, rather than having to approach them themselves.

Families have developed connectedness – this is one of our greatest outcomes. Connectedness to each other and to their own community; if they relocate within the area they don't 'get lost', they maintain that connectedness.

Huge trust and respect within the partnership now that we know we're all working towards the same outcomes.

By working together – and with the level of trust generated within the Partnership – organisations can work out where the gaps are in the community. During this process, all services shared information about kinder participation. Six years ago, there would not have been that trust and that sharing of information.

Improvements in social inclusion

An important and often unstated aim of service coordination is to help common understanding so as to work for the benefit of the same community or client group. The focus group responses to many questions illustrated the importance of working for the benefit of the community. Positive outcomes were developing as a result of a message of inclusion for all. A welcoming philosophy was a consistent approach in all community hubs and other meeting places, in activities that encouraged bilingualism and in breaking down cultural barriers and promoting social cohesion: This philosophy of welcome was offered to parents coming into professional spaces such as the library or school and was also offered to new partners at partnership meetings.

The Partnership has a 'philosophy' of welcoming, it is not exclusive. There are groups that are multicultural and multilingual e.g. international playgroup is facilitated by Vietnamese-speaking worker, with 10 languages spoken in the group; "when we come to playgroup we speak the same language." These groups break down cultural barriers.

Improvements in sharing of staff and pooling of resources at a neighbourhood level

Partners encouraged staff to work together on programs to improve community engagement and encourage agency resources to be shared.

Bilingual workers can come across to the playgroup/kinder from the school when a need arises for a family. The families don't have to go anywhere to get that help; the help comes to them on site.

Resources that have been produced through the Partnership – this could not have been achieved as an individual effort. The resources are available to the families who really need them and information was translated. Those resources are available to all HEYP organisations to share.

Families were able to find out about and to attend multiple programs that offered support and these were provided by many partners (for example, one family attends Mother Goose, the Parenting program and the Playgroup at the hub.)

Drawbacks for partners

Common themes in relation to drawbacks are the time it takes to partner successfully, the demands of the evaluation in a bilingual community, short-term funding arrangements and high expectations creating more pressure for staff. HEYP is also encouraged to be more strategic, with its expansion to a whole-of-Hume focus and the executive structure.

Bilingual workers sit with parents to do the surveys – this is great because we get feedback but there are drawbacks as well – it takes time away from our core business.

Now that the Partnership has grown, there needs to be clearer identification of decision making processes – how is the Exec going to be accountable to the Partnership, how is the Partnership going to be accountable to the Exec? It's about mutual accountability and a shared vision.

Partnership functioning

One of the strengths of the Partnership was the length of involvement and commitment of key players and their extended networks. These networks can share information and collaborate at all levels within their agencies, expanding out across the City of Hume, the northern region and Victoria. Partners were concerned that this commitment needs to be maintained to ensure expertise is not lost.

Representatives who attend the partnership meetings take what they have learned back to their individual organisations – other staff at those organisations benefit from that representative's involvement e.g. taking information back to school and sharing that information with school staff. There is the network of the partnership, but there are also extended networks beyond the partnership.

Playgroup coordinator is receiving calls from other areas outside of Hume (i.e. – Geelong, Footscray) about facilitated playgroups. Parents are particularly interested in language-specific playgroups (e.g. Turkish-speaking playgroups) – that are not available in other areas.

Analysis of professional journals

The following findings present qualitative results from the agency reports and professional journals required by the CiC program. For the purpose of this analysis, each data source, including professional journals, case studies and final activity reports, was analysed in order to determine common themes arising from two or more data sources.

4.1 Outcomes for the community



Professional journals were completed by 10 project workers. The majority of the professional journals were completed in 2008. A total of 194 journal entries from all five strategies were analysed in order to determine the key themes emerging from the data. Only the sections of the journals that related specifically to the outcome (Health, education and community services have strong links around early-years issues) have been included in this analysis.

Local ownership and responsiveness to make improvements

Each community hub site took ownership and responsibility for organising activities and new programs on their sites in response to parents' identified needs. CfC funding was one part of these resources and offered leadership, regular meetings and assistance through the local evaluation to review how activities were working and to clarify the enabling and limiting factors in their development.

Many agencies came to our site where parents were present, rather than parents having to travel to access programs. VICSEG set up the Kinder Moves program at community hub sites as parents were already involved and were interested in a physical activity program.

(professional journal 2008)

There were a number of initial CfC program concerns that were addressed through partners offering feedback to each other. In the beginning, many parents did not actively participate with their children in activities. As time progressed, ways of encouraging parent participation were highlighted. Partners have shown interest in trialling other new programs in this way and gaining feedback to improve program design.

Schools and agencies provided significant financial support for activities as part of this responsiveness and were able to mobilise resources (e.g. family days, local neighbourhood events, expand the days playgroups were offered) to be responsive to local needs.

Coordination of mentoring and support for workers

There were many references to the mentoring, support and recognition offered to workers by more experienced workers or those with a longer history in the local area. Professionals were assisted in their understanding of the local community at network meetings. For example, the Coolaroo Child and Family Network operated from the Coolaroo hub and brought together MCH and preschool teachers from local council sites, some of whom were new to the area.

Coordination of support for families in their neighbourhood

Parents saw community hubs as a place to find out information about services such as emergency housing, domestic violence, legal aid and Centrelink (e.g. Dallas introduced a 'come and chat' session at the hub so that any parents involved in the hub could continue to use it as a source of information-sharing about support agencies. This led to the hub's email address being offered to parents. Feedback from parents was included in many professional journals.



Children enjoying themselves in an activity

They love that all the cultures can come learn and celebrate together.

We now have a support network, parents have exchanged mobile numbers.

Feeling great that I know I have somewhere to come when I need help.

(professional journals 2008)

Trust and partnership with families

Many community partners emphasised the importance of gaining the trust of parents as the first step in an early intervention response. All programs are encouraged to identify and address children and family needs earlier.

When parents feel more comfortable in the activity space, we bring professionals in and Mum can decide if she wants to take up on a referral. Workers can conduct incidental assessments within the playgroup setting once trust has been established.

Families are more willing to complete forms to gain assistance for their child. In the past it took until grade 5 for parents to sign a permission slip for an assessment – after attending activities they were not as afraid to complete forms and understood that something positive may come out the assessment.

Families/parents become more comfortable with (and less intimidated by) professionals who may be able to assist them e.g. speech pathologist (SP) in Dallas is always available for at least some of playgroup time. The parents already know SP, see her working with other families, comfortable for family to talk with her – less daunting for parents, less confrontational and an attitude of "we're doing this together".

Influence on the home learning environment

It is now more widely understood that quality early-years programs in disadvantaged areas can influence the home learning environment for children. Evidence of this influence was identified in reports on speech and language development in the playgroups and in the adult education programs offered in hubs.



Parents in the playgroup become 'experts' – and can tell other parents about what they did at home and how the language kits are working for them.

Pathways for families were established – parents started nervously attending programs for their child and then found out where they wanted to go for their own learning and development. It was not just about the child progressing, but also about the parent developing skills that can be of long-term benefit for the child. Adult-education classes offered included: computer literacy; Cert. 2 in community services; Cert. 3 in childcare.

What has been achieved by the HEYP structure that links health, education and community sectors?

Agencies as partners have emphasised local ownership and responsiveness, coordination of mentoring and support for workers, coordination of support for families in their neighbourhood, an emerging early intervention response and capacity to influence the home learning environment.

Outcome summary

Overall, the three sources of data have provided numerous examples of how outcome 1 has been achieved. The Hume Early Years Partnership offers a coordination role, expanding linkages across sectors and across organisations for young children and their families. HEYP continues to have vision; strong connections and relationships between agencies that made it possible to take actions quickly. Journals documented multiple experiences of working together across agencies to improve programs and provide feedback about program effectiveness. Community ownership of projects and activities developed and responsiveness to local needs increased.

Common themes relating to how collaboration is assisting in providing positive outcomes for families and children were found across focus groups and professional journals. They included: connectedness; inclusion for all; joint planning and resourcing; greater ability to intervene early; and influence on the home learning environment. Overall, the partnership found that working in a collaborative and respectful trusting way with other professionals, especially the Hume Early Years Partnership, paralleled their ability to work with community members in the same way.

Drawbacks to participation in the HEYP and associated collaboration included the time commitment required, the communication needs of a bilingual community and the high expectations of workers. In identifying challenges for the future, respondents commented that the partnership had not yet reached its potential in terms of joint planning and collaboration. A significant example of how shared leadership and planning can improve outcomes for children and families has been the success of shared advocacy to ensure that preschools and community meeting spaces were included as part of the Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration program. While most HEYP activities are still at the service coordination and collaboration level, community partners are demonstrating interest in joint planning and further service integration into 2010.

Local hubs have strong links with the community through local participation

Background

Early-years hubs in Broadmeadows are planned around local needs. Hubs can be a single location or a network of places working together to offer programs, services and events to families and children. The hubs work by facilitating the connections between universal services such as schools, kindergartens, maternal and child health and other relevant agencies and professionals. The collaboration aims to establish lasting relationships between families and the services they use throughout the course of their early years. The hubs seek to build on the existing relationships with and links into the community.

A number of early-years services are now co-located on, or next door to, primary-school sites in Broadmeadows. The creation of local hubs in school settings provides families with opportunities to access early-years services and informal family support at a neighbourhood level.

In Hume, there are five hub projects operating and they are diverse in delivery and approach. The sites are located in primary schools. The key sites are:

- Campbellfield: Campbellfield Heights Primary School and Hume City Council Preschool
- Broadmeadows: Broadmeadows Valley Primary School (formerly Jacana Primary School, Broadmeadows West and Meadow Fair North Primary School which amalgamated in 2009) and Hume City Council Meadow Fair North preschool
- Broadmeadows: Meadows Primary School and Early Learning Centre (formerly known as Meadowbank Primary School and Early Learning Centre)
- Coolaroo: Coolaroo South Primary School and Kindergarten
- Dallas: Dallas Primary School and Kindergarten.

Community liaison positions were established and funded by some schools to build stronger links with their local communities and to increase participation of families as a result of their CfC involvement. Each of the hubs sites, except Coolaroo South Primary School and Kindergarten and Meadows Early Learning Centre, employed community liaison officers; Coolaroo South and Meadows Primary Schools had pre-existing positions. Of the five positions, four are held by bilingual workers fluent in the most common community language. Bilingual/bicultural staff have made a significant difference to the level of community engagement. The work of community liaison officers has been crucial to developing new, more culturally relevant programs and activities that local parents and children want to attend.

Evidence

Community hubs offer a new way of working with families, with agencies and schools working collaboratively. There is considerable interest in strengthening the role of schools as a hub within the community and as a natural focus point for coordination of the

4.1 Outcomes for the community



provision of services to children and their families (Best Start Broadmeadows action plan, 2006).

The Sure Start model of community hubs in schools is able to address disadvantage by offering integrated programs for families with young children within a 'one-stop shop' approach (Valentine et al., 2007).

Schools offer a public space where the whole community can be engaged. Community partnerships with schools can mobilise the community before school entry (West-Burnham et al., 2007).

Communities have a critical impact on child development and wellbeing. Building community capacity and child- and family-friendly communities will help achieve the outcomes and vision for children (COAG, 2009:17).

Improved outcomes for children were occurring where there was a better coordinated local system of early childhood services: National CfC Evaluation report (COAG, 2009: 12).

Two local reports documented the progress of increasing participation in hubs (*Setting the hubs humming: working together for children and their families 2007; Keeping the hubs humming: tuning into neighbourhoods 2009*).

Strategies related to this outcome

Local hubs have strong links with the community through local participation is an expected outcome of the **Setting the hubs humming strategy**.

Interim evaluation report findings

The following elements were found to contribute to joint planning and collaboration within hubs and the overall process of hub formation in the 2007 interim evaluation report. The report indicated that existing hubs had been strengthened in the following ways:

- sharing resources between partner agencies has increased community engagement
- improved service coordination and collaboration at each site
- improved access for families because of the employment of bilingual workers and
- shared professional development opportunities for project workers.

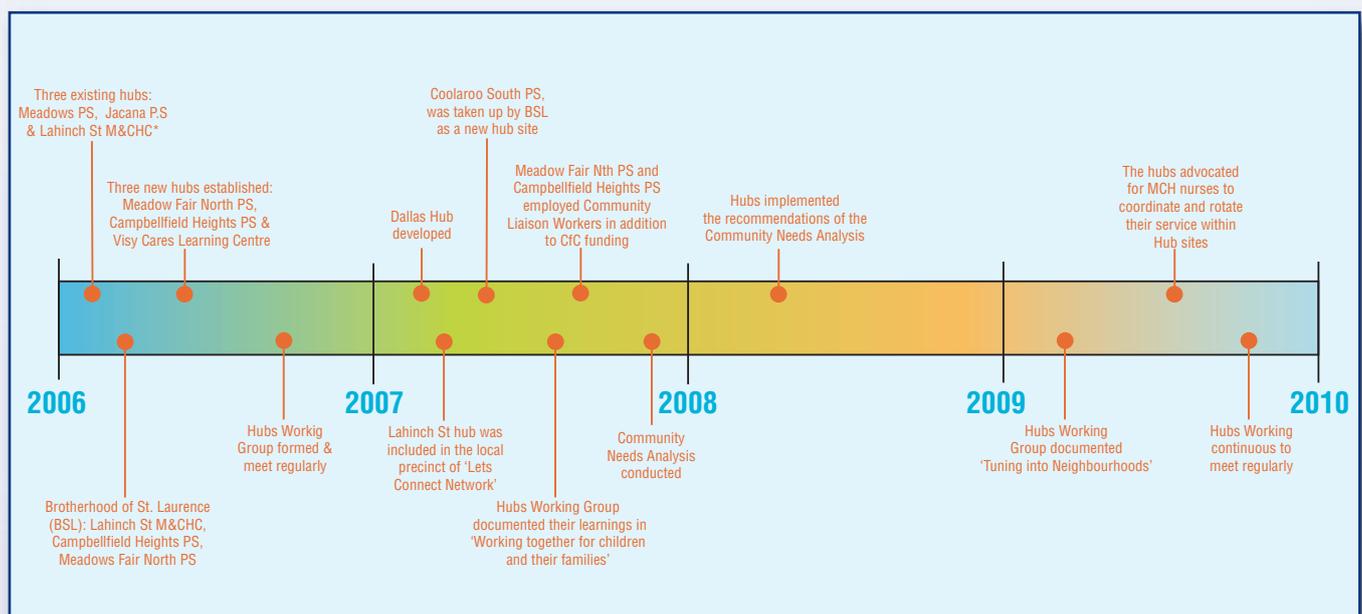
The interim evaluation report refers to community hubs becoming more welcoming and supportive environments for families and children. Community hubs have provided space for new activities to engage low-income families and ensure they can attend through informal activities such as playgroups, family fun days, enrolments for preschool information, transition to school programs, bilingual storytimes, early literacy programs, morning teas and many more events based on parents' needs. The key to local hubs having strong links with the community has been achieved through providing free activities for families and their children. As the strategy name suggests, the hubs are 'humming' and strengthened by the CfC activities and events held within them. Agencies brought programs to the place where the parents were already engaged.

Final evaluation findings

The quantitative and qualitative data relating to this outcome are presented below, followed by a discussion of all the data in relation to outcome 2: *Local hubs have strong links with the community through local participation*.

The quantitative data for this outcome comes from a range of sources including a needs analysis at each of the hub sites, community member feedback surveys and attendance/participation data. The following timeline in Figure 7 shows the progression of development of the hubs.

Figure 7. Hubs development timeline



* Not Funded by Communities for Children

4.1 Outcomes for the community



As outlined above, the Brotherhood of St Laurence was funded by CfC in 2006 to develop the humming hubs project, and a hub working group began meeting regularly. There were six hubs working; three of these were new hubs set up with CfC funding with four partnership agencies involved. In 2007, two more hubs started (Dallas was funded by CfC), Coolaroo was added to the BSL project and the community partners increased to eight. Two hub sites (Meadow Fair North and Campbellfield Heights Primary School) employed community liaison workers in addition to CfC funding. A community needs analysis was conducted at each hub site to determine if the hubs were meeting community needs and what could be improved. (The results of the community needs analysis is outlined further in figure 9). In 2009, the hubs advocated for maternal and child health nurses to coordinate and rotate their service within hub sites. The hub working group continues to meet, planning together and pooling their resources and mentor each other in their work to provide support and free activities to families and children.

The tables on the following pages list all hub activities and the agencies involved. These programs/activities are advertised by word of mouth, in school newsletters and on noticeboards. Dallas Hub has invested in large signs at the school entrance and on the school fence advertising the hub and the programs it offers. Advertising in all these mediums is in both English and community languages.

The following tables show that all hubs had fewer activities prior to CfC funding. With the additional funding, not only did the activities at each hub site increase but also the 'buy in' from other agencies increased. When summarised, 27% of hub activity is funded by CfC and 73% is funded by the schools or other agencies within the HEYP, including a small number of agencies outside the partnership. This is a very positive improvement in neighbourhood capacity.



Workshopping Hubs



Community involvement in hubs

4.1 Outcomes for the community



Table 5. Coolaroo South P.S. Hub activities and providers

Coolaroo South P.S. Hub

Before CfC	Service Provider	After CfC	Service Provider
Playgroup	Coolaroo South P.S.	Kinder Gym*	VICSEG
Jewellery Classes	Coolaroo South P.S.	Confident Parenting in Challenging Times*	Orana Family Services
Cooking Classes	Coolaroo South P.S.	Parent-Child Mother Goose Program*	MCM
Coffee Club	Coolaroo South P.S.	Bilingual Storytelling in the Community*	Hume City Council Library Services
4 year old Kindergarten	Coolaroo South P.S.	Families and Children's Resource Library*	Coolaroo South P.S.
3 year old kindergarten	Coolaroo South P.S.	Coolaroo South Children's Festival	Coolaroo South P.S.
		Arts and Crafts Classes	Coolaroo South P.S.
		Adult Computer Classes	Hume Global Learning Centre
		Adult English Classes	Visy Cares Learning Centre
		Maternal Child Health Visits	Hume City Council

* Funded by Communities for Children

Table 6. Campbellfield Heights P.S. Hub activities and providers

Campbellfield Heights P.S. Hub

Before CfC	Service Provider	After CfC	Service Provider
Mothers Group	Campbellfield Height P.S.	Playgroup	Campbellfield Height P.S.
		Playgroup*	VICSEG
		Kinder Gym*	VICSEG
		Assyrian/Chaldean Community Group	Spectrum
		Parent Child Mother Goose Program*	Melbourne Citymision
		Confident Parenting in Challenging Times*	Orana Family Services
		Maternal an Child Health Visits	Hume City Council
		Bilingual Storytelling in the Community	Hume City Council Library Services

* Funded by Communities for Children

4.1 Outcomes for the community



Table 7. Broadmeadows Valley P.S. Hub activities and providers

Broadmeadows Valley P.S. Hub

Before CfC	Service Provider	After CfC	Service Provider
<p>Harmony Day</p> <p>Confident Parenting Turkish, English Arabic</p> <p>Information sessions in English, Arabic, Turkish about right responsibilities</p>	<p>Broadmeadows Valley P.S.</p> <p>Islamic Welfare Organisation</p> <p>Legal Aid</p>	<p>Confident Parenting in Challenging Times*</p> <p>Bilingual Storytelling in the Community*</p> <p>Cool Kids Playgroup</p> <p>Jewellery Classes</p> <p>3 year old program</p> <p>Maternal and Child Health Visits</p> <p>Adult English Classes</p> <p>Learn to manage your money course</p> <p>Anger management in English, Turkish & Arabic</p> <p>How do you do homework with children at home</p> <p>Financial Management Course</p> <p>Info sessions in English, Turkish & Arabic</p> <p>Info sessions in English, Turkish & Arabic</p>	<p>Orana Family Services</p> <p>Hume City Council Library Services</p> <p>Broadmeadows Valley P. S.</p> <p>Broadmeadows Valley P. S.</p> <p>Hume City Council</p> <p>Hume City Council</p> <p>Visy Cares Learning Centre</p> <p>The Smith Family</p> <p>Anglicare</p> <p>Anglicare</p> <p>Brotherhood of St Laurence</p> <p>Centerlink</p> <p>Office of Housing</p>

* Funded by Communities for Children

4.1 Outcomes for the community



Table 8. Dallas Hub activities and providers

Dallas Hub

Before CfC	Service Provider	After CfC	Service Provider
Playgroup	Dallas P.S. & Kindergarten	Speech and Language Program*	Dallas P.S. & Kindergarten
3 year old program	Dallas P.S. & Kindergarten	Kinder Gym*	VICSEG
4yr. old kindergarten	Dallas P.S. & Kindergarten	Parent Child Mother Goose Program*	MCM
		Bilingual Storytelling in the Community*	Hume City Council Library Services
		Confident Parenting in Challenging Times*	Orana Family Services
		Parent Information Sessions	Dallas P.S. & Kindergarten
		Learning basic Turkish	Dallas P.S. & Kindergarten
		Maternal Child Health Visits	Hume City Council
		Smiles for Miles	Dianella Community Health
		Adult English Classes	Visy Cares Learning Centre
		Adult Computer Classes	Hume Global Learning Centre
		Certificate 3 Childcare	Spectrum Registered Training Organisation
		Certificate 2 Community Support	Spectrum Registered Training Organisation
		Financial Literacy Course	The Smith Family
		First Aid	Hume City Council
		Volunteer reading in the classroom	U3A
		Human Rights Meeting	Equal Opportunity Board
		Visit from Joan Kirner	Victorian Community Ambassador

* Funded by Communities for Children

4.1 Outcomes for the community



Table 9. Meadows E.L.C Hub activities and providers

Meadows E.L.C Hub

Before CfC	Service Provider	After CfC	Service Provider
Toddlers Playgroup	Meadows P.S.	Kinder Moves*	VICSEG
4 year old Playgroup	Meadows P.S.	Arabic Playgroup*	VICSEG
Ready for School/ Transition	Meadows P.S.	Samoan Playgroup*	VICSEG
Parent coffee and Chat drop in mornings	Meadows P.S.	Rising Stars Playgroup*	Anglicare
Yearly School Concert	Meadows P.S.	Parent-Child Mother Goose Program*	Melbourne Citymission (MCM)*
Harmony Projects	Meadows P.S.	Active Broadmeadows	Meadows P.S./Dianella C.H.
Community Garden Project	Meadows P.S.	4 year old Kindergarten Program	Broadmeadows UnitingCare
Bilingual Storytelling	Hume City Council Library Services	Breakfast Program	MCM
Maternal & Child Health Visits	Hume City Council	Homework Program Holiday Program	MCM MCM
Sounds like fun	Anglicare	Sing and Grow	Playgroup Victoria
Artist in Schools-Local	Meadows P.S./	Each One Teach One	The Smith Family
Hume Artists	Hume City Council	Smiles for Miles	Dianella C.H.
Broadmeadows Tapestry Project	Meadows P.S./BCNR	Lets Connect sessions	Meadows P.S/ Broadmeadows
		NeighbourhoodRenewal	(BCNR)
		Local Leaders	Meadow P.S./BCNR
		Kids Hope Program	Meadows P.S./UNICEF
		Volunteers Gateway	Hume Global Learning Centre
		Music Program	Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
		Adult Computer Classes	Infoxchange
		Children's Computer Classes	Hume Global Learning Centre

* Funded by Communities for Children

4.1 Outcomes for the community



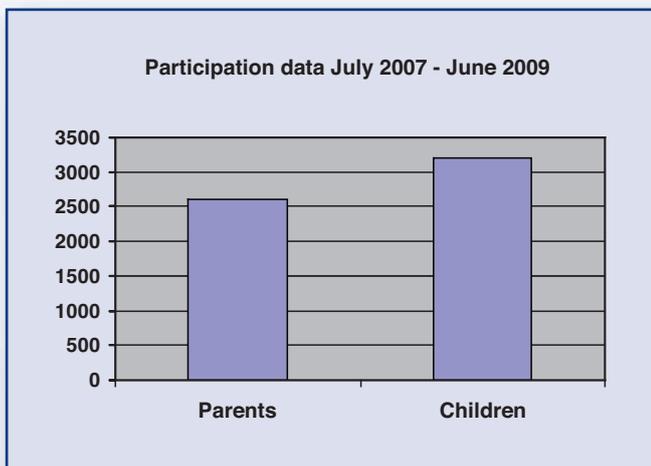
Participating at National Children's Day 2009

Participation

Community participation at each of the hub sites also included families who did not have children at the school or kindergarten (for example, they participated in adult-education programs or as volunteers in the programs).

The following participation data has been collated from Meadows Early Learning Centre, Breaking cycles by building neighbourhood hubs (which includes Broadmeadows Valley, Coolaroo South and Campbellfield Heights Primary Schools) and Dallas Hub activity six-monthly activity reports. Figure 8 below presents participation rates from July 2007 to June 2009.

Figure 8. Participation rates

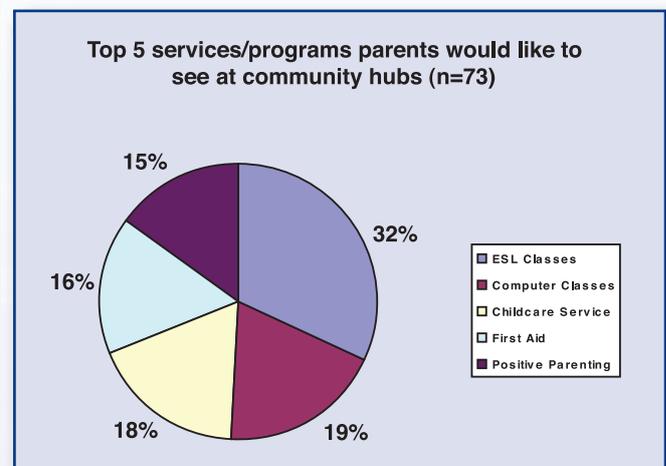


Data for participation was not collected prior to CfC as only one of the seven hubs had been established before that time. A total of 2,608 parents and 3,205 children have been involved in the hubs since July 2007. This participation is both regular and episodic. Many families attend more than one activity and other community events. Anecdotal evidence from hub coordinators suggests that community events/activities are often an effective way to encourage families to try out the hubs before committing to a regular program. Community hub workers have reported that, more recently, parents have played a key role in shaping new activities and programs.

Needs analysis of community hubs

In order to ensure the activities at the hubs were meeting the needs of the community, including families, parents and children, a needs analysis across the hub sites was undertaken in December 2007. A total of 73 parents, of whom 93% were mothers, participated in the study. Parents were asked to indicate their top five priorities from a list of 15 activities that they would like to see at their local hub. The top five priorities identified included English classes (n=42), computer classes (n=25), childcare services (n=23), first aid (n=21) and positive parenting programs (n=19). The graph in Figure 9 below demonstrates the percentage breakdown of these responses.

Figure 9. Priorities from community needs analysis



The following are parent responses supporting the above findings.

I need childcare to do any of the activities or programs at the centre/hub.

I believe these programs or activities should be advertised in bilingual newspapers or radios.

I am concerned for parents that don't speak English or understand what their children's teacher is saying or telling them about their child. I had to do interpreting many times for my friends that don't speak English.

I would like first aid can be one of the other educational classes that can take place at the centre/hub. Not a lot of Turkish parents know first aid.

I would like more outdoor activities happening which enable the children and parents to socialise more often.

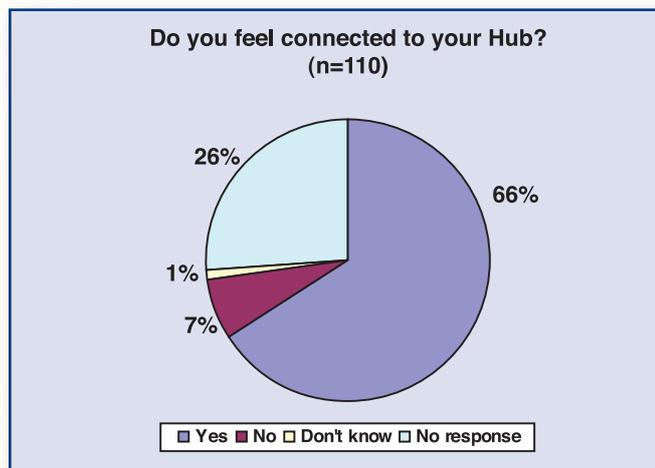
English classes were a strong theme in all hub sites. Parents wanted to see childcare attached to all programs and services provided in the hubs, so as to fully participate in them. As a result of this study, all hub sites implemented English classes for parents in 2008 and 2009. The complexity of providing accessible (free and on-site) childcare has been an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed and further investigated by HEYP and the sites.



Community member feedback survey

The following quantitative findings were obtained from Strategy 1 community member feedback surveys. Surveys were conducted with community members in 2007, 2008 and 2009 about their involvement in the hubs (n=110). When respondents were asked if they felt connected to the local hub, the majority (n=72 or 66%) of respondents responded 'yes', 26% of respondents did not respond and only 8 (7%) said they did not feel connected to their local hub. The remaining one (1%) participant responded 'don't know'. The responses are outlined below in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Responses from community member feedback survey



Overall, the majority of responses were positive; most participants said they felt connected to their hub/local school (66%).

Qualitative findings

For the purpose of this analysis, each data source, including professional journals, case studies and final activity reports, was analysed in order to determine common themes emerging from the data. The individual common themes for all data sources were then compared and, where a common theme was identified in two or more data sources, it was identified as a 'key' theme.

Professional journals

Professional journals were completed by three hub coordinators. The majority of the professional journals were completed in 2008. A total of 25 journal entries from the Setting the hubs humming strategy was analysed in order to determine the key themes emerging from the data. Only the sections of the journals that related specifically to the outcome (Local hubs have strong links with the community through local participation) have been included in this analysis.

The key themes from the professional journals are listed below. This includes a percentage count for how many individual journals (of the total 25) referred to these themes:

- planning community hub events and activities (100%)
- locating support for families locally in neighbourhoods (100%)
- impacting on parenting confidence and skills (75%)
- increased enrolments in playgroups/schools (15%)
- hub program continuity (15%).

Planning community events and activities

All professional journals reported on events and activities taking place within their hubs to increase participation and develop stronger links with their communities. School noticeboards were used to highlight the school, kinder, playgroup, community news, workshops and newsletters, with opportunities to advertise for community participation in local events and activities. Parents were made aware of hub activities through school newsletters and these were translated in community languages in each site.

Some of the professional journals referred to distributing flyers at kindergartens and schools to recruit more parents into their hub activities, while others referred to specific events and networks including Let's Connect, Harmony Day, National Playgroup Day, festivals, end of year celebrations, multicultural and fun activity days to increase local community participation. All hub workers aimed to achieve greater participation by taking into account who accessed hub events and who did not. Workers looked at ways of improving outreach to more families. The hub structure allowed workers to observe changes in local demographics that could impact on levels of participation.

As the number of Arabic-speaking families increased, the need for more Arabic-speaking workers was identified and workers were sought to fill this role.

(professional journal 2008)

Staff invited bilingual workers to run parenting programs that addressed parents' concerns, rather than using interpreters to offer a standard English program.

(professional journal 2008)

Community hubs offer a space for new programs as parents are already engaged and tell us what programs they would like. Agencies are more efficient in setting up new activities and are approaching us with programs they would like to run. Others come and visit to see how the community works before they design their activity.

(professional journal 2008)

Each professional journal referred to activities taking place within their hubs.

Over 300 families attended the Let's Connect Multicultural Day event held on the 24th of June 2008. Samoan, Turkish and Arabic dancers provided a welcome led by parent volunteers and the school children. Following a performance by the African drummers, families joined the Early Learning Centre for mirror art and activities. A shared lunch was provided by students and families and volunteers from Let's Connect network.

(professional journal 2008)

4.1 Outcomes for the community



The Let's Connect parent volunteers were successful in tendering for the Go for Your Life 'Walktober' event held at Jack Roper reserve. They supplied lunch for the 570 adults and children.

(professional journal 2008)

Locating support for families locally in neighbourhoods (100% of journals)

All journals described feedback from families suggesting that they know where to find supports locally through attending the hub and meeting hub workers. Schools and agencies are learning how to see families as part of local neighbourhoods that offer informal support. Sites have gained a reputation as a place to go to gain support and assistance for parents and have made many referrals to other services. School-based hubs used the enrolment of children in school as a time when families' needs could be identified and referred to other agencies for support. This course of action was particularly relevant as Broadmeadows is considered a mobile and transient community. Dallas, Coolaroo and Meadow Fair North staff invested a lot of time in learning about the needs of the whole family during school enrolment. The hub workers identified that offering more early support to families locally could also impact on regular school and/or preschool attendance of children. The schools saw this investment in the hubs as an investment in longer-term educational outcomes for children.

Parents were reassured and supported to understand that children with additional needs are welcome in the playgroup. For example:

A parent with a child with autism was supported by staff to attend a program. Another new group of parents came in halfway through a program and were also invited to join in and actively included in activities. This had an impact on everyone understanding the message that everyone is welcome and that this principle has real meaning in the hub, including new parents and with children with additional needs.

(professional journal 2008)

Impact on parenting confidence and skills

All journals described how hubs provide a vehicle to impact on parenting confidence and skills. Staff are modelling to parents ways of communicating with young children in playgroups. They actively demonstrate how to use encouraging language and request that children assist in small ways in the activity. This key theme is reported in more detail in the outcome related to improved parenting skills and confidence.

Increased enrolments in playgroups/preschools

A smaller proportion of the professional journals reported an increase in enrolments to the playgroups and the school by offering programs for all the family. It has been noted that many of the families are moving on from playgroups with a stronger understanding of the role of play and learning in their children's development. As a result, this has created waiting lists for some of the hub and preschool activities. Two principals identified that schools were able to develop much closer ties with their local community and these ties had a positive flow-on effect to greater enrolments at the preschool, as parents saw that support for themselves and their younger children was available at the site.

Enrolment in the playgroups has increased with a total of 43 families/55 children enrolled. Some families attend more than one session – 28 families/36 children (Monday), 31 families/42 children (Tuesday).

(professional journal 2008)

Hub program continuity

Hubs provide a vehicle for program continuity with more flexible management of staffing and resources. Programs can be supported by a number of agencies to be continuous, with agencies partnering with staff currently working on site. Sometimes parent activities resulted in poor participation due to factors such as unduly hot or cold weather or religious festivities. However, the commitment of the hub is ongoing, meaning programs continue even if there is low participation for one week, as the goal of hub work is long-term, over a five- to ten-year period.

Hubs also offered more seamless pathways for families linking and referring into programs as their children developed. For example, antenatal programs refer directly to postnatal programs which in turn refer to playgroups. Playgroups actively assist in enrolments to preschool and preschools are connected to schools.

(professional journal 2009)

The kinder assistant role was offered to a parent volunteer during the assistant's long service leave. This would help ensure program continuity as the parent volunteer was well known to the teacher and children and this helped keep the program as settled as possible.

(professional journal 2009)

Outcome Summary

Both qualitative and quantitative data suggest that local participation in hubs is growing and deepening as hubs become embedded in their local neighbourhoods. More children, parents and community members are becoming involved in activities in the five local hub sites. The hubs aim to be inclusive and non-stigmatised, and qualitative reports indicate they are succeeding in this aim. Over time, the proportion of community members who reported that they have strong links to their local hub increased.

The hub structure allows staff to observe the needs and interests of local families and changes in the demographics that could affect participation. The hubs have worked collaboratively to investigate community needs and implemented many of the clear needs of the community. The hub structure of having a coordinator in each hub and collaboration across the site has supported a range of innovations that have highlighted systemic concerns across the site. All hubs now provide regular English-language classes for local parents. Programs such as playgroups and parenting groups operating in hubs were adapted and offered in specific languages, rather than an interpreter being assigned to an English-language parenting program. Local parents were asked to help with the translation and dissemination of parent information.



In addition, all hubs have introduced a wider variety of programs, primarily on the advice of the community. It is likely that this responsiveness has contributed to improved participation and to a feeling of strong connection and ownership. This outcome relates to and adds to other outcomes for the community. For example, where families have strong connections to the hubs and hub workers are skilled and have strong connections to each other, this all contributes to supporting the community to improve outcomes for families and children.

All hubs have opened up communication and coordination between the early-childhood and school sector. The increased communication has led to the development of common goals with the schools and playgroups, such as working on early literacy and oral language and transition to school programs.

The structure of the hub has allowed programs to integrate across universal and secondary services and integrate the parent and child's needs simultaneously, and this is continuing to progress. The hub structure has changed the way the maternal and child health program is offered on a rotational basis within hub sites. The hub structure has also consolidated the way adult education is offered.

Since the joining together of the Victorian Departments of Education and Early Childhood Development, the hub sites have been demonstrating how resources can be pooled to support improved educational outcomes for children, alongside improvements in health and wellbeing for all. Schools are working more proactively with their community to ensure programs are tailored to meet local community needs. Young children are more comfortable when they arrive in the school space with their families, as they have been on site many times before. Professional journals describe the feeling of the “hubs humming” in the schools where parents are moving around and made to feel welcome and comfortable on site. The leadership of the school principals at hub sites underpins these results, along with partner agencies that have given staff permission to attend local hub strategy meetings and plan together. The CfC program has helped mobilise community resources in hubs, and it is important to note that the majority of new programs in hubs are funded by agencies and schools in their own right, or are a reconfiguration of existing resources, thus ensuring local and systemic sustainability. All hub sites have seen major improvements in the number of children participating in preschool. The development of a community hub model at a number of locations has received attention from other CfC and Best Start sites across Victoria.

Community leaders/ playgroup facilitators are skilled and connected to each other

Background

The outcome aimed to enhance playgroup practice and availability by supporting and resourcing community leaders including playgroup leaders, enhancing CALD playgroups and training parents as facilitators. The strategy is an important linkage point within the early-years service system in Broadmeadows, enabling opportunities to provide parenting information and resources in the playgroup system. In this site, many playgroups are facilitated playgroups that are operated by a mix of volunteer and paid facilitators in community venues. Playgroup facilitators and others are becoming key members of the early-years services system and an important source of education and support for parents. A playgroup facilitators network has been formed to support facilitators in working collaboratively together and with other members of the early-years system including Playgroups Victoria, which is already assisting with training facilitators.

Evidence

To be effective, services need to build on local strengths of early-childhood workers, parents and children and be locally relevant and accessible to the community (Carbone et al, 2004). A culture of collaboration helps create an integrated system of support for families, through linking community, schools, and families to achieve a common goal (Homel et al, 2006)

Professional development for early-childhood workers has been identified as an important component of service provision (Schorr, 1997). Research has shown a need for a suitably skilled workforce to ensure the success of early intervention initiatives (Department of Family and Community Services, 2004; Homel, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Strategies related to this outcome

Community leaders/playgroup facilitators (parents) are skilled and connected to each other is an expected outcome of the following strategies:

- Playgroups rule ok!
- We are ALL community

Local evaluation interim report findings

The local evaluation interim report (2007) found an apparent increase in both the number of local community leaders with an active interest in early childhood and opportunities for these local leaders to gain mentoring and support from existing community leaders and through CfC networks and activities. The report also noted that:

- The Playgroups rule ok! strategy and the Bilingual storytime in the community activity led to the emergence of 21 part-time workers. Many of these part-time workers are local parents and the majority are bilingual and bicultural.

4.1 Outcomes for the community



- A case study outlined the story of ‘Suzan’, a Turkish migrant who became a playgroup facilitator and is now “often a first port of call for advice and support for women within the Turkish community in Broadmeadows”.
- Community leaders attended strengths-based training programs.

The report noted that further opportunities for the development of local community leaders were expected during the duration of the Broadmeadows CfC project. In the second half of the CFC project, the issue of community leaders was made an identified outcome.

Final evaluation findings

The quantitative and qualitative data relating to this outcome are presented separately below. This is followed by a discussion of all the data in relation to outcome 3: Community leaders/playgroup facilitators are skilled and connected to each other.

The Playgroup Facilitators Network was established as part of the CfC project in 2006. By June 2009, the Playgroup Facilitators

Network had 102 members in total, with a current membership of 40 participants. Of those, 21 were employed as part-time workers, 58 were volunteer/parent leaders and 23 were professionals. Members of the network have been provided with workshops and playgroup training sessions to increase their skills and to assist them to connect and share ideas and ways of working with each other. The members received 21 training sessions from 3/8/07 to 17/6/09. Some members attended multiple training sessions and others attended more irregularly.

As a result of their involvement in the Playgroup Facilitators Network, eight of the volunteer members gained employment as playgroup leaders, kindergarten assistants or childcare workers.

Community leaders/playgroup facilitators have been provided with a number of workshops and playgroup training sessions to increase their skills and connect with each other. Table 10 below lists the topics covered at each of these sessions, their providers and attendance data.

Table 10. Playgroup facilitators training sessions

Dates	Topics	Service Provider	Attended	Completed evaluation
17/10/2007	Running an effective playgroup	Playgroup Victoria	7	5
14/11/2007	Managing children’s behaviour	Playgroup Victoria	4	3
12/03/2008	Creating and planning play	Playgroup Victoria	7	7
16/04/2008	Health and safety issues at playgroup	Playgroup Victoria	10	10
21/05/2008	Efficient playgroup committees; promoting music at playgroups	Playgroup Victoria	6	5
04/06/2008	Together we can make a difference; environmental awareness and youth services; library services	Broad Insight Group, Hume City Council Library Services, Banksia Gardens Community Centre	6	6
13/08/2008	Efficient playgroup committees	Playgroup Victoria	4	4
10/09/2008	Emotional coaching	Dianella Community Health – child psychologist	14	12
15/10/2008	Health and safety issues at playgroup	Playgroup Victoria	7	4
12/11/2008	Preschool enrolments; financial counselling services; children and disability early years program	Hume City Council; Broadmeadows UnitingCare; Melbourne CityMission	13	12
25/02/2009	Physical activity kit workshop	VICSEG	18	10
04/03/2009	Promoting literacy in playgroups	Playgroup Victoria	19	19
18/03/2009	Emotional coaching	Dianella Community Health – child psychologist	4	4
29/04/2009	Promoting music in playgroups	Playgroup Victoria	12	–
20/05/2009	Behaviour guidance in playgroups	Playgroup Victoria	9	–
Totals			139	101

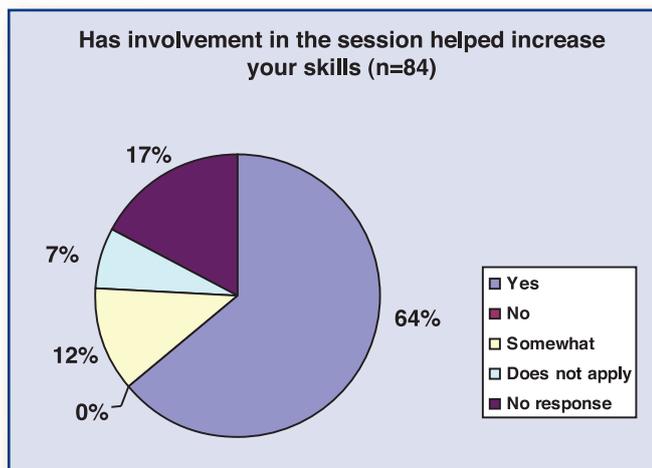
4.1 Outcomes for the community



Participants from the playgroup training sessions completed questions relating to the training sessions. There were 101 participants in the sessions. This figure includes those who have participated in more than one session and filled out a questionnaire relating to each training program attended.

The participants were asked to comment on whether the session(s) had helped them in relation to improvement of facilitation skills and connection with other playgroup facilitators. The data is outlined in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11. Playgroup training sessions: increased skills

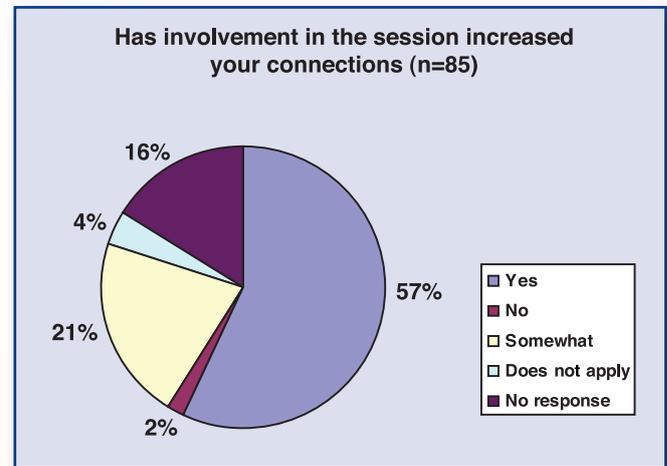


Seventy-six respondents (90%) reported that the sessions had helped them improve their skills at least somewhat and 54 respondents (64%) reported that involvement in the training sessions had helped to increase their skills as playgroup facilitators. Also of interest is that none of the surveyed participants believed that the sessions had not helped them at all.

The participants were also asked to comment on connections, because it was thought that an active network of playgroup leaders would

support their work in the community and allow them to share ideas for playgroup development. The data is outlined in Figure 12 below.

Figure 12. Playgroup training sessions: increased connectedness



A total of 78 respondents (92%) believed that the session had at least somewhat increased their connections and 48 respondents (57%) reported that involvement in the training sessions had helped to increase connections with other parents/community leaders/playgroup facilitators (n=85).

These results are very encouraging, not only in seeing the opportunities that have been made available to and been taken up by the community, but also that the sessions are having an impact towards the outcome.

A large majority of playgroup network members (78%) have joined Playgroups Victoria. This will assist in ensuring that playgroup leaders/facilitators/parents continue to have opportunities to continue to receive up-to-date information and training sessions.

Table 11 below shows the numbers in each of the local networks that community leaders in early-years activities are likely to be involved in. Members of these networks are likely to be connected to each other, as individuals are often involved in more than one network.

Table 11. Community leaders/playgroups facilitators/parents

	No. of members in networks	Network meetings 2007-09	Training areas
Bilingual storytellers	5	48	5 – accredited, formal & informal training sessions
Playgroup facilitators	40	21	Refer to Table 6
Parent–Child Mother Goose facilitators	46	6	19 participants trained in Parent – Child Mother Goose teacher training



Qualitative findings

While quantitative data about the impact on skills developed was collected from the playgroup network, there are a number of other relevant networks that provided qualitative data. Other networks of early-childhood educators in the CfC site include the bilingual storytellers, the Parent–Child Mother Goose network and the Hub Coordinators Network. These networks are directly relevant to CfC activities and have been active in providing professional development and recently accredited education programs for their members. Data from those networks was gathered through professional journals, CfC reports and network meetings. Additional data was taken from the evaluation report of the bilingual storytime in the community project.

The key themes emerging from the data are outlined below:

Training was provided to playgroup facilitators and five parents were trained as Parent–Child Mother Goose leaders. Bilingual storytellers, who function in many ways as community leaders, received multiple training opportunities, including library systems and library resource training and specialist training in strengths-based practice, positive management of preschool children, positive parenting and advocacy (Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, June 2008). Training was acknowledged in the evaluation of the bilingual storytime program as “essential” to storytellers and storyteller leaders, whether they are paid or employed on a volunteer basis.

The bilingual storytellers have a key role in **building relationships and networks**. They have excellent people skills and are incredibly well connected to their community networks. An example of this was demonstrated by linking parents with other services in the Broadmeadows area.

In all Bilingual storytime in the community sessions where a parent had some specific concerns about their child/children’s development or health, this was addressed in a private discussion after the session, with the bilingual storyteller providing information about the best service to get in touch with and, if they didn’t know, following this up after the session and informing the parent. It was reported by a number of bilingual storytellers that they had often spoken to maternal and child health nurses for advice and also fathers about what to do, as the mother had not been able to convince them of the need for additional support.

(Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, June 2008).

The bilingual storytellers are also **role models for women in their community**. Teachers have commented that mothers feel inspired and motivated to “have a go” themselves when they see the other bilingual storytellers presenting. It gives them confidence when they see women like themselves using their culture and language in a professional capacity (Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, June 2008).

Playgroup facilitators were **provided with opportunities to network with one another**. For example, a number of facilitators were involved with the National Playgroup Planning workshop and the National Playgroup Day Celebration.



Celebrating playgroup

Parents within the community demonstrated increased confidence in advocating for early-childhood services and demonstrated **community leadership** skills. For example, two parents were involved in setting up a playgroup in consultation with Hume City Council. The increased confidence and skills of playgroup facilitators led to employment opportunities. For example, one local facilitator was employed by Victorian Cooperative on Children’s Services for Ethnic Groups VICSEG New Futures Training.

Another example has been that, **through the training of the bilingual storytellers, they have become library and learning opportunity advocates**. Weekly storytimes in numerous languages (Turkish, Arabic, Assyrian) occurred in the Age Library in Broadmeadows. The program is often the first contact that participants have with library services and it has helped to break down the barriers to accessing full library services and learning opportunities, by the provision of translated information about library services and encouragement of membership and borrowing. Repeated contact with the bilingual storytellers has supported community members to increase their level of comfort with library services. The increased level of comfort combined with knowledge of the services provided has supported people from initial attendance at bilingual storytimes to becoming a library member and accessing full library services (Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, June 2008).

Training bilingual staff in playgroup facilitation, the Parent–Child Mother Goose program and bilingual storytime sessions mean that they can also facilitate their own sessions by bringing all these skills they have learned to their groups. For example, the hub coordinators, playgroup development officer, bilingual storytellers and playgroup facilitators have all received training in implementing Parent–Child Mother Goose programs, and have enough experience to train new teachers by apprenticeship. (Teachers need to run a group for at least 30 weeks to be accredited to train other teachers). As they are all involved in implementing groups, they can incorporate PCMG into their range of activities.

A majority of the facilitators attended regular network meetings to connect, provide mentoring and support to each other, share their knowledge and plan their sessions.



Playgroups and the Parent–Child Mother Goose program have quarterly newsletters going out to their members. The PCMG program has established an online information website including current programs and contact details, to connect with one another.

Playgroup facilitators **demonstrated their skills** through numerous tasks including conducting information sessions in playgroups on issues such as safety in the home and transition to school. Some of these sessions were facilitated in parents' home languages. Playgroup facilitators assisted guest speakers to attend playgroups by advising them about what parents were interested in. Facilitators also consulted with relevant support organisations regarding specific families. It is likely that through such activities the confidence and skills of playgroup facilitators increased.

Playgroup facilitators had **opportunities to network with other professionals** which provided them with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills base. For example, some programs arranged visits from organisations such as Melbourne CityMission, local multicultural services and a local women's health centre. Numerous facilitators worked with library staff to organise a library session for parents and children. Although these visits were designed to help parents, they also provided facilitators with opportunities to learn more about services and develop their skills as community leaders.

Connections: the bilingual storytellers met once a month to connect, provide mentoring and support to each other, share their knowledge and plan sessions. Occasionally networking was also done with local religious, cultural or educational organisations to provide storytimes, build relationships and promote library programs to reach a broader section of the population. Some of the organisations networked with have included mosques and churches, cultural groups attending neighbourhood houses, Islamic schools and weekend language schools. (Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, June 2008).

Outcome Summary

The data outlined above indicates that community leaders/playgroup facilitators/parents believe that they are developing their skills and community connections. The findings indicate that playgroup facilitators and other key community leaders are enthusiastically taking up training and networking opportunities and that, in an increasing number of cases, this is leading to paid work. While increased connections were valuable to individuals, they were also a key mechanism in improving the ability of the networks to work with the community.

Early-years services communicate effectively with parents

Background

How services for young children and families are delivered is as important as what is delivered (Centre for Community Child Health, 2007).

It is important that professionals, including childcare workers, kindergarten and primary school teachers, maternal and child health nurses, family support workers, social workers and allied health professionals including speech pathologists and psychologists, are able to communicate effectively with the young children they work with AND the parents and carers of those children. This communication is especially important in early years where children are not able to mediate that communication. Good communication between professionals and families has implications for the management of early-years programs and services. For example, it requires additional program time to talk with families about each child's progress.

This outcome focuses on the ability of Broadmeadows early-years services to communicate effectively with parents. Early-years staff who work in the Broadmeadows CfC programs may interact with many parents who are experiencing social disadvantage. Many families are dealing with challenging circumstances, such as poverty, homelessness and the anxiety those challenges create. This context is important when considering parents' ability to interact with, trust and communicate with staff.

An added complexity for services is that many families in the CfC site are from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Communicating effectively with parents who do not speak English can be challenging for services. Many services within Broadmeadows have implemented innovative methods to overcome this particular challenge.

Those communication strategies include:

- taking into account the diversity of families in the many senses of the word 'differences' including cultural and language background, personal resources, levels of education and confidence, parents' perceptions and experiences of their situation, and basing services on what parents are capable of contributing
- basing services on the needs and priorities of families, that is, family-centred practice
- building partnerships with parents and communities.
- empowering families and communities, and assuming that parents and communities have considerable strengths and experience
- becoming comfortable working with interpreters and understanding the service system involved in working with interpreters
- employing bilingual and bicultural workers at all levels of the service system and not only as assistants

4.1 Outcomes for the community



- training bilingual workers in mainstream approaches
- training workers, especially those of Anglo-Celtic background, in working with cultural diversity
- providing multiple methods of communication with parents including individual face-to-face contact.

Evidence

Some of the key ways these strategies have contributed to this outcome, and the evidence to support the relationship between these strategies and the outcomes, are as follows:

- engaging parents in activities at early-years services and using those opportunities to communicate with them (Hubs, Playgroups; Plowman, 2004).
- training early-years professionals in the strengths-based approach, an evidence-based approach that improves the potential for positive client–professional engagement (CCCH, 2007)
- services that adopt a strengths-based approach are recognised as more effective than those that do not (Bond & Carmola Hauf, 2004; Epps & Jackson, 2000; McCashen, 2005)
- good communication is a key component of developing a partnership with families where children’s needs can be discussed on an ongoing basis and trust is established (CCCH, 2001)
- the relationship skills of professionals are increasingly being recognised as critical to effective service delivery for young children and families; these skills are viewed by many as equally important as specialist knowledge and skills (Davis et al., 2002; Moore, 2006; Pawl & St John, 1998).

Strategies related to this outcome

Early-years services communicate effectively with parents is an expected outcome of the following strategies:

- Setting the hubs humming
- Playgroups rule ok!
- We are ALL community

Interim evaluation report findings

The local evaluation interim report did not report upon this outcome. It was noted, however, that language barriers were making engagement with families difficult for some hub workers and playgroup facilitators (CCCH, 2007). It was noted that presenting parent-information sessions in English and then translating into another language was not always an effective strategy for communicating with parents who speak a language other than English (CCCH, 2007).

Final evaluation findings

The data associated with this outcome relates to two different types of activity. Firstly, there is data that relates to professional-development activities offered to early-years professionals in order to assist them in communicating effectively with parents. Secondly, there is data that demonstrates the ways in which early-years staff communicate effectively with parents.

These two types of data cannot be analysed together, as they relate to different stages in the outcome. Stage one is the increased knowledge and skill of professionals. Stage two is the utilisation of this knowledge and skills. Therefore the findings below are divided into two different sections; the first relating to professional development and the second relating to data that demonstrates effective communication with parents.

Professional development activities

The professional development activities that were evaluated and subsequently reported on for the purpose of this report are:

- cultural competence
- strengths-based training
- working in partnership with parents for the benefit of children.

The activities that contributed to those areas were a range of professional-development activities that focused specifically on improving communication with the community, including families, parents and children.

Table 12. Professional - development activities

Subject	Presenters	Attendance	Effectiveness and Satisfaction
International comparison – how early-years services operate in 3 countries: Australia, USA, Turkey	Serdar M. Değirmencioglu. (May 2008)	43	86% found presentation informative
Hume early-years conference	Local and national presenters	190	88% were satisfied. 82 % found conference gave improved understanding of working in partnership with local parents (June 2008)
Introductory and advanced	Bernadette Glass 2007 and 2009 strengths-based training	61	78% found the course relevant to their work with families
DVD summit on working with culturally and linguistically diverse community	A facilitated discussion 2009	26	92% satisfied and 92% found summit had increased their knowledge in effectively communicating with parents



Evaluation of professional development

Forty-three professionals attended the early-years professional-development seminar hosted by Dallas Hub. The seminar was presented by a visiting Turkish psychologist, Serdar M. De irmencio lu. The seminar aimed to provide an opportunity for early-years professionals to discuss and compare early-childhood education and care systems across three countries (USA, Australia and Turkey), how to work better with parents from Turkey who are not familiar with the early-years system in Australia, and how to meet their expectations and needs. 86% of participants who completed an evaluation form for the presentation rated the presentation as informative or highly informative.

The Hume early-years conference was attended by 190 participants across two days. Of those, 45% were already involved with the Hume Early Years Partnership and 55% were not yet involved in Partnership activities. 88% of participants who completed an evaluation form for the Hume early-years conference reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the conference; 82% of respondents thought the conference was extremely successful in giving them a better understanding of the importance of working in partnership with families and communities.

An introductory and advanced strengths-based training course was offered over four days in May–June 2009 to 35 professionals. The course was supported by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and delivered in partnership and collaboration at the Broadmeadows site. The course offered workers from a variety of professional backgrounds an opportunity to develop shared goals in working within a strengths-based framework and a common understanding of practice across the family support, early-childhood, education, early intervention and health sectors. The course had the explicit aim of finding points of synergy and collaboration where workers could work together to address the needs of families in Hume with a consistent approach. 78% of participants who completed an evaluation form rated the presentation as relevant or highly relevant; 94% (n=14) of participants who completed an evaluation form rated the training as very or extremely beneficial in improving their confidence in their work with families.

A DVD summit on working with the CALD community was attended by 26 early-years professionals. 92% (n=12) of participants who completed an evaluation form for the summit reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the summit; 92% (n=13) respondents stated that the activity had increased their knowledge of how to effectively communicate with families from CALD backgrounds.

Overall, where levels of satisfaction with professional development (PD) activities were measured, there were positive results.

When asked specifically about what they had gained from these professional activities, a large majority found the activities very relevant to their work with families in Hume, when asked if PD had contributed to their knowledge and skills in working with local families or with CALD families in particular. These findings suggest that many of these professional-development activities contributed to improving early-years workers' ability to communicate more effectively with parents.

Data that demonstrates effective communication with parents

Qualitative data has been compiled from the early-years professional-development seminar presentation, the Hume early-years conference evaluation, the DVD summit, the strengths-based training course and the DVD resource *Catching the rainbow: modelling cross-cultural practice with families*. Common themes outlined below were identified predominantly by analysing the evaluation results of the early-years PD seminar and the Hume early-years conference. Data from the DVD summit, the strengths-based training course and the DVD resource itself have been used to further illustrate these themes, as there was not enough data from these sources to identify common themes.

Two common themes emerged from the data. They were:

Interaction with families:

Changing some aspect of their interaction with families was a key theme reported by evaluation respondents who attended the early-years PD seminar and the Hume early-years conference. Respondents involved in the early-years PD seminar commonly reported that they would show increased care and empathy and listen more to families. Respondents involved in day 2 of the Hume early-years conference commonly reported that they would engage more with parents.

Comments made during the evaluation of strengths-based training – when asked how they would work and/or communicate differently with families – suggest a change in some participants' method of interacting with families:

I will seek alternative ideas and ways to engage families by consulting (with them) and understanding their needs.

(DVD summit, 2009)

(I'll be) listening more.

(strengths-based training case study, 2009)

Data from the project workers and coordinators in interviews from the *Catching the rainbow* DVD demonstrates how this type of approach has been successful with the program:

Listening to [the parent] and responding to what they are saying.

(summit 2009)

Respecting and giving parents space for when they actually need the information and not forcing information onto them.

(summit 2009)

It is extremely important to have families included in the planning process – we can hear directly from them and reflect on how our program is meeting their needs and implement it [changes].

(summit 2009)

Importantly, appreciation and value of families has been instrumental in the success of the program, as demonstrated by feedback from the parents of families involved in services:

One of the major things that helped me feel welcome was that the staff took a keen interest in me and my son just as people – just getting to know me.

(*Catching the rainbow* DVD)

4.1 Outcomes for the community



(When comparing the service with another encountered) I experienced going to another service and I didn't feel comfortable -no-one greeted me or said what's your name, what's your sons name, I walked in and then walked out and I never went back to that service again.

(Catching the rainbow DVD)

Strengths-based, partnership approach:

Respondents involved in the early-years PD seminar reported that they had a better understanding of where families from a Turkish background have come from and how this might impact on their parenting style. Sensitivity to family cultural and ethnic diversity is recognised as a key aspect of effective service delivery.

The importance of cultural sensitivity and respect in relation to service delivery was echoed by project workers and coordinators in interviews from the Catching the rainbow DVD:

We have used cultural storytelling to engage those families-it is saying to those families that we respect your culture and value it and it gives these families a sense of belonging.

(Catching the rainbow DVD)

As was the use of a partnership approach with families:

Building relationships and networks is a really important part of the program – building those relationships of trust with these families has been a very important first step to engaging these families in library and learning opportunities.

When asked how they would work/communicate differently with families, respondents to the Hume early-years conference evaluation commonly reported that they would use a strengths-based and/or partnership model. Comments made during strengths-based training and in the evaluation of the DVD summit also pertaining to this theme were as follows:

(I'll be) respecting their cultures and learning more about their needs. (I'll) make them feel that they are valuable and important to the community.

(DVD summit)

(I'll) remind myself (that) I do not need to teach people how to parent, but rather find their own solution.

(strengths-based training case study)

Less advice, more conversation, removal of pressure to fix things and be the expert.

(strengths-based training case study)

In summary, the qualitative findings presented above suggest that professional development activities assisted professionals to interact and communicate effectively with families.



Partnering with families

Parents' views on professional communication

None of the CfC surveys included a question asking parents directly if they thought that the early-years services staff they interacted with communicated effectively with them. However, the DVD Catching the rainbow includes interviews with parents relating to their experiences of good and poor communication by early-years professionals. Poor communication experiences, they reported, meant families would not access those services. This is an area for further investigation. This outcome reports on a wide range of information about early-childhood development, the micro-skills needed by parents and information sessions on early-years services.

The data that was analysed for the purpose of demonstrating that effective communication with parents is increasing included:

- case studies (qualitative data)
- Parent Advisory Group minutes and reports (qualitative data).

There is a range of other qualitative and quantitative information relating to professional development opportunities being taken up by playgroup leaders, bilingual storytellers and Parent-Child Mother Goose facilitators. They are in the strategic position of being a group of workers who work to communicate with children, their families and the broader community. Those workers report that they are learning a wide range of skills and gaining a great deal of information to pass on to parents, children and the broader community (refer to outcome 3 above: Community leaders/playgroup facilitators are skilled and connected to each other).

Early-years services communicating effectively with parents

The methods that early-years services used to communicate with parents included individual face-to-face communication with parents during activities and group-based methods of communication such -as the Hume Early Years Partnership Parent Advisory Group.

The Parent Advisory Group meets each term and consists of parents from the community. One of the key aims of the group was to use those parents attending as a means of communicating with a broader



community of parents and for the group to provide input into decisions about improving the early-years service system through reports to Hume Early Years Partnership meetings. It was expected that parents attending the Parent Advisory Group would spread the knowledge they gained during the group meetings among other parents outside the group. The minutes from April 2009 state:

The other goal was that this group of parents act as advocates for their communities, taking the importance of early childhood back to their networks.

(Parent Advisory Group minutes, 2008)

Many examples from professional journals demonstrate how staff were able to communicate effectively with parents despite challenging circumstances. For example, a community hub liaison worker attended a Department of Human Services (DHS) meeting with a CALD parent who was very anxious about DHS involvement with her family. The case study begins by describing the worker entering the room where the meeting is taking place and then:

The [worker] introduced herself and spoke to the mother. They discussed strategies to use if at any point the mother felt uncomfortable. Following the meeting [the worker] reassured the mother and they then spoke of strategies to use in future, for example, to ask for an interpreter. The mother approached [the worker on another day] for support with another issue... The parent was supported through the process by someone who spoke her language, she was comfortable with.

(professional journal, 2008)

The worker described in the case study above was able to effectively communicate relevant information to the parent to ease her concern and to ensure that, in future, she was able to access an interpreter. The worker's ability to effectively communicate with the parent is supported by the fact that the parent went on to ask for the worker's support with another issue on a later date.

Another case study, an excerpt of which is provided below, further demonstrates the capacity of early-years staff to communicate with parents in challenging circumstances. A mother ('J') with a three-year-old daughter who was experiencing separation anxiety approached staff to discuss the situation with them:

J admits to staff that she needs help in letting her daughter take part in activities without her (mother) being constantly present. J states that since they have been attending the hub: "[my] daughter is sharing and confident and I can see now that [without me] backing off she will regress. She has to learn to do things for herself. I see it is not [my daughter] who needs help, it is me.

(professional journal, 2008)

This mother then revealed that she has a teenage daughter at home with a disability who "needs me for everything." The staff working with the mother responded to the mother's concerns:

We suggested that the separation anxiety J is feeling can be supported in the centre. The opportunity is provided to remove yourself from the child's activity, watch at a safe distance and relax.

As a result of this interaction and support from staff and other parents, J began to join in activities while her daughter was playing elsewhere. J was understandably showing signs of anxiety and distress during her discussion with staff about her situation. However, the outcome of this discussion – whereby J showed an increased willingness to leave her daughter to play without her being present – suggests that, despite J's feelings of anxiety and stress during this conversation, staff were able to communicate effectively with her about what they could do to help her. The ongoing support provided by staff to assist J in this process would also have involved an ability to communicate effectively.

Staff were also able to communicate with parents as a group during activities to ease common anxieties and concerns. For example, the excerpt below relates to a situation in a playgroup where parents were anxious about their children using knives to cut fruit. The workers recognised the parents' anxiety and the parents consented to the activity when staff:

...explained that a safety talk [with the children] and close supervision [of the children] was a part of the activity.

This is another example of how early-years staff are able to communicate effectively with parents in order to achieve a positive outcome (the outcome here being parental consent for children to take part in an activity that will contribute to their development).

Interviews in the *Catching the rainbow DVD* demonstrates the communication approaches adopted to facilitate the effective engagement of families. In the DVD, parents reflect on the importance of a friendly and welcoming environment. Service providers reflect on the importance of treating their clients with respect and building their trust. Parents and service providers agree that good communication is important in delivering an effective service to families.

Having bilingual workers who have the skills and experience to engage with these communities is really important so having frontline staff who can do that work successfully has really been the cornerstone of the program.

When we have an information session we always make sure we have interpreters.

We have displays in other languages.

Our communication strategy allows us to use different forms of communication – we have informal structure (gentle communication between workers and families), more formal interviews with families (tell us their needs). Along with that, there is an opportunity to provide interpreters from outside the service; that respects the privacy of the individual communications and allows families to have ownership of who has access to that.

The *Catching the rainbow DVD* has been designed to "assist services to develop programs that effectively engage families from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds" by being used as a "staff professional tool and inform program development and planning" (CfC six-monthly report, June 2009). It is anticipated that the DVD will further assist early-years service providers with effective engagement and communication with parents. The DVD has now been developed and finalised to be distributed to services in the near future.



Outcome summary

Overall, this data demonstrates that early-years professionals working in Broadmeadows have taken advantage of opportunities to increase their capacity to communicate effectively with parents. These opportunities have contributed to their awareness of and willingness to adopt approaches that facilitate and foster positive communication, including strengths-based and cross-cultural training and partnership approaches in working with families.

Early-years programs have also had the opportunity to hear from the Parent Advisory Group about how systems can be improved and information shared with a wider audience of parents in the community who may not attend current programs.

The communication skills of these early-years professionals are evident in the work they do with families. They utilise these skills to bring about positive outcomes for children and parents. The depth and

extent of their communication skills are evident in the way in which they utilise these skills in situations where communication is likely to be difficult – such as situations where parents are themselves dealing with stressful situations that commonly occur in disadvantaged communities.

These findings indicate that early-years services are learning to communicate more effectively with parents and it is anticipated that, with the provision of ongoing professional development (for example, the DVD resource), further progress towards this outcome will continue.

A challenge for the program is to gain systemic feedback from parents and other carers about their perception of professional communication and how it can be improved. This issue has begun to be addressed by the inclusion of parent voices in the professional development DVD and the establishment of a municipality-wide parent advisory group.

4.2

Outcomes for families





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

Background

In an area where there are high levels of disadvantage, access to services is a very important factor. When services are poorly integrated, families with complex needs are less likely to make use of support services. Families who discontinue using services may experience the service as an additional burden rather than a help, because it did not address their overall needs, for example, layers of referral processes and what can seem to families like a waiting list that is not worth waiting for with maternal and child health or assistance with sleeping/settling issues.

Access to services can mean many things. It may be that there are many more people wishing to access the services than there are services available. It may mean families are not able to access the services because of the costs involved, or a combination of both. For example, kindergartens are a universal service but one which has a significant cost for children to attend. On the other hand, speech pathology is a service that needs a referral from a health practitioner and there are limited publicly funded services available and a greater number of private services which attract a significantly higher cost. While access to services does not ensure positive outcomes for individual children, qualitative feedback throughout this report suggests that families have found services beneficial for themselves and their children. Kindergarten in particular is specifically designed to prepare children for school and ultimately to improve children's educational outcomes.

Playgroups support parents by offering a friendly, informal environment for the development and practice of parenting skills. Playgroups and other community development programs/activities can be used as a venue for the provision of a wide range of information and education for parents to create easy entry points to services. For example, playgroups are a good transition into kindergarten and they offer a forum for parents to learn to use lengthy and sometimes complex enrolment processes.

This outcome was identified as a key priority in consultations for the Victorian Best Start program in 2003 and continues to underpin the work of the Hume Early Years Partnership. This outcome aims to demonstrate improvements in knowledge about and access to services for families and children in the Broadmeadows site.

Evidence

Research has shown that disadvantaged families have greater difficulties accessing services than other families (Carbone et al., 2004). Evidence indicates that it is the most disadvantaged groups that require assistance to access support services (Moore, 2002). When services are poorly integrated, families with complex needs are less likely to make use of support services. Families who discontinue using services may experience the service as an additional burden rather than a help, because it did not address their overall needs (Attride-Stirling, Davis, Farrell, Groark & Day, 2004).

Strategies related to this outcome

Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children is an expected outcome across all CfC strategies in Broadmeadows. Increased parent knowledge of and access to local services is an outcome of the following strategies:

- Setting the hubs humming
- Playgroups rule ok!
- Connecting dots and neurons
- We are ALL community
- Catching them ALL

Interim local evaluation report findings

The 2007 interim report found an increase in knowledge and access to kindergarten, playgroups, maternal and child health and library services. Data was drawn from surveys conducted by schools in 2004, 2005 and 2007 (Improving access to preschool report, 2003–07), playgroup coordinators' reports (numbers of playgroups and consistency of attendance), bilingual storytime sessions (attendance and book borrowing data) and CALD fathering report (referrals). The interim report also pointed to resources developed, including information for parents and professionals, that are relevant to this outcome. These include materials developed specifically to inform parents about local services and where to access them. Materials include: *Your child and you*, a parents' directory of services, programs and activities for children 0–8; a playgroup participation poster for the City of Hume.

The findings of the interim report suggested that employing bilingual workers leads to better understanding about the needs of CALD families. Bilingual workers are able to directly and easily communicate with parents about the importance of early years, link parents to programs and increase knowledge of, confidence in and access to other services.

The interim report pointed to improvements in parents' knowledge of and access to local services. The report noted that an improvement in access to services is likely to be influenced by many factors and required further investigation.

Findings from final evaluation

The quantitative and qualitative data relating to this outcome are presented below followed by a discussion of the outcome: *Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children*.

The quantitative data concerning access to a wide range of services continues to indicate a steady increase, particularly for those services that are universally available, including kindergarten, maternal and child health, library and playgroups. Quantitative evidence is drawn from a range of sources including surveys from participants, six-monthly progress reports for CfC over the period 2006–09 and data relating to access to local services collected for the Best Start program. This data all contributes to the evidence for an increase in knowledge about local early-childhood services and, in most cases, a corresponding increase in access to those services. Parents were particularly asked about their experience of access to those services.

4.2 Outcomes for families



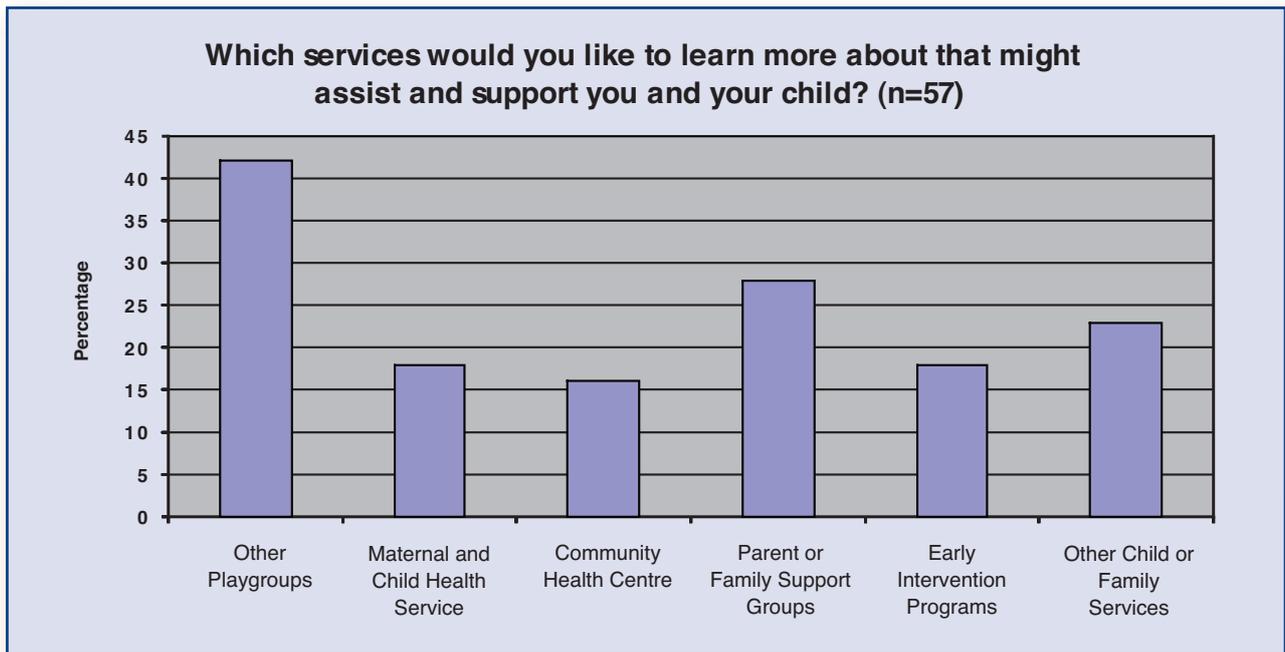
Increased knowledge of services

Information about parents' knowledge of services was gained in a number of ways, including surveys. CfC activities provided targeted and general information within their programs.

Parents attending the programs *Confident parenting in challenging times* and *Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless* were asked what services they would like more information

about at the commencement of each program. Parents (n=57) were asked *Would you find it useful to learn more about other services that might be able to assist and support you and your child?* Possible programs included: other playgroups; maternal and child health centres; community child health centres; parent or family support groups; early intervention programs; other child or family services. Information requested by parents was then provided as part of the program. The results are outlined in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13. Which services would you like to learn more about that might assist and support you and your child?



Parents' responses included other playgroups (42%, n=24) and parent or family support groups (28%, n=16) as the most common services they wanted to learn more about.

Qualitative responses from the above survey included:

Yes, family support groups and what sort of help they provide with dealing with family issues.

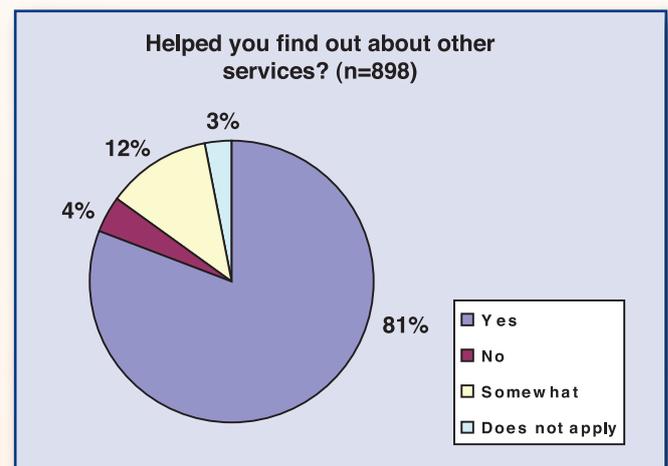
Not sure in general what services are available and would like to build that knowledge.

Parent feedback surveys

The following quantitative findings were obtained from Strategy 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 and Best Start parent feedback surveys. The evaluation survey asked all participating parents in the following activities, Has this program helped you find out about other services?

- CALD fathering
- community
- kinder movement
- Parent-Child Mother Goose
- playgroups
- strategy 5 – post-parent feedback
- bilingual storytime

Figure 14. Helped you find out about other services?



Of a total of 898 activity participants, 90% responded to the question. Figure 14 above shows that the vast majority of respondents (81% or n= 808) said the program had helped them find out about other services.

4.2 Outcomes for families

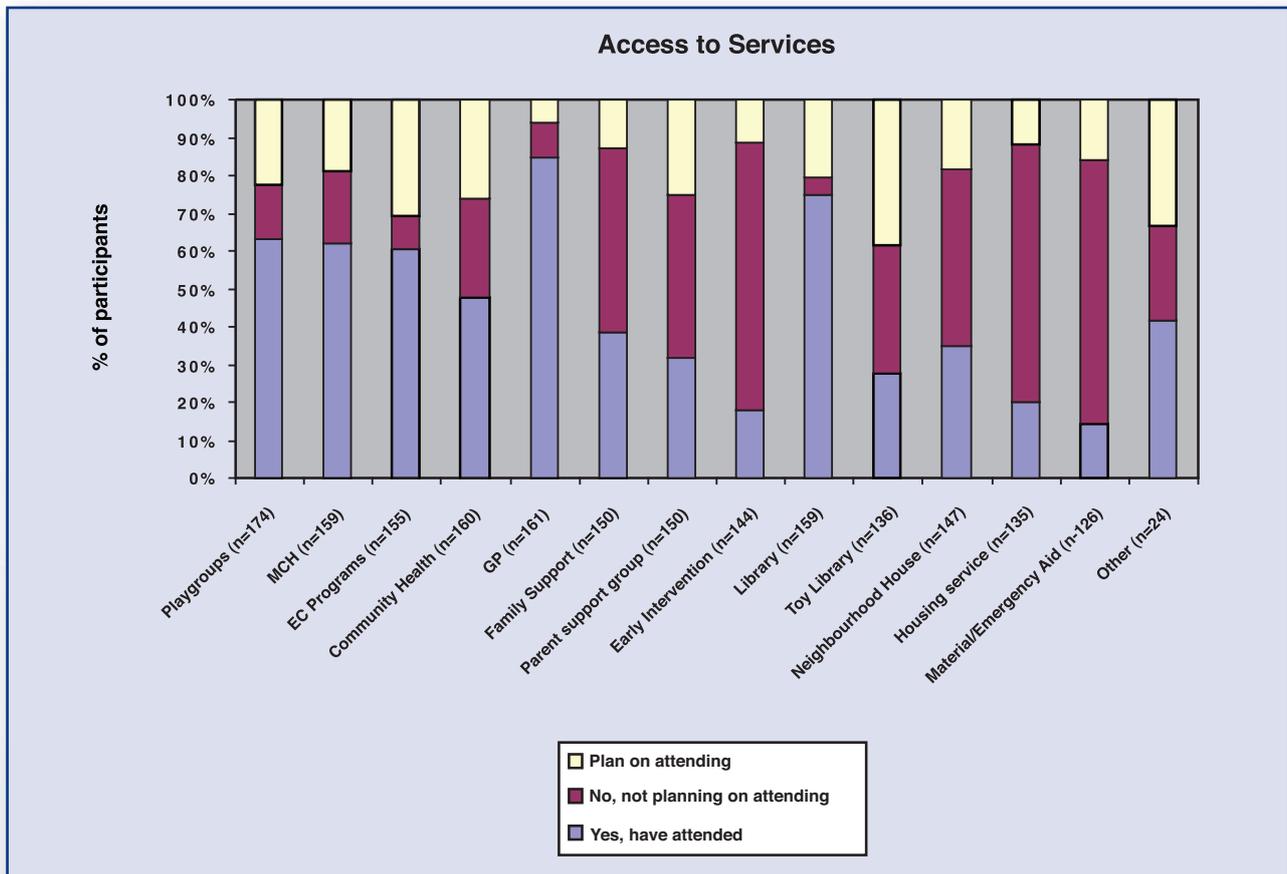


Knowledge of and access to particular services

In 2008 the community member survey from Strategy 1 and the post-parent feedback survey from Strategy 5 asked parents questions about

access to services in more detail. For example, the parents indicated which services they 'have attended', 'plan to attend' or are 'not planning to attend'. The results are outlined in Figure 15 below.

Figure 15. Access to services



The number of participants who responded to each question varied from n=174 to n=24 out of 226 respondents to the survey.

For those participants who responded to these questions, the service they were most likely to have attended was the GP (84%, n=136) and the library (75%, n=119). The service they were least likely to have attended was material/emergency aid (14%, n=18).

The service they were most likely to be planning on attending was the toy library (23%). The service they were least likely to be planning on attending was early intervention services (71%, n=102). These results are useful in confirming service usage patterns for families within the CfC site. They are not surprising results. It would be useful to confirm if there has been an increase in participation in those services respondents planned to attend, for example, toy libraries.

Access to services

The Best Start program surveyed parents of three-year-old children in 2003 (n=164), 2006 (n=172) and 2008 (n=153) to investigate their experiences with children's services and facilities in their area and assess knowledge of and ease of access to services including maternal and child health, preschool/kindergarten enrolment, libraries and playgroups. Parents indicated their responses by ticking 'very easy', 'easy', 'difficult' and 'very difficult' boxes. It is important to report that contrasting education levels of the individual cohorts may have had an impact on these variables. There was a higher proportion of participants in the 2008 cohort with an education level equal to or below Year 10 (44.7%) when compared to the 2006 (33.7%) and 2008 (26.7%) cohorts. Level of education is likely to have an impact on ability to access information. The data is presented on page 63 in Figure 16.

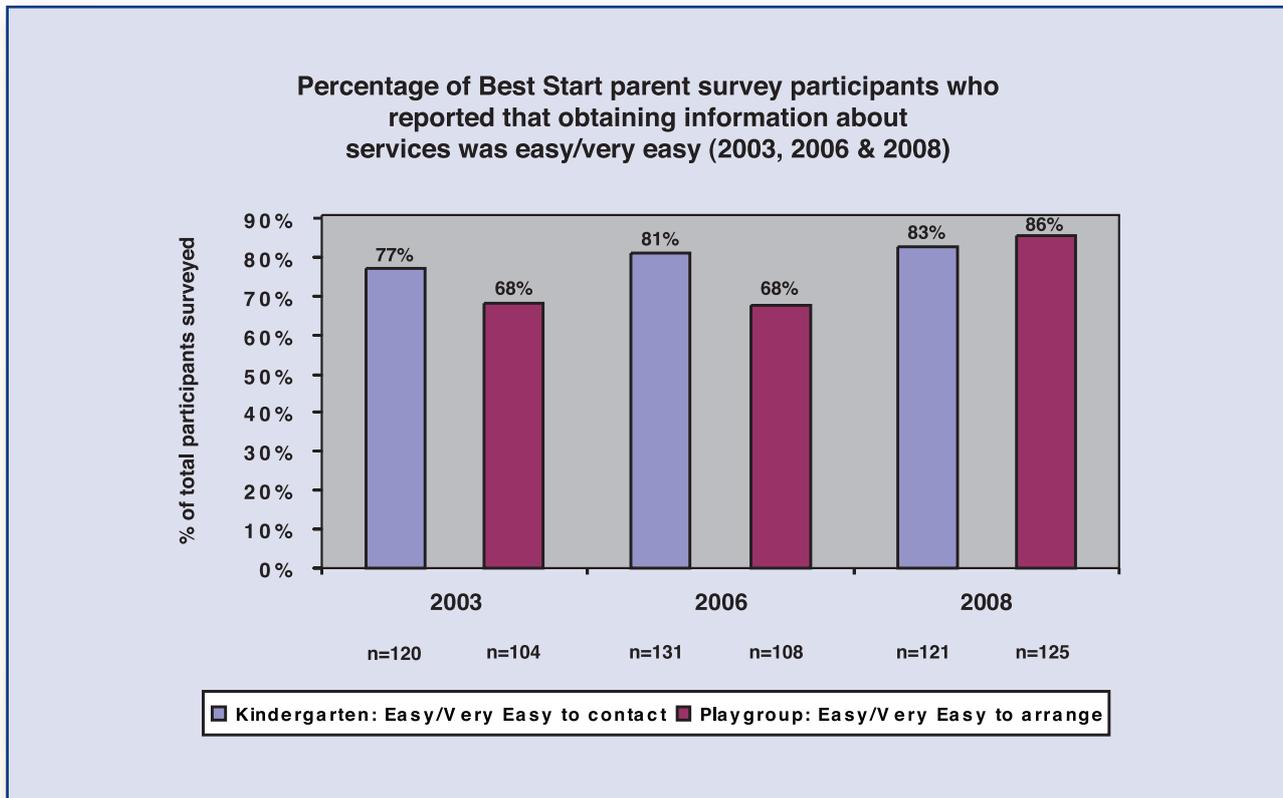
4.2 Outcomes for families



Since 2003 the site has surveyed parents about obtaining information about services and gaining access to services. This information is used as an indicator of actual ease or difficulty of gaining information and/or

services. It is an important platform of the methodology for the Victorian Government Best Start program.

Figure 16. Percentage of Best Start parent survey participants who reported that obtaining information about services was easy/very easy (2003, 2006 & 2008)



Source: Ross Trust school readiness in Broadmeadows report, Building a culture of readiness – through coordination, collaborative relationships and local decision-making 2009 - pg. 20

The majority of parents (77%, n=92) found it easy to access information about kindergarten and preschool in 2003. That number had increased to 83% (n=100) by 2008.

The majority of parents (86%, n=108) in 2008 found it easy to get information about playgroups as compared to lower numbers in 2003

(68%, n=71) and 2006 (68%, n=73). This information suggests that efforts made by playgroup coordinators and early-years services to provide more and more detailed advice about playgroups has had an impact. Playgroup information was posted on the Council website and updated regularly.

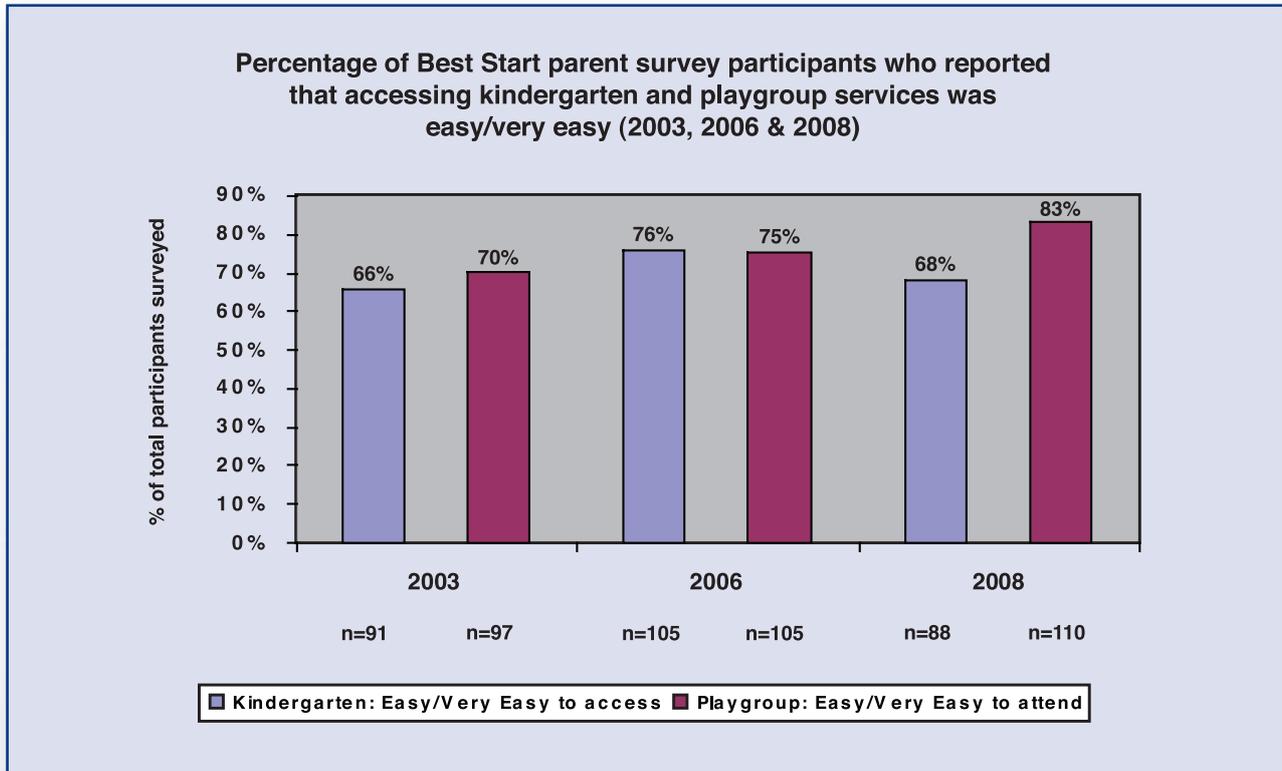
4.2 Outcomes for families



Figure 17 below outlines data on access to services in the Best Start program. The findings below suggest that between 2003 (66%, n=60) and 2006 (76%, n=80) parents felt kindergarten services became easier

to access; however, this figure decreased between 2006 and 2008 (68%, n=60).

Figure 17. Percentage of Best Start parent survey participants who reported that accessing kindergarten and playgroup services was easy/very easy (2003, 2006 & 2008)



The findings above suggest that parents found securing a place in kindergarten was more difficult for parents in 2008, as compared to 2006. The difficulty that Best Start parent survey participants had in securing places for their children in kindergarten in 2008 may have been due to an increasing number of parents seeking kindergarten places without a corresponding increase in kindergarten places.

The above findings show a gradual increase in the proportion of parents surveyed who found it easy/very easy to attend a playgroup. This appears to indicate that attending playgroups is becoming easier for parents within this area. The increased ease of attending playgroups may be a result of an increase in the number of playgroup sessions available in the area from 55 in 2005 to 116 in 2008. The increase in

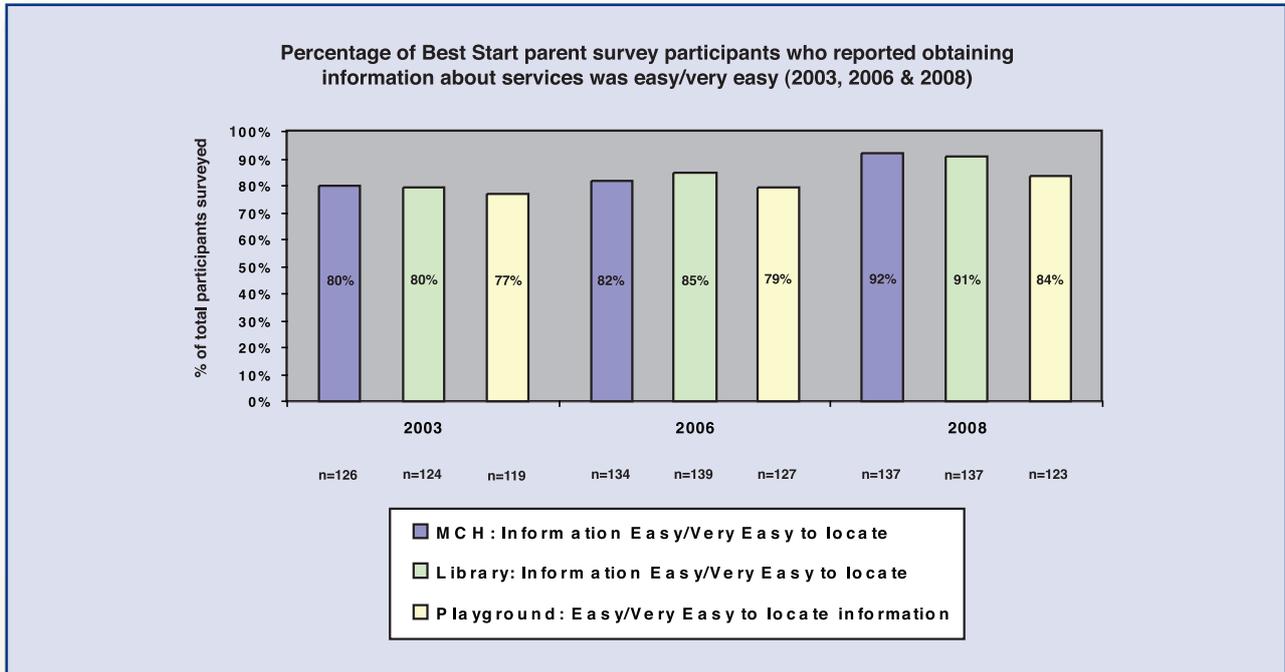
the number of playgroups available from 2005 to 2008 was facilitated by the CfC provision of additional facilitated playgroups in local community languages. At the same time, the playgroup coordinator role was expanded to facilitate the development of additional parent-run playgroups and to maintain an up-to-date playgroup directory on the Hume City Council website.

As part of the Best Start parent surveys, parents were asked how easily they could obtain information about maternal and child health services, libraries and playgrounds.

4.2 Outcomes for families



Figure 18. Percentage of Best Start parent survey participants who reported obtaining information about services was easy/very easy (2003, 2006 & 2008)

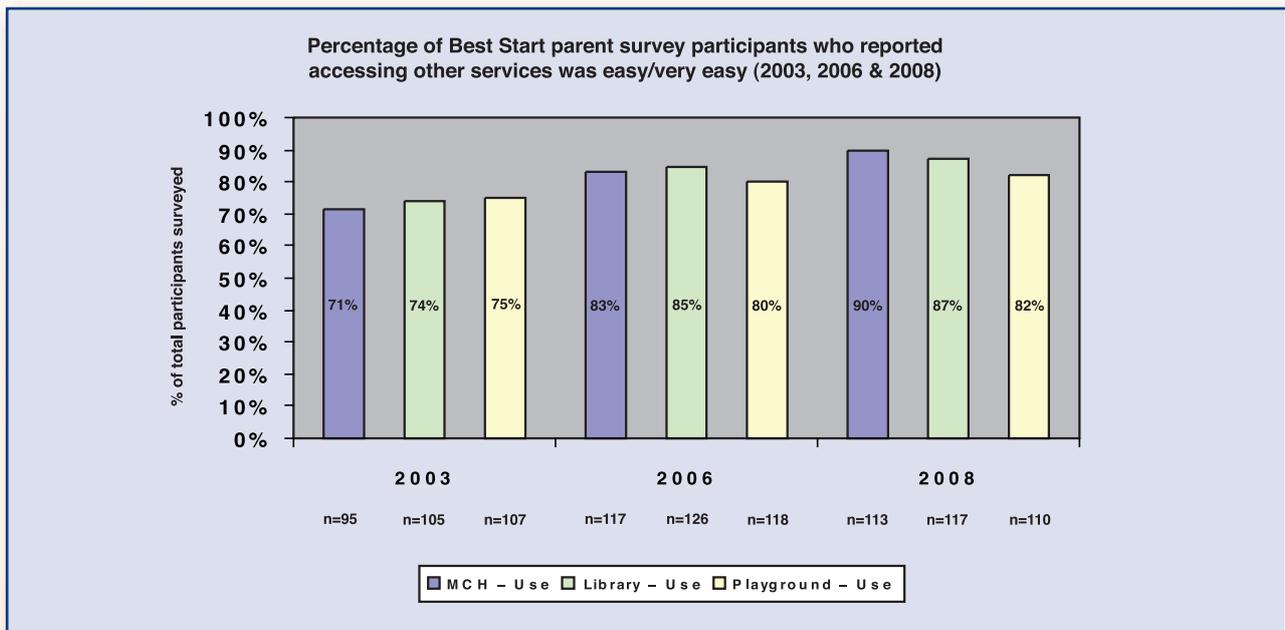


Source Ross Trust school readiness in Broadmeadows report, Building a culture of readiness – through coordination, collaborative relationships and local decision-making 2009 - pg. 22

In 2003 71% of parents surveyed (n=67) found that accessing the MCH service was easy. In 2006 83% (n=97) of the participants reported accessing the MCH service was easy and in 2008 90%

(n=102) reported that it was easy to access MCH services. A greater proportion of the people surveyed in 2008 found that the service was easy to access.

Figure 19. Percentage of Best Start parent survey participants who reported accessing other services was easy/very easy (2003, 2006 & 2008)



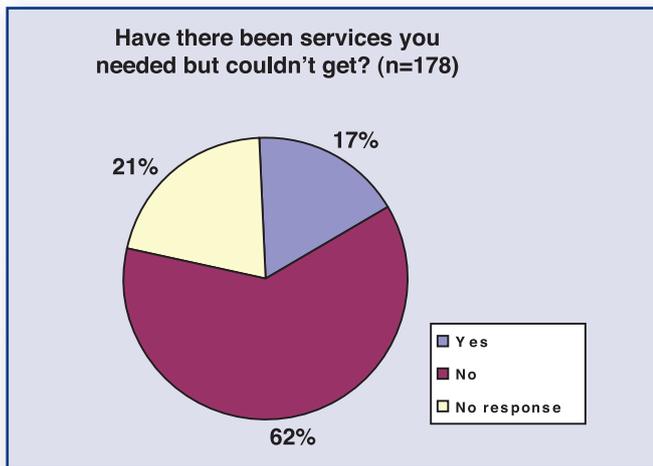
Source Ross Trust school readiness in Broadmeadows report, Building a culture of readiness – through coordination, collaborative relationships and local decision-making 2009 - pg. 22

4.2 Outcomes for families



The question *Have there been services you needed but couldn't get?* was asked in the bilingual storytime survey, CALD fathers survey and community member survey. Of the 178 participants, 141 (79%) responded to this question. The results for this survey question are outlined in Figure 20 below.

Figure 20. Have there been services you needed but couldn't get?



Of the 141 people who completed the survey question, 62% (n=111) reported that there were not any services that they required but could not access. However, 17% (n=30) stated that there had been services they needed but couldn't get, including speech pathology and childcare services, because of the cost. Another parent commented, *"I don't know how to make contact with those services"*.

Qualitative findings

Qualitative data sources, including professional journals, case studies, final activity reports and other evaluation reports, were analysed in order to determine common themes emerging from the data. The individual common themes for all data sources were then compared and, where a common theme was identified in two or more data sources, this was identified as a 'key' theme.

Professional journals

Professional journals were completed by 11 project workers including the playgroup coordinator, bilingual playgroup facilitators and hub coordinators. The majority of the professional journals were completed in 2008. A total of 89 journal entries from all strategies were analysed in order to determine the key themes emerging from the data. Only the sections of the journals that relate specifically to outcome 5 (Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children) have been included in this analysis.



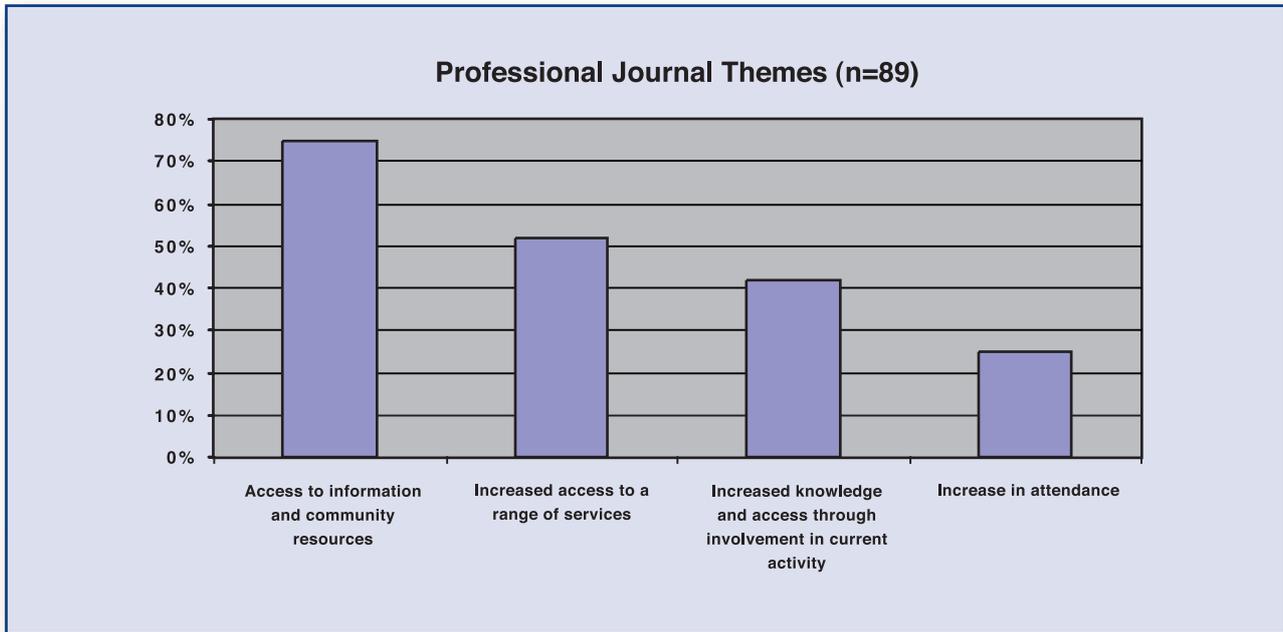
Families accessing the library

The dominant key themes from the professional journals are listed and shown in Figure 21. This includes a percentage count for how many individual journals (of the total 89) referred to these themes.

- access to information and community resources was noted in 75% (n=67)
- increased access to a range of services was noted in 52% (n=46)
- increased knowledge and access through involvement in current activity was noted in 42% (n=37)
- increase in attendance was noted in 25% (n=22)



Figure 21. Professional journal themes



Access to information and community resources

This theme includes: the development and distribution of new resources such as information/books in community languages; the promotion of community infrastructure such as parks and community facilities; enabling service providers to provide information to parents and each other; and encouraging parents to share information with each other.

New resources

Where the development and distribution of a resource has been noted as a required output for activities, community partners produced resources that are evidence-based and culturally relevant.

CfC funded nine activities that set out to develop resources that would improve awareness of and access to services. Eight of those were aimed at parents, to increase their knowledge of and access to services, as well as their knowledge of children's development. The examples set out below reflect the breadth and complexity of developing resources relevant to providing information about services, and the aim and value of early-years services for families in the Broadmeadows community.

Resources for parents in community languages

A number of activities developed written materials in community languages. For example, the Childcare Links activity set out to develop linkages across a cluster of childcare centres, enhancing the ability of

childcare services to connect with other family and children's services in the area, as well as with each other. It aimed to increase the knowledge and understanding of services, facilities, information and support mechanisms for parents, and assist in developing parenting skills and reducing social isolation. Information sessions for parents and staff about issues relevant to young children and dissemination of written information in community languages were the main outputs of the activity. The activity distributed 535 calendars to parents in English (375), Arabic (55) and Turkish (105). 121 calendars were distributed to childcare workers (English). 734 'display-it information packs' were developed in English (395), Arabic (100), Turkish (215), Chinese (5), Vietnamese (10), Somali (7) and Punjabi (2).

Service providers providing information to parents

All of the 89 journals noted the inclusion of service providers as guest speakers in session times. For some activities, the scheduling of guest speakers was central to communicating information about aspects of early-childhood development, for example, health or early literacy. Programs and activities were encouraged to share information with families about other relevant and related activities occurring locally.

For example, **Playgroups** provide a platform for multiple events and have introduced activities such as bilingual storytime, Kinder Gym and the Parent-Child Mother Goose programs within the sessions or provide information to parents about how to access those programs.

4.2 Outcomes for families



Hubs offer English classes, access to parenting sessions, playgroups and other information as relevant. Services are approaching the schools to provide their activities on-site as a way of reaching their target groups.

Professional comments about activities they visited

The Hume playgroup strengthening activity asked six early-years professionals who visit and provide information to playgroups about their views on the value of disseminating information to parents in playgroups. Some of their comments included:

They (playgroups) are a valuable resource to access families and/or families difficult to reach by other means. Smoother transition for children/families from playgroups to early-years services...

(early-years professional 1, Hume City Council, March 2008)

Provision of information relating to a range of universal early years services, such as preschool and maternal and child health, including information about how to access (enrolment process, allocation process etc) and information about what to expect from a service. The way information is presented to families can make a significant difference to their access to services...

(early-years professional 2, Hume City Council, March 2008)



Partners working together

Parents sharing information with each other

Providing opportunities for parents to exchange information has been both an intended and an incidental outcome for many activities. Importantly, journals noted that information shared between parents may have more impact than information provided by services. This is consistent with much of the social-capital literature which reflects on the importance of establishing community-level networks to drive social-change agendas.

The facilitators observed that having parents sharing their knowledge of services with others generates a more open discussion among group members, more so than having a guest speaker informing them of services available to their families.

Increased access to a range of services

Referrals across and within the service system (including universal, secondary and tertiary services) has been noted in 47 journals and is widely mentioned in activity reports. This theme includes efforts to link families through universal platforms to health and allied services (e.g. speech, pediatrics and hospitals) and support services (e.g. family support, early intervention support).

Referrals in the local context may be complex and/or require significant support from services, given the multiple issues facing some families. A case study below illustrates the positive impact of a referral for one family.

Case Study – hubs

From this situation the mother approached Roula for support for another issue that she was experiencing. This involved linking the mother to multiple services and making multiple phone calls and enquiries to find out information to assist in addressing her concerns. This issue is still ongoing.

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, when talking about Coolaroo South, says “this is my school”. When taking messages for her mother, the daughter says there is a message from “okuldan Fahriye teyze aradi” (the aunty from school).

This case study illustrates the increased access to services through a single entry point for the parent. By accessing one service within the network, the parent had access to a much broader range of services. The parent was supported through the process by someone she was comfortable with who spoke her language and was willing to navigate the service system with her.

Extending access through involvement in current activity

This theme includes embedding new programs in existing activities e.g. introducing Parent-Child Mother Goose, bilingual storytime, Kinder Moves and English classes in playgroup settings. This approach has been identified as a successful way of engaging families in extended programs within the Broadmeadows community, with positive feedback from both parents and professionals.



Increase in attendance

An increase in attendance was noted in 25 of the 89 professional journal entries, suggesting an increase in parents' interest and understanding of the social and educational benefits for children participating in early-years activities. It also suggests that structural/service system barriers such as service cost, time and location have been overcome by some families.

Outcome Summary

Quantitative data presented above indicates that a large majority of the parents accessing CfC activities believe that the programs are helping them to find out about other services. The findings also show that parents' knowledge of services has increased after their participation in CfC programs and most were able to access the services they required. However, 17% indicated that they could not receive the service they needed. This finding is important and needs further exploration, although individual surveys suggest this was related to long waiting lists for some programs, including allied health, and the affordability of other programs, for example, childcare.

When the data around service provision was analysed and knowledge and information about particular services were examined, a steady increase in knowledge of services was observed from 2003 to 2008 and across several cohorts of parents. In general, where there was an increase in knowledge about a service, there was a corresponding increase in ease of access to that service. However, in the case of kindergarten, it appears that increased knowledge of the service correlated with a perceived decrease in accessibility of the service.

Qualitative results from professional journals and other sources support the quantitative findings. Increased access to information and community resources, including information in local community languages, was noted in the large majority of journal entries. Journals also detailed the increased range of early-childhood services available to families in the last several years. The cross-fertilisation of knowledge and information for parents about the services available for their children was noted by professionals in their journals, as well as in the range of parent comments reported from surveys and in journals.

This outcome reports on increases in parental knowledge and access to services over time. It also reports on some of the strategies used to achieve those increases, for example, embedding information about complementary services within playgroups. It does not report on the wide range of additional services that have been provided in the community by CfC and other programs.

Developing parent knowledge and connections within the community is a key strategy for enabling families to access services and valuable activities for themselves and their families. A knowledge of health and educational information can empower families to more successfully navigate the sometimes-complex entry to the range of programs available to enhance children's health and education outcomes. Maintaining high levels of parental knowledge and access to services for their children is an ongoing challenge for the community.

Families are socially connected to and supported by their community

Background

Families feel socially isolated due to a range of circumstances. Many families might not have roots or connections to the community. In Broadmeadows, for example, some people marry an Australian-based partner and leave family and friends behind to enter a new country, where a different language is spoken, and must adjust to a new way of life that involves relying heavily on their partner's social connections and networks. Some enter Australia as refugees and settle in an area where there are people from their own countries of origin. Other families might experience social isolation due to ongoing crisis and unemployment, or they might move to an area where there is cheap housing. Broadmeadows is a community where 29.3% of the population was born outside of Australia and 36.3% speak another language at home, and so families are at high risk of being socially isolated (Hume City Council community profiles 2006).

There is also a relatively large number of Indigenous children living in the Broadmeadows area. There were 212 Indigenous children under the age of 8 reported in the 2006 census. This is the third largest Indigenous population in the Melbourne metropolitan region (Best Start early-childhood community profile report, 2007). While accurate statistics are difficult to find, it is likely that the majority of Indigenous families in the area are outside their own 'country' and so also likely to be isolated from family.

Evidence

One way of supporting families more effectively is to build social capital and promote community connectedness (Hamel, Elias & Hay 2001; Etzioni, 1996; Perkins, Crim, Silberman & Brown, 2004). When social capital is high and communities are well-connected, children and families benefit in a number of direct and indirect ways (Fegan & Bowes, 1999). Social capital is thought to have direct benefits for individuals and communities, including improved health, greater wellbeing (according to self-reported survey measures), better care for children, lower crime rates and improved government-regions or states with higher levels of trust (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001).

Supportive social support networks are not only important for child development, but also for parental wellbeing and general family functioning (Cochran, 1991; Cutrona & Cole, 2000; Dunst, Trivette & Jodry, 1997; Erickson & Kurz-Riemer, 1999; Thompson & Ontai, 2000). Families who are supported by their communities have many opportunities for incidental encounters with other children and other parents within their local neighbourhood. These encounters can provide information, reduce the intensity of uncertainty and alleviate parental anxiety (Fegan & Bowes, 1999).



In terms of achieving better outcomes for families and the broader community, a well-coordinated service system response at a local-community level is most likely to make a difference. A comprehensive service system consists of the continuum of supports and services from universal to secondary and tertiary levels (Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, 2008). When supported by their communities, families can develop strong social support networks and potentially have greater opportunities to access the local service system. Social support networks reduce the isolation that families might be feeling and provide occasions for sharing problems and minding each other's children. This high level of social support potentially reduces the degree to which families depend on formal services.

Playgroups provided a space for parents who are isolated to develop friendships and connections within their language of interest as a first step to inclusion (Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, June 2008; Playgroups rule ok!).

CfC parent groups, including playgroups and other activities, provided support, information and education and enabled parents to broaden their social networks by meeting other parents with similar interests, children within the same age group, language, religion and circumstances. Since personal support networks are important for child development, parental wellbeing and general family functioning, it is important to ensure that all families have supportive social networks (Cochran, 1991; Cutrona & Cole, 2000; Dunst, Trivette & Jodry, 1997; Erickson & Kurz-Riemer, 1999; Thompson & Ontai, 2000; Setting the hubs humming, Playgroups rule ok!, Connecting the dots and neurons, We are ALL community, Catching them ALL).

One of five key areas parents identified in the CfC 2005 community consultation was for parents to meet each other. This consultation was conducted to identify and understand the needs of families, parents and early-childhood professionals. The findings of this consultation informed a local plan for action.

Strategies related to this outcome

All five strategies contributed to outcome 6: *Families are socially connected to and supported by their community*:

- Setting the hubs humming
- Playgroups rule ok!
- Connecting the dots and neurons
- We are ALL community
- Catching them ALL

Interim evaluation report findings

The interim evaluation report found that CfC had a positive impact on the social connectedness of families who had participated in the project. CfC activities provided opportunities for families to be socially connected and supported by their community. This was achieved through community hub activities/events, playgroups, postnatal group activities, fathers and confident parenting groups, ATSI family fun days and many other activities. Activities were avenues for support, socialisation and learning for families. The activities supported families to become connected to services for their children and to develop connections within the community.

Playgroups provided families, particularly mothers, with the opportunity to establish friendships and long-term support structures that strengthened their social networks and community connectedness.

Community hubs adopted an open-door policy to encourage parents to become more involved in activities. Parents were welcomed into the hub at any time. The hub sites provided socialising opportunities for parents. Parents reported that their involvement in the hub activities provided them the opportunity to meet new people.

Final evaluation findings

The quantitative and qualitative data relating to this outcome are presented separately below. This is followed by a discussion of all the data in relation to the outcome: *Families are socially connected to and supported by their community*.

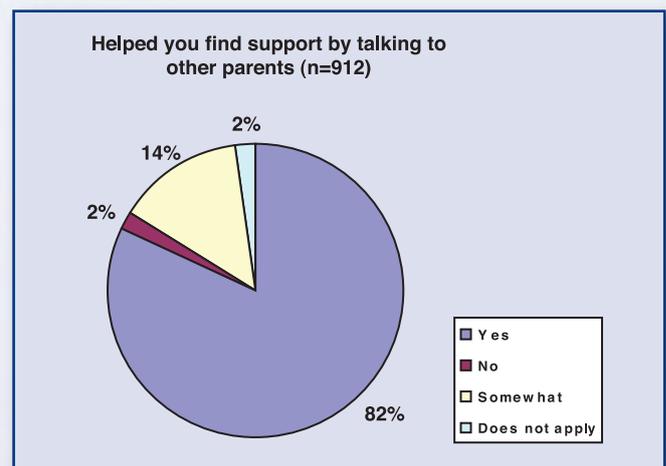
Parent feedback surveys

The following quantitative findings were obtained from Strategy 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 parent feedback surveys in the following surveys:

- CALD fathering survey
- community member survey
- Kinder Movement survey
- Parent-Child Mother Goose survey
- playgroup survey
- post-parent survey
- bilingual storytime survey
- Arabic parents workshop (one-off session, 26 June 2008).

A total of 912 participants (92% of the total) responded to the question: *Has this program helped you to find support by talking to other parents?* The results are outlined in Figure 22 below.

Figure 22. Helped you find support by talking to other parents?



4.2 Outcomes for families

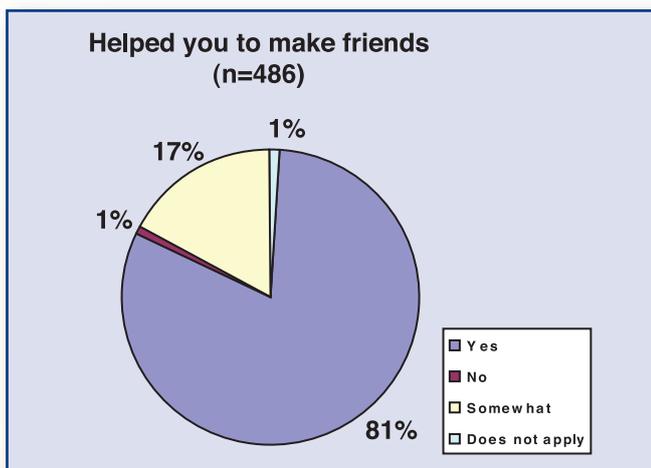


Of the participants who took part in the survey, 82% (n=751) responded 'yes' and 14% (n=126) responded 'somewhat'.

The playgroup survey also asked parents: *Has this program helped you to make friends?* A total of 486 respondents (98%) answered this question.

The vast majority (81%, n=396) of respondents stated 'yes', 17% (n=82) stated 'no', 1% (n=5) stated 'somewhat' and 1% (n=3) stated 'does not apply'. The details are outlined in Figure 23 below.

Figure 23. Helped you make friends



Pre-questionnaire responses

Parents who attended two activities – Confident parenting in challenging times and Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless – completed a pre-questionnaire at the commencement of both programs. Parents (n=64) were asked if they would like to have more opportunities to meet and talk with other parents. The majority (80%) responded 'yes' and some of their comments included:

Yes, it would help to find out more information about what's going on in our community.

I would like to share my experience with other parents – to feel that I am not alone.

Yes, it would be good for information sharing and social contact.

I would like to meet more parents.

It would be good to meet with those in similar situations.

The activities then structured their programs to include opportunities to meet and talk with other parents. Post-activity surveys were completed but they did not address the issue of meeting other parents.

Service users study: 2006, 2007 and 2008

The CfC service users study was conducted in 2006 (n=108), 2007 (n=50) and 2008 (n=32) with parents of children involved in CfC programs.

The findings of the 2006 and 2007 studies indicated that parents became more involved with their neighbours, children were more sociable and parents felt more supported after their involvement in the range of CfC activities in Broadmeadows. The first round of the surveys conducted in 2006 (n=108) found that parents had relatively little contact with their neighbours. By the second round of the surveys in 2007 (n=50) families, both parents and their young children, had *significantly increased* their relationships with their neighbours. This is an encouraging indication that CfC activities in Broadmeadows are contributing to the development of community connectedness for families and young children in the CfC catchment area. This research was published in the *Australian Community Psychologist* journal, June 2008.

The data from service user studies (2006, 2007 and 2008) relating to 'frequency of contacts' for the 32 parents who took part in all three surveys was collated and analysed by the Centre for Community Child Health.

Parents' frequency of contacts

Parents were asked to record how often they talked with, saw or emailed family members, friends and neighbours, to determine whether there was a change between frequencies of contact over the 2006–08 period. Overall, after a significant increase in contact between neighbours between 2006 and 2007, the increased contact has been maintained.

Children's frequency of contacts

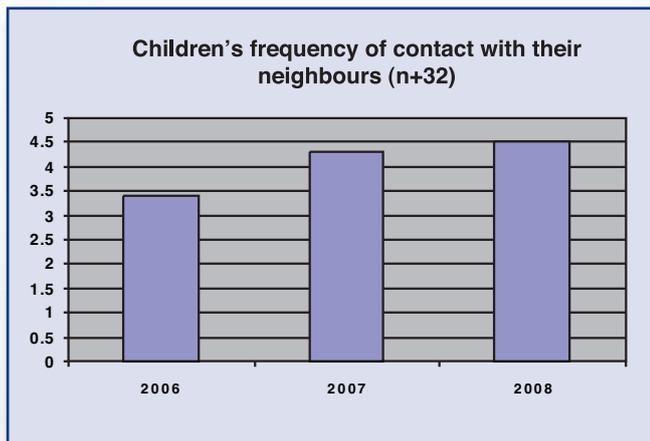
Parents were asked how often their child saw or spent time with: grandparents, other family members, parents' friends, parents' neighbours and other young children (outside childcare or school). The survey findings indicated that children's contact with their grandparents and parents' friends remained stable. The impact of the CfC program upon participants' children's frequency of contact with these four groups has been neutral.

4.2 Outcomes for families



However, as with the findings of the 2006–07 studies, the 2008 study also found *statistically significant change* in the children’s levels of contact with their neighbours. This suggests that the CfC program had an ongoing positive impact upon participants’ children’s frequency of contact with this particular group. Figure 24 below shows the mean scores of children’s frequency of contact with their neighbours.

Figure 24. Children’s frequency of contact with their neighbours



Qualitative findings

For the purpose of this analysis, each qualitative data source, including professional journals, case studies, final activity reports and other evaluation reports, was analysed in order to determine common themes emerging from the data. The individual common themes for all data sources were then compared and, where a common theme was

identified in two or more data sources, this was identified as a ‘key’ theme.

Professional journals

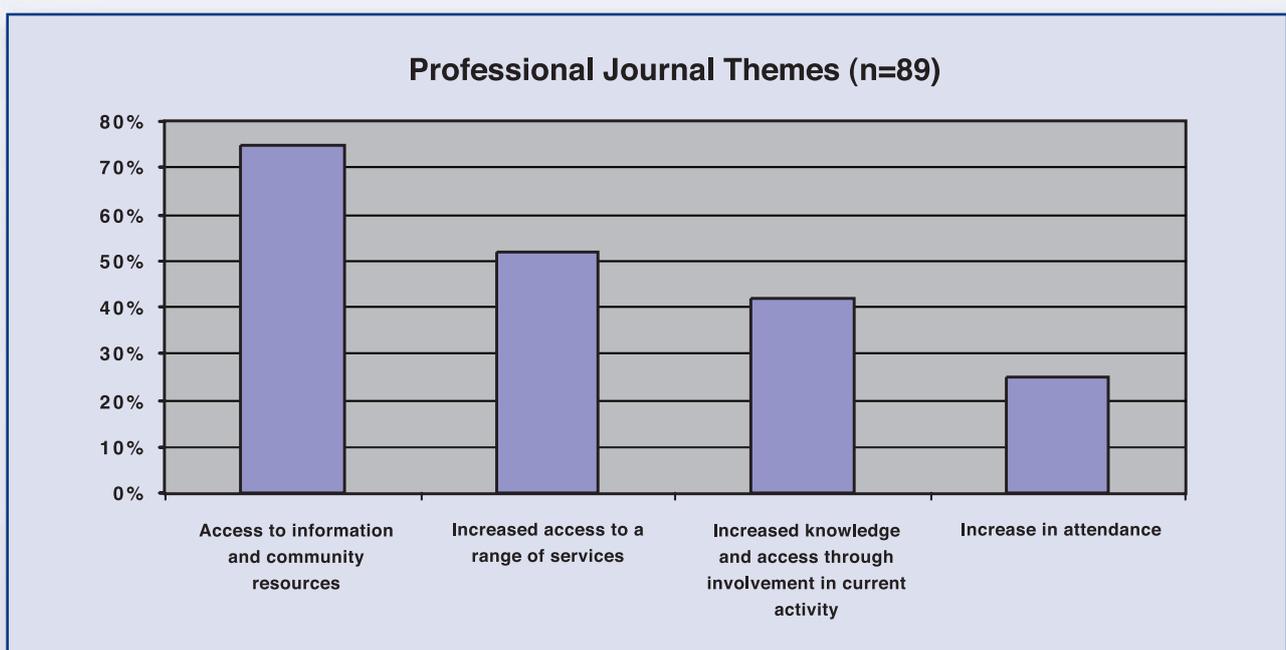
Professional journals were completed by 14 project workers including the playgroup coordinator, bilingual playgroup facilitators and hub coordinators. The majority of the professional journals were completed in 2008. A total of 141 journal entries from three strategies were analysed in order to determine the key themes emerging from the data. Only the sections of the journals that relate specifically to the outcome (Families are socially connected to and supported by their community) have been included in this analysis.

The journals provided three main types of information. They outlined activities, detailed professional support and assistance, and recorded observations of families and the changes taking place. Other journal entries referred to how project workers assisted and supported families, both during and outside the activities taking place. For example, vulnerable families who were not showing up at activities were followed up and supported through phone calls to make sure they were coping.

The dominant key themes from the professional journals are listed and shown in Figure 25 below. This includes a percentage count for how many individual journals (of the total 141) referred to these themes.

- families supported by professionals (48%, n=68)
- meeting new people (46%, n=65)
- social networking and learning opportunity (46%, n=65)
- belonging (17%, n=24)
- feeling lonely and isolated (16%, n=23)
- groups benefiting children (11%, n=16)

Figure 25. Professional Journal Themes





Koorie Family Christmas Day 2009

Some examples of how these themes were referred to in the professional journals, and parent feedback quotes and case studies, are presented below.

Meeting new people

46% of journal entries related to parents making friends, developing strong and close friendships, meeting new people and other parents, and meeting parents from the same culture.

For example:

- offering lifts to each other to attend groups
- shopping together and visiting each other outside of group time, including going to the library, swimming pool and park together, leaving their children with each other when attending a wedding or doctor's appointment, inviting each other's families for meals and coffee, going on outings together on the weekends, providing support to each other and developing a support network by exchanging telephone numbers
- parents meeting parents in the same situation as themselves and realising that they are not alone.

Supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness

Most group members talked about how they do not have extended family in Australia and that they felt isolated prior to joining this group. Group members said that they feel the group is their extended family and they believe they are more connected to their community. Parents talked about how through the group they have established friendships, not just between group members but also among their older children and partners. (Anglicare, Rising stars report, March 2009):

The following case study demonstrates how one isolated mother has made new friends and increased her social connections.

Community links – postnatal mothers' group

Background

Soher is a 37-year-old mum from Syria with two boys aged five and three. She has been in Australia for seven years and has no family here.

During her pregnancy she was attending the CfC activity 'Community links – postnatal mothers' group' where the project worker referred her to attend the Assyrian/Chaldean playgroup. She's been attending this large playgroup of 31 mothers and 37 children since July 2006 with her two sons.

Meeting new people and building strong friendships and connection with the community

Soher speaks very highly of the playgroup, as it has provided her with a social network of parents from the same background, language, culture and religion.

I like meeting new parents and sharing our life experiences, stories, food and everything. It's a great opportunity for me to socialise with other mums while my sons are involved in educational play activities. For example, I met Murvatt here and she is like my sister now. We both have lots of things in common. Murvatt is 35 years old and she is from Iraq. Like me, she has been in Australia for about 7 years and has no family except her younger brother (23). She has a son aged 3 years old, same age as my son. She also has a 6 month old daughter.

I met Murvatt at the Assyrian/Chaldean playgroup. I had a flat tyre one day after the session. Murvatt straight away said 'I'll call my husband and he can fix this for you'. She made a call and soon after her husband Ahmed came and changed my flat tyre. From that day onwards we became very good friends. We started going to each other's house for coffees and dinners. We go out shopping and spend lots of time together.

When Murvatt had a caesarean birth to her daughter, she asked me if I could look after her son while she stayed in hospital for three days as she had no one to leave him with. I said of course without thinking, to help and support her. My boys and Murvatt's son all played together and we regularly visited the hospital during her stay.

I have been from the postnatal group to Assyrian/Chaldean playgroup. I also attend the Bilingual storytelling sessions at the library and soon I will be attending the Arabic confident parenting program.



Social networking opportunities

The professional journals referred to parents from different cultures coming together to learn, celebrate, connect, chat, share ideas, information, stories and experiences (e.g. cooking recipes and childrearing issues). Journals noted that parents were keen to network with professionals who were visiting the programs.

One of the project workers reported that many parents are complaining that they do not have time for themselves. They spend their time completing household activities such as cleaning, cooking and shopping, which means that they do not have much social activity in their lives. The programs provide parents with social networking opportunities. For example, parents arrive at the sessions at 9.30 am instead of 10 am to catch up with each other before the session. Then they stay back to socialise with each other. As a result of attending the confident parenting program, five parents got together and organised their own walking group.

Initially most mothers with their children were very much by themselves and not socialising with other members of the group. It is now different; all mothers are happily meeting and discussing life experiences. They have jokes, cooking recipes while their children are sharing toys.

(professional journal)

My personal favourite is Mother Goose; it's fun for the kids and parents interacting together. Then the time for mum to relax is the best, where the child moves gently away from mum and the child is happily playing while mum is happily relaxing.

(professional journal)

Meadowbank Hub activities encouraged mothers to interact and socialise with each other. For example, parents' interest in craft opportunities was supported with a weekly activity at the Meadowbank Hub. The photo frame making was particularly popular.

This is a photo frame. This is special, not bought in a store. Doing things like this, I can put it up at home. Good time to talk with other mothers.

(parent feedback recorded in professional journal)



The Kazoos at Koorie Family Christmas Day 2009

Families supported by professionals

Families were supported by hub coordinators, the playgroup coordinator and project workers. There are many examples of how professionals provided support to families attending the activities. For example, the playgroup coordinator linked many parents into playgroups. Other project workers supported their families to be more socially connected, welcoming the families into the group, informing them about family services they can access. Professionals facilitated access to services when parents approached them directly for guidance and information. Some of the activities provided transport and childcare for parents and staff followed up by phone with the families who were unable to attend the sessions in order to continue to support and encourage them beyond the activity times.

The following comment from a mother demonstrates the impact of the Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless project on this mother's social connection.

I was feeling socially isolated and didn't have the confidence to attend a group. I knew the group would be good for the kids, but I had no idea how much support I would get for myself. I feel like sometimes it was more therapeutic for me than for the children and this is what I needed.

(one mother with 3 children attending)

Three other minor themes emerged from the professional journals. These were referred to by at least 10% of the individual journals analysed.

Belonging

The journals referred to: the school community; feeling comfortable; having a safe place; trusting the centre/hub/playgroup/group/project workers; being connected to the school through bilingual workers; being part of the group – like family; and new parents being welcomed by engaged parents.

Feeling less lonely and isolated

The City of Hume has a high proportion of migrant, refugee and newly arrived families. Many families leave behind their relatives and friends, which can leave new immigrants feeling lonely and isolated. Workers reported their observations on how parents began to feel less isolated as a result of participating in the activities. Some parents at Dallas hub and Coolaroo South hub took up volunteering at the community hubs.

The case study below demonstrates how a young mother of a 15-month-old boy has been socially connected and supported by the hub coordinator at Dallas Hub.



Experience of isolated mum

Mary, who has a 15-month-old son, arrived at playgroup. She introduced herself and told the hub coordinator that she was an experienced childcare worker. She had concerns about her son being very active.

Sometime later, the playgroup leader told the hub coordinator that Mary was very upset and going home. Her son and another child had hurt each other at the playgroup. The hub coordinator went to sort out the situation. Mary said that people judged her and her child. The hub coordinator comforted her and explained that he's an active normal boy and, after chatting for a while, convinced her to come back to Thursday's session.

Mary went home and thirty minutes later she called the school sounding very depressed. The hub coordinator took the call and talked to her about general things and Mary mentioned how much she enjoyed the childcare work she used to do. Feeling good about having someone to talk to, Mary called back two hours later, sounding very happy and wanting to help out with children's activities. She said:

I'm feeling very isolated and lonely as all my family live in Melton and I don't have a car. I want to feel like me again. Before I got married I wanted to study teaching but after my husband did not allow me to study.

The hub coordinator encouraged Mary to attend the playgroup twice a week and other monthly meetings. She is now very happy that there is a safe place where she can come and be allowed to attend at anytime. Her confidence has increased significantly and she has become a different woman. Through her participation in the playgroup activity at the hub, she has been able to make new friends and she has been linked into training sessions at Banksia Gardens Community Centre. She is now aware of the opportunities that are available to her and feels comfortable in contacting the hub coordinator to find out about other things.

Group benefits for the children

One of the mothers commented at the end of this session how she thought the group was very beneficial for her daughter, who previously had not spent much time with other children. Another mother commented several times during the group that she was really aware of how much the group benefited the children as well as her to get out of the house and do something a bit different.

Other parents' comments indicate a range of ways parents involved in activities have found improved connections give them confidence.

Feeling great that now I know of somewhere to go when I need help

Feeling like a person again, not just a mum

Can come and talk confidently and get advice or just get it off my chest

Love that all cultures can come learn and celebrate together

Other findings

Most of the families who had taken part in the Meadow Heights language and literacy program were recently arrived migrants under the Federal Government's refugee/humanitarian program or family reunion program. The majority had limited English skills and little social involvement in the community. The program succeeded in breaking down this isolation and increasing social connectedness by providing the program in their first language. This created immediate access for some parents and involved children who would not ordinarily attend such a group.

Many ongoing friendships formed in the groups. There was a supportive environment created where parents visited other parents in the group. Many of the participants lived locally and lived in close proximity to the venue and to the other parents.

Parents commented that they benefited from the socialising and that parents learn from each other.

I have made many new friends.

I get to meet all the women; it's a break for me. I like interacting with different people; discussing parenting.

Interacting with different people and discussing parenting.

Many of the women attending the Community links – postnatal group had recently arrived in Australia; therefore they had language barriers and did not have the in-person support of their families. Many of the women mentioned that these groups had given them the confidence to ask questions, knowing that they would be answered or referred to someone who could give them the information. As many of the women were newly arrived and socially isolated, they felt that meeting and talking to other mothers and sharing their experiences was an important part of attending the group. Some women mentioned that through the group they made friends with other women who they would keep in touch after the group ended.

4.2 Outcomes for families



The best part of this program was socialising with other mothers and being able to bring my son along.

Overall, the program was very helpful and supportive. The topics were beneficial. The environment was friendly.

I enjoyed talking to other mothers and sharing stories.

The groups allowed women to share their own experiences and ideas and to develop social networks. Many of the women who have attended the groups to date have been socially isolated and therefore the groups provide not only an opportunity to learn and develop new skills, but also a forum to meet other women with similar experiences and expand their social networks. The groups also provide children with an opportunity to interact and play with other children, as well as introducing many of them to childcare for the first time.

The members of the bilingual storytime team have seen great improvements over the period that they have been involved in delivering the bilingual storytime in the community program. They have reported that they have seen great improvements in the level of community connection and support that is available to parents within their own community. This has been seen as a key to setting the foundation for becoming involved in the wider community when their child starts preschool or school (Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, 2008).

Parents, storytellers and volunteers all reported that participating in the bilingual storytime sessions facilitated the development of positive relationships with other parents. Parents reported this from all groups – Turkish and Assyrian playgroups and Arabic bilingual storytime at The Age Library. Overall 96% indicated that bilingual storytime sessions had helped them to find support by talking to other parents (Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report, June 2008).

The Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report noted that parents talked about how the activity allowed them time with existing friends, as well as opportunities for getting to know new people. Many indicated it was the first time they had a chance to develop friendships independent of their family or within this particular community. A number of these women indicated that, prior to participating in bilingual storytime sessions, they had felt quite isolated and lacked contact with other women in their circle who were going through similar experiences. These women included:

- those who were new residents to Australia with a refugee background, who had settled in their area because they were advised that other people from their country of origin lived in the area, yet did not interact with these residents
- those who had arrived in the area after marrying an Australian-based husband and, while they had contact with their husband's family and friends, as yet had not developed their own friendships.

Additionally, there were women who had moved to the area when they had purchased a home. Many women talked about how attending bilingual storytime sessions had provided them with a sense of community and support, as well as experience of this in the community away from the bilingual storytime sessions. Examples they provided included:

- seeing friendly faces in the street and at shopping centres and how a minimal gesture of greeting or acknowledgement made a difference to them
- walking to the shopping centre together after bilingual storytime sessions
- small groups going to others' home in turns after the bilingual storytime sessions to have coffee, which turned into shared lunch and spending much of the rest of the day together
- other groups arranging to meet at the library with their children or at a local playground at a regular time during the week.

The following feedback was obtained from parents participating in the bilingual storytime sessions:

I hear other parents' experiences of their children, share stories and advice. [I even] found the right godmother. I now have new ideas about parenting [and have] learned songs to sing with my child.

(parent, Arabic bilingual storytime in The Age Library)

I have met new friends and we now meet away from this playgroup, sometimes at the playground and sometimes at each other's houses. I used to see people at the playground but we didn't talk to each other. Coming has also shown me that my children are the same as others; they are generally doing what they should be for their age.

(parent, Turkish playgroup bilingual storytime)

Time to meet other women and talk to them. I don't have any family here and this is where I have met people who have become my friends. It is a bit like a family gathering.

(parent, Assyrian playgroup bilingual storytime)

I didn't know anyone before I came to playgroup, now I have some very close friends, especially one other [friend]. Sometimes a group of us will go for a coffee at the shops; afterwards other times we visit each other's homes. I have learned about lots of services and activities and as a result have enrolled in a computer course. I am also thinking about doing childcare, it has inspired me, but I don't think I will be able to do this until the children go to school. I feel more part of this community now.

(parent, Turkish playgroup bilingual storytime)

Playgroups – feedback from early-years professionals

Six early-years professionals who participated in the playgroup sessions as guest speakers provided their feedback on what they saw as the benefits of linking into playgroups and what they have learned by attending the playgroups. Their feedback included:

From my visit I've learned that families and young children learn from each other and support each other. They use each other to gain information about services... Playgroups are highly organised and provide a great environment for play for children and support for families.

(HCC staff member)

4.2 Outcomes for families



All families require support and the playgroup environment is an ideal venue for reaching families.

(MCH nurse)

Parents are benefiting in a number of ways – social connectedness, learning parenting skills, how to engage children around books and songs. Refugee families benefit tremendously from facilitated playgroups – it acts as a link into the community and early-childhood services and a point of contact to meet other families. Playgroups are a very effective way of linking families to services, providing positive parenting messages and breaking down social isolation.

(Hume Global Learning Centre – community literacy and engagement officer)

Playgroups are VERY valuable to help the parents socialise or at the very least, not feel isolated at this very vulnerable stage of early parenting.

(HCC – child safety promotion officer)

Outcome summary

Both quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence that families participating in the CfC initiative felt socially connected as well as supported by early-years professionals.

An overwhelming majority (82%) of the almost 1000 respondents to the survey across activities agreed that they have found support by talking with other parents in a range of CfC projects. A smaller number of respondents reported that they had felt 'somewhat' supported. There were no respondents who said they found no support. In addition, data from almost 500 parents in the playgroup strategy further consolidated this finding regarding social connections; when asked *Has this program helped you to make friends?* the vast majority (81%) responded that they had made new friends.

Professionals observed and documented that meeting new people, social networking and learning opportunities, belonging and being a part of a community as well as feeling less isolated were among the highest priorities for families. Professional journals referred to many occasions where they have supported and helped a particular child or a family by providing direct assistance or referring them to appropriate services. The surveys and professional journals documented many cases where previously isolated parents and families had made friendships and provided support for each other.

The findings of the service users study over three years indicated that parents became more involved with their neighbours, children were more sociable and parents felt more supported after their involvement in the range of activities in Broadmeadows. The first round of the study (n=108) found that parents had relatively little contact with their neighbours. By the second round (n=50) families (parents and their young children) had *significantly* increased their relationships with their neighbours. When the study was repeated for the third time with the same parents (n=32), the results found statistical significance in



Sharing traditional Turkish stories

the children's contact with their neighbours, showing an increase over the past three years, while the parents maintained their relationships and contact with each other.

A connected community leads to strong social capacity and wellbeing. Connecting families to each other and to local services that they can access is critical in building functional and sustainable communities. Social connection and support are the key elements in addressing the needs of disadvantaged communities and are directly linked to other outcomes in this report. For example, when families are socially connected, they are more likely to:

- develop long lasting friendships and support networks
- have an increased knowledge of accessing services
- become more aware of early-childhood development
- feel confident and skilled about their parenting
- develop pathways to create employment opportunities for themselves
- have a healthier outlook on life and the community they live in.

CfC provided opportunities for many families with young children to connect with each other and local services, to build and strengthen relationships in friendly, welcoming, accessible places and feel supported in the activities.



Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge

Background

CfC provided support to families in their parenting role by providing information and practical parenting skills to increase their confidence. *Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge* is a very broad outcome and relates to many of the issues that parents of young children face. The three domains of confidence, skills and knowledge are not mutually exclusive and therefore will be analysed and discussed together in this report.

Information and education sessions aimed to increase parents' knowledge, parenting skills and confidence and to assist parents to navigate the service system. In addition, information and education sessions are an important referral pathway, linking parents into the services they need for themselves and their children.

Evidence

While socio-economic status is a significant predictor of successful outcomes in developmental areas such as health and education, and its early influence is linked with outcomes through life-course education for parents and for children, the negative impact can be alleviated (McCain & Mustard, 1999; Stanley et al., 2005). Practical assistance including providing education for parents on financial management can help alleviate financial distress (Moore, 2002).

Parenting behaviours are instrumental in achieving many child behavioural and developmental outcomes (Collins et al., 2000). Parenting influences the child's development of: emotional regulation, exploratory behaviour, communication, self-direction, intellectual flexibility, introspection, self-efficacy in meeting life's challenges, moral values, expectations and motivation. A lack of a warm, positive relationship with parents, insecure attachment, harsh, inflexible, rigid or inconsistent discipline practices or inadequate supervision of and involvement with children all increase the risk that children will develop major behavioural and emotional problems. These include: conduct problems; substance abuse; antisocial behaviour; and participation in delinquent activities (Coie 1996; Loeber & Farrington 1998; Patterson 1982).

Parents interacting with their young children by talking, singing and playing rhyming games not only stimulates language and vocabulary development by building the foundations for learning to read; it also builds a positive warm relationship between children and their parents (Carter, 1997 cited in *Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report*, p. 9). Some parents may feel that they lack the necessary knowledge and skills to provide this level of support and consequently feel inadequate. This is especially the case when parents are poor readers themselves or when they are reading in their second language. When parents attain the skills and confidence to read aloud to children, children's reading fluency increases and parents' teaching ability improves (*Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report*, 2008).

Strategies related to this outcome

Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge was an expected outcome of the following strategies:

- Playgroups rule ok!
- Connecting the dots and neurons
- Catching them ALL

Interim evaluation report findings

Community consultations in 2005 revealed that parents wanted information to enhance their knowledge regarding early-childhood health and development issues and to increase their parenting confidence. Information sessions covered a wide range of issues and micro-skills of early parenting including: sleep issues; breast feeding; dental health; toilet training; importance of play; school readiness; and encouraging positive behaviour. Evaluations indicated that *school readiness and encouraging positive behaviour* were the most popular information sessions among parents.

The CALD fathering activity targeting Iraqi fathers provided information sessions to increase parenting skills and knowledge. Fathers reported that they attended the group sessions to develop and gain further information about parenting, Australian laws and cultural norms.

Activities trialled the presentation of parent information and education programs in parents' first language. The confident parenting program offered parenting groups in Vietnamese and English. Parents involved in these activities reported that they were feeling more confident in their parenting ability and that their knowledge and skills had increased.

Final evaluation findings

Information and education

Over the lifetime of CfC, many information and education sessions for parents and carers were held on a wide range of topics. Community partners delivering activities often asked families what topics they would like to see included in the sessions. Table 13 below outlines the topics requested by parents and the topics provided by professionals. Over the four years of the CfC program, information sessions became more popular with parents, groups became larger and the range of information requested grew. Over the period, activity providers began to seek advice from parents as to what information and education issues were most important to them.

Information and education programs were provided for groups with a predominantly female audience of mothers, grandmothers and other female carers. However, the Iraqi fathers' group invited several speakers to provide information sessions including the maternal child health nurse, Foundation House and ParentLine representatives. Fathers were seen to be missing out on information relating to their children and their stages of development because they do not usually accompany their wives to see the maternal child health nurse. Fathers learned the importance of praising their children.

4.2 Outcomes for families



Table 13. Topics requested by parents and provided by professionals

- encouraging positive behaviour
- children attending school for the first time; school readiness
- fun things to do with kids
- activities that can be duplicated at home with child at low cost
- encouraging healthy eating
- toilet training
- dealing with misbehaviour, tantrums, stubbornness
- behavioural issues e.g. eating habits, sleeping issues, obeying rules, discipline, listening to instructions, getting along with other siblings
- helping children appreciate rules
- parenting strategies
- being a positive parent
- cultural differences in raising children in Australia
- helping children concentrate and learn
- baby massage
- being a father
- increasing parenting confidence
- reading and singing to child
- breastfeeding
- promoting language and literacy at home
- safety in the home
- first aid – CPR
- financial planning: managing money, budgeting tips, banks/credit cards and loans, dealing with Centrelink etc.
- water safety
- kinder enrolments
- effective communication with children
- communication with children/babies through language and play
- children’s speech development and understanding children’s language & communication
- social development of children
- importance of play and spending more time with children
- improving child confidence
- promoting children’s language development
- overcoming child separation and anxiety issues
- encouraging positive attachment
- age comparisons for development
- aural health
- oral health
- self care – women’s wellness
- women’s wellbeing i.e. coping with stress, how to exercise, proper stretching after baby and with baby
- information on local services, especially for newly arrived families
- the role of the maternal and child health nurse
- service support for children with disabilities
- safety in the car – seat belts and car seats

4.2 Outcomes for families



The information sessions outlined above were held over the four-year period. Some were held as a special request while others were provided to multiple audiences. According to the data collected from six-monthly activity reports, over 7000 families benefited from the information sessions. Some parents may have attended multiple sessions.

Guest speakers and early-years professionals from a wide range of services and agencies provided information sessions on the above topics. These services and agencies included: Hume City Council; Melbourne CityMission; ParentLine; Foundation House; maternal and child health nurse; playgroup leaders; child psychologist; community and allied health services (including community health nurse, physiotherapy, continence health, speech pathology, dental services, dietetics, audiology etc).

Some programs provided structured parenting-skills programs with a built-in skills development component. The Confident parenting in challenging times activity, which was one of these programs, provided six-week education sessions, including skills development, to parents on the following topics:

- being a positive parent
- encouraging positive attachment
- promoting children’s language and development
- helping children concentrate and learn
- helping children appreciate rules
- managing tantrums, misbehaviour and problems.

Pre-questionnaire responses

All parents attending the Confident parenting in challenging times and Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless program from 2007 to 2009 (n=64) were asked about any particular information they would like to receive in relation to child development. The majority (n=58) responded that they would like to know more

about their child’s development in a number of areas included in the above table.

In addition, the majority (n=52) who participated in these programs stated they would like to learn more about new ways to play with and teach their children. Some of their comments included:

I really need to know how to play with my children effectively and beneficially. Normally we don’t allow our children to touch anything.

Yes, it’s very important for my child’s development. I would like to learn how to play with my child to develop his physical and mental growth.

When I play with my children, I want to do so with knowledge and also how to communicate effectively with them.

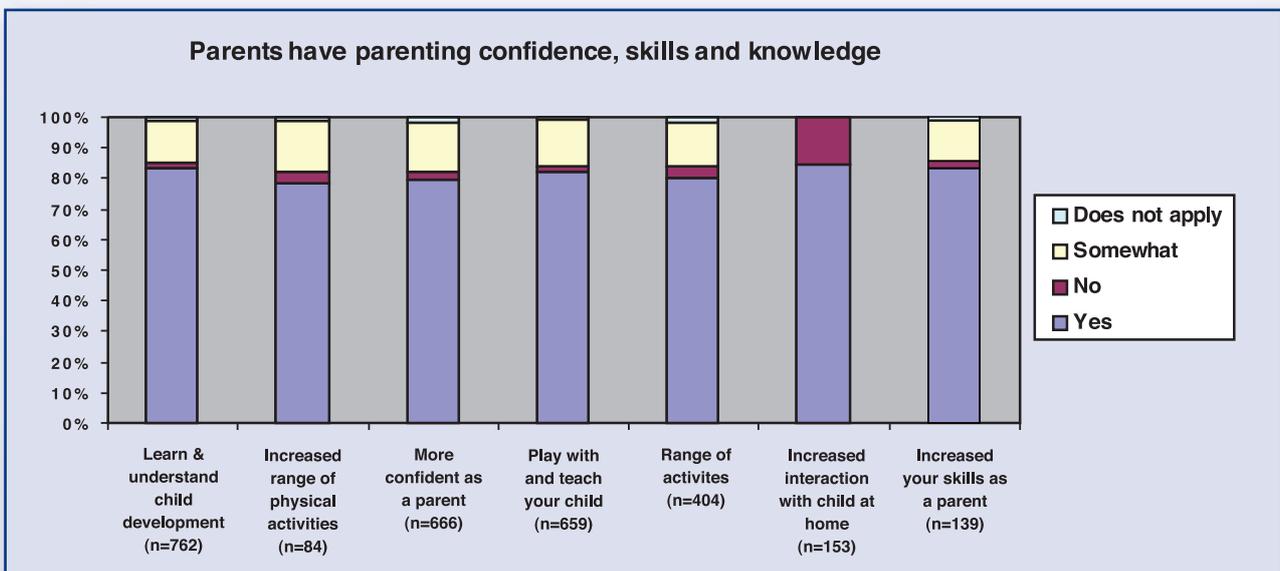
Parent feedback surveys

The following quantitative findings were obtained from parent feedback surveys.

Different surveys asked different types of questions regarding parenting confidence, skills and knowledge, depending upon the goals and format of the program. The following surveys have been used to obtain data for this outcome:

- CALD fathering survey
- community member survey
- Kinder Movement survey
- Parent–Child Mother Goose survey
- playgroup survey
- post-parent survey
- bilingual storytime survey
- Arabic parents workshop (one-off session, 26 June 2008)
- Samoan songbook survey.

Figure 26. Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge



4.2 Outcomes for families

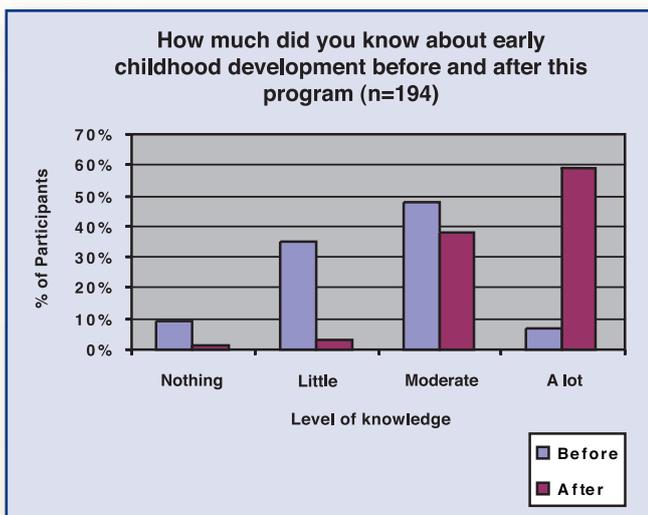


For every question, more than 75% of participants believed that the program had helped them with issues such as their confidence as a parent, their skills as a parent and their knowledge of issues such as child development. In addition, for all questions but one, the proportion of participants who stated that the program had not helped them with their parenting skills, knowledge and confidence was small (ranging from 1% to 4%).

The question *Has this program increased your interaction with your child at home?* received a notable number of negative responses (n=24,16%). Overall, the data indicates that the program has been very useful in helping parents improve confidence, skills and knowledge in relation to parenting. The issue of increasing interaction between parents and young children, while also very positive, needs further investigation to determine parental barriers to parent/child interaction at home.

The Parent–Child Mother Goose survey asked parents *How much did you know about early childhood before this program?* and *How much did you know about early childhood after this program?* Figure 27 below outlines the results.

Figure 27. Improved knowledge of early childhood development

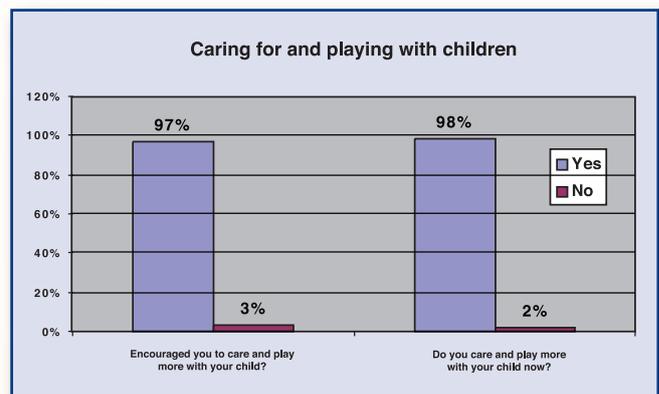


Of particular interest in Figure 27 is the large proportion of participants who increased their knowledge about early childhood 'a lot' from just 7% (n=14) before the program to 59% (n=115) after the program.

Consequently, the proportion of participants who knew 'nothing' about early childhood decreased from 9% (n=17) prior to the program to 1% (n=2) after the program, as did the proportion of participants who knew 'little', which decreased from 35% (n=68) before the program to 3% (n=6) after.

The questions *Has this program encouraged you to care and play more with your child?* and *Do you care and play more with your child now?* were asked in the CALD fathering and bilingual storytime surveys. There were a total of 68 participants in these programs. The results from these survey questions are outlined in Figure 28 below.

Figure 28. Caring For and Playing With Children

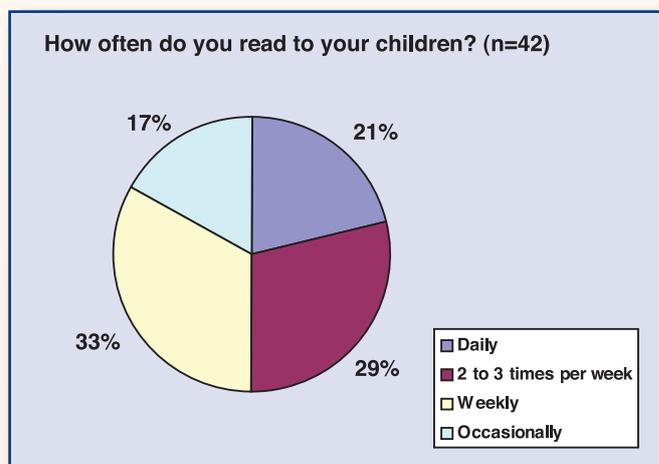


Sixty-one participants (90% of the total) responded to the first question *Has this program encouraged you to care and play more with your child?* and, of those, 97% (n=59) agreed that the program had encouraged them to care and play more with their child.

Sixty-three participants (93% of the total) responded to the second question *Do you care and play more with your child now?* and, of those, 98% (n=62) agreed that they care and play more with their child now.

The question *How often do you read to your child?* was asked in the Samoan songbook survey. A total of 42 participants were involved in this program and all of the participants (100%) responded to this question. The results for this survey question are outlined in Figure 29 below.

Figure 29. How often do you read to your children?





Bilingual workers in community venues

Of the 42 people who completed the post-session surveys, 21% (n=9) stated that they read to their child daily, 29% (n=12) read to their child two to three times per week, 33% (n=14) read to their child weekly and 17% (n=7) read to their child occasionally. While these results do not demonstrate a significant impact on the outcome, it is important to realise that half of the parents within this program are reading to their children regularly.

Qualitative findings

For the purpose of this analysis, each qualitative data source, including professional journals, case studies, final activity reports and other evaluation reports, was analysed individually in order to obtain qualitative data on outcome 7: *Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge.*

Professional journals

Professional journals were completed by seven project workers including the playgroup coordinator, bilingual playgroup facilitators, hub coordinator and other project workers. The majority of the professional journals were completed in 2008. A total of 182 journal entries from three strategies were analysed.

Professional journals asked facilitators to comment directly on parent confidence, skills and knowledge. This analysis focused on the ways in which parents demonstrated increased confidence, skills and knowledge as a result of their involvement in these programs.

A range of themes emerged from the qualitative data. The themes draw out some aspects of what it means to the participants and to the professional to be a confident, skilled and knowledgeable parent.

Parents' increased involvement in activities

Parent involvement in children's activities was promoted at all sessions and activities. Facilitators observed that parents were gaining more confidence in their ability to support their children during activities. Mothers began requesting their children's favourite songs during

group sessions and discussing how they use these at home during bath time and playtime. Some mothers requested written copies of songs such as "The wheels on the bus" so they could sing it at home with their children.

The facilitators reported that parents, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds, are joining in the singing and dancing activities with their children. Parents have been learning new songs with actions and singing them to their children at home and to the group.

One of the mothers thought that singing didn't help her child. The facilitator explained that singing helps children to develop their speech and language and learn English. Parents also learned the importance of singing in communicating and settling their children.

(professional journal)

Parents also reflected on their skills development in relation to talking and singing to and playing with children.

What happens here I can do at home. I now know that it helps to talk and play with my son.

My son loves Old Mcdonald song but I do not know how to sing it in English, so I created my own in Arabic and called it Uncle Yousef and made animal sounds with engaging my son to make those sounds.

I have never sung to my baby before.

Reading to children

Professional journals reported that parents are learning the importance of reading books and stories to their children. In some of the sessions, parents have been encouraged to read a book to their children before they start on the activities and/or to tell stories to their children in their own language. Parents have also been listening to the stories and translating them into their own language.

Zeina said she has been reading the boys the Arabic books at home and they do not speak Arabic. She explained that she reads in Arabic so they will learn her language and translates the words back to English for reinforcement.

(professional journal)

Parents were commenting on how they felt more confident in building on their children's letter and sound recognition by using the worksheets that were provided to them during the session so that they could assist their children at home. The facilitators talked to the parents about a wide range of activities that they can do at home with their children e.g. while driving in a car, ask the child to name things they can see that start with the letter "B", at the grocery store, go on a hunt to find labels that start with the letter "A". Parents appeared to be very enthusiastic to start using the strategies that were suggested to them.

(professional journal)

Facilitators reported that initially some of the mothers felt silly reading to their children. However, they gained the confidence to read stories with expression, making different sounds and noises while reading, using movements and singing to their children. The facilitation and modelling were effective in supporting the parents to attempt new

4.2 Outcomes for families



methods of communication with their children. Learning songs in the group and singing these songs with their children at home was one of the key ways that interaction between the parent and the child had increased. Reading to their children was another source of increased interaction between parent and child.

Parents gained the confidence to join in and share their own stories with the rest of the group and to read stories to their children before bedtime.

I have learned [that it is important] to read to my daughter even though she is only 6 months old. I thought because she couldn't understand it wasn't important – I spend time reading and showing her pictures and talking about them [now].

(parent, Turkish playgroup bilingual storytime)

My son wants me to read him a story every night before bed.

(parent comment recorded in professional journal)

Through their involvement in the reading activities, parents reported that they learned some techniques on how to read and change their voice tone to keep children's attention.

I learned to make animal noises. I point to a picture and ask my son what is it and what sound it makes and we both like making the sound.

(parent comment recorded in professional journal)

Journals and parent feedback indicate that parents have learned to borrow books from the library. This is reflected in service access data (refer to outcome 5) that shows a large proportion of parents surveyed have attended the library and more parents are planning to attend.

Positive changes in parents' behaviour and relationships with children

Professional journals also document that the activities had a positive impact on parents' behaviour in terms of their relationships with their children. The facilitators reported that parents learned about the importance of play in their child's development and as a result parents were playing and spending more time with their children at home and at the programs.

The facilitators continued to encourage parents to spend quality time with their children and provided many examples of new ways of playing together. During the general group discussion sessions, parents talked about simple maths activities that they could employ with their children, using as props everyday household objects and inexpensive items that they could purchase.

The facilitators reported that the majority of the parents gained more skills in interacting with their children and were able to enjoy their children's company more.

Parents enjoyed participating in the sessions. One parent commented:

My son has greatly enjoyed the various activities you have supplied at the centre. We both love Kinder Gym and Mother Goose sessions. I always look forward to the many different things on offer at the centre. My son has also shown great improvement in many ways. He has become more sociable, more patient and

more curious about learning new things. I cannot emphasise enough how much WE LOVE what you do for us! We always leave happier, inspired and more motivated.

(parent comment recorded in professional journal)



Spending more time with children at programs

Facilitators observed and reported on the changes in parents' parenting behaviour as a result of attending CfC programs/activities. Professional journals described how parents developed confidence in themselves and their parenting role. It was reported that parents reached a level of:

- making suggestions as to activities they want for their children
- asking questions individually while the universal service speakers are visiting
- leading the singing or reading to the group in their own language or in English
- initiating activities and joining in with their children
- helping the facilitators set up for meal time and pack up toys with their children
- managing their children's behaviour
- becoming good listeners, calmer with their children and learning to think before they act
- spending quality time together by tuning in to their children
- attending training sessions and other courses
- completing the Playgroup Victoria initiative to become a five-star playgroup (playgroup parents)
- feeling comfortable with the environment/group and moving around freely
- socialising with other parents and children
- applying and modelling what they have learned at the groups or activities at home (e.g. reading to their child, making playdough at home, model-sharing with others and taking turns)



- singing lullabies to put their babies to sleep, attending the group to learn, improving and practising their English skills, attending the library and choosing age-appropriate books for their children, learning how to be assertive and set limits for their children.

Parents shared their childrearing experiences with other parents, learning from each other and adjusting their tactics to suit their own and their children's personalities.

I learned a lot, especially to be patient. My son was stubborn, but after attending the sessions I decided to change my tactics with him to suit his personality. This was wonderful for both of us.

(parent comment recorded in professional journal)

I have a very active son and I used to complain about this, but now I have seen different ways to play with him that help to calm him down, I think he was a little bored before, because I didn't really do things with him or have things for him to do. Now I know he is normal. It has also helped me to see the importance of routines for children. Cem shows us a different way of reading, how to make it interesting, and I try and practise what she has shown us.

(Bilingual storytime in the community evaluation report data)

Improved parenting confidence, especially for those who have been anxious or intolerant parents

Journals recorded many instances where parents with less-than-ideal parenting styles were feeling secure enough to attempt change strategies within the various groups that provided parenting information or skills development. Issues included anxiety, fear of separation and angry or judgemental parenting.

Natalie did a painting and her mother said 'that isn't good' and tore it up. Staff spoke about the painting being the child's work and the mother admitted to being frustrated with the separation anxiety she is feeling. Mother said she has been scaring her child (Natalie) by constantly reinforcing she will be on her own when she leaves her at her kindergarten session. The family's attendance at playgroup has been irregular and after a follow-up phone call Dad said the family will concentrate on getting the mother's anxiety under control before they return to playgroup with the younger child. An offer of a referral to a family support worker was made.

(professional journal)

Professional journals report observation from parents including reflections on gaining trust in their peers and reporting the challenges they face. One mother said that she didn't have a lot of knowledge and was anxious about parenting:

My mum never hugged and kissed me. I am 27 and have 3 children. Now my mum wants to hug and kiss me but I am not used to it. I feel uncomfortable but I am trying to show affection to my children.

Parents are demonstrating their skills

Professional journal observations referred to parents learning from each other, learning to make playdough, gaining skills to provide their children the opportunity to learn and explore through play.

Skills that parents have learned include:

- reading books and allowing their children to choose the books they want to read
- healthy communication with child, developing communication cues – verbal and non-verbal – and giving the child reasons and choices
- relevance of eye contact
- assisting their children to develop their speech and language
- healthy eating
- children watching less TV
- keeping hot drinks away from children
- toilet training
- separation at night time
- awareness of children's ages and stages e.g. teething, overattachment, phobias etc
- sleep settling
- practical parenting tips
- activities to develop their children's verbal, gross and fine motor skills as well as social skills at home with no-cost or low-cost activities to stimulate their children
- building up their children's self-esteem and independence by praising and reinforcing things.

Behaviour management/parenting styles/strategies

One program, Confident parenting in challenging times, focused intently on skills. It also focused on issues for parents in managing young children's behaviour and managing their own responses to children's behaviour. Some of the parenting strategies they learned included: 'pause and think before you act'; be calm and flexible; the praise–ignore principle; use choice and consequences; 'time out'; and reinforcement and discipline techniques. The activity collected qualitative feedback from parents. Parents reported how they realised that tuning in to their kids, coming down to the same level as them to make eye contact, using an appropriate tone of voice and touching and cuddling them facilitated the management of challenging behaviours.

I have to calm down and not show my son that I am upset.

I have stopped shouting and yelling and try to be calm before I act and start to think.

If I am calm, I notice that my children are calm as well.

I've learned not to give up when I put rules.



One mother who worked on changing her discipline tactics with her child said:

Now I give my son choices. I understand he does not respond to orders, this works well.

My son was stubborn but after attending the sessions I decided to change my tactics with him to suit his personality. This was wonderful for both of us.

One parent mentioned that she applied what she learned from a previous group and says she benefited and that was why she was coming back to learn more.

An observation from a professional journal referred to a parent applying the parenting strategies she learned at the programs with her son Jack. The professional journal noted that Jack did not want to participate in the activities. The professional approached the mother and asked what was going on. The mother said:

He won't join in because I have told him not to do activities like jumping at home. I see now he won't join in because of this. I need to say why we don't jump – like on the chairs or bed. Then he will join in here.

Professional journal observations noted that parents were happy with the take-home equipment and craft activities. They asked about other activities they could do at home with their children to further their learning and development.

I spend more time with my child.

I share with him, sit down, read a story or play a game.

Parents increased interest in children's development and school readiness

Professional journal observations stated that parent enrolments in all activities demonstrated an increased understanding of the benefits for early-years development. The professional journals also noted that parents attended regularly because their children were enjoying the activities.

Two parents reported that they were not aware they needed to talk to their children from birth. Parents became more knowledgeable about the fact that children learn as soon as they are born.

There are a lot of things to teach children before they start school.

My older daughter didn't attend any playgroups or Mother Goose sessions before she started school and she had lots of difficulties. I could really see the difference with my younger child now.

Parents also reported that they had become aware that their children need social skills and interaction with other children. One of the mothers, who had six children, had been involved in playgroups previously. She attended the playgroup with two of her children and said that:

My children and I enjoy coming to playgroup and it's giving my toddler an opportunity to socialise with others his own age.

Experience of a mum's learning

An Arabic mother with two children aged four and two years old attended the Arabic postnatal group. Both children could be described as hyperactive, uncontrollable and dangerous to other children.

Mother presented as vulnerable and naive.

During the first session, the two children were running around dangerously, putting themselves at risk of injury and other children at risk. Project worker approached the four-year-old boy and modelled walking behaviour. The following week, the boy ran again in the room, Project worker modelled walking behaviour again and took him to childcare room while door remained open so that children can see their mothers. The boy started to play roughly on the indoor slide. Again, project worker approached the child and modelled taking turns and social behaviour. The child listened, looked at the worker and then waited for his turn. It was explained to the mother, and the facilitator modelled the behaviour during lunchbreak. Both children understand now that it is not safe to run in the room and knock down other children. They both learned that mother is in next room and they will join her at lunchtime. They also learned to share and play with other children.

The mother reported that she gained confidence in her parenting role. She built her self-esteem and shared her parenting concerns with the group. Every week she comes back to report what she did with her children at home such as reading a story, playing games, listening to her children so that they can listen to her.

It was obvious in week eight, the mother was implementing the new parenting information she learned on that day about 'challenging behaviour' and how parents need to tell their children when they are good and not only when they do things wrong. She told her son what he did well on that day and the son sounded happy.

The mother commented:

I want to tell everyone in the group what is happening to me, everything I learned is working, I can see the change in my children and also with me. The sessions made me very confident to parent my children. Believe me, it is working.



Outcome summary

The findings presented here indicate that CfC programs, groups and activities have made encouraging progress towards outcome 7: *Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge*. The outcome is, however, a complex one to report on because it is difficult and not practically useful to separate the domains of knowledge, skills and confidence, given that they overlap. Reporting on this outcome highlights the myriad of micro-skills and knowledge that parents need to bring up young children. Parents are their children's first teachers and play a very important role in their children's learning and development. Both qualitative and quantitative data show positive results when parents are supported and equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to become more confident in their parenting roles. All programs and activities provided parents with the skills and knowledge to learn and understand child development, behaviour management and communicating and interacting with their children by highlighting the importance of play, reading, singing and spending more time in playful activities together.

There are a number of areas where clear improvement of parenting has taken place. Parents became much more knowledgeable about the importance of reading to their children regularly. Many learned a range of skills in making the process interesting to their children and had a sophisticated understanding of the benefits and complexities of bilingualism. Parents also learned and were beginning to implement the skills of spending time playing with their children in order to build a better, closer relationship and to assist in children's learning. Quantitative data indicates that some parents still struggle to find the time at home to do this with each of their children.

There were also clear improvements in the area of behaviour management, with many parents reflecting on the importance of being patient, understanding their own and their children's personalities, and fathers in particular understanding the importance of praising and positively reinforcing children for good behaviour. Data presented refers to changing parenting techniques and parents gaining a better understanding of the ages and stages of their children's development. As a result, parents were developing better relationships with their children and families, which was likely to create a more resilient community.

In addition, the professionals and parents demonstrated a greater level of trust, with more parents reporting and displaying their parenting difficulties to other parents and to professionals. This in turn led to improvement in parenting for the wide range of parents involved in CfC programs, addressing this outcome.

Families with complex needs participate in early-years services

Background

This outcome aims to improve the ability of partnership organisations to reach out to parents who are not accessing early-years services or supports, although they may be accessing other services, including mental-health and housing services. It also aims to improve the ability of partnership agencies to join together and share resources and common understandings to support families with complex needs.

Broadmeadows is a community with many vulnerable and isolated families and this outcome is important in helping families feel more included in the community and supporting them. Broadmeadows is also a community with long standing professional networks that have the potential to offer coordinated local support for families. This has been achieved through opening up universal services and programs for family engagement and coordinating referral pathways.

The specific target of this outcome is families with complex needs. Complex needs have not been closely defined. In Broadmeadows, families facing the challenge of homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness are included in this category, as is the local Aboriginal community, parents from a CALD background with a mental illness, newly arrived migrant and refugee families, and families where a child has a behavioural or other issue that requires intervention. The aim is to ensure that **families with greater than usual challenges** are supported in their parenting and are able to access the interventions that support the family and improve children's outcomes.

Evidence

Evidence from the research on social disadvantage and social inclusion emphasises the value of community partnerships in addressing the engagement of families with complex needs collaboratively, with multiple layers of intervention, as no one agency can offer this in isolation (Homel et al., 2006). The Best Start statewide evaluation report states: "working in this way, it is felt that members of the partnership can more effectively build on community assets, provide programs that are more tailored to local conditions, connect multiple services, programs, policies and sectors and attack problems from multiple vantage points simultaneously" (Dunt et al., 2006).

Families with complex problems are most effectively addressed jointly across the health, education, early-childhood and community programs. They may have a range of needs (often health, social support and education related) that are difficult to deal with holistically in one service (Mattessich et al., 2001). Community partnerships within a defined place can offer a shared responsibility for achieving results for more vulnerable families. It is important to ensure that programs are responsive to local needs and are culturally inclusive (COAG, 2007). A range of programs at multiple levels ensure families have access to local support, which can also increase parenting confidence (Homel, 2007). Strengthening the social environments for children/families can assist with children's learning and development and school readiness (CCCH/Broadmeadows UnitingCare RE Ross Trust report, 2009).



Strategies related to this outcome

Outcome 8, *Families with complex needs participate in early-years services*, is an expected outcome of the following strategy:

- Catching them ALL.

Interim evaluation report findings

The interim evaluation report (2007) did not provide quantitative data to indicate an increase in participation in early-childhood services for families with complex needs. Project workers noted improved parent-child relationships and parents reported that their skills knowledge and confidence had increased.

Families facing homelessness were provided with a specific playgroup for homeless children. Families who participated reported having renewed confidence as a result and/or the capacity to request and search for other services in the community.

Parents participating in a Confident parenting in challenging times program provided positive survey responses indicating increased participation in services. Three of the parents commented on a sense of social connectedness being created as a result of the program.

Outreach support provided to newly arrived and isolated families resulted in families directly accessing relevant services and agencies for further support. This assistance was provided with the intention of reducing isolation and increasing participation in the local service system.

Final evaluation findings

Data collected since the interim evaluation report consists of both quantitative and qualitative information and includes: participation rates; parents' quantitative and qualitative survey responses; and professional feedback.

Quantitative findings

The quantitative data reported in this section comes from activity reports, including the six-monthly progress reports and the final activity reports for participation data. The activities provided services to families with complex needs, many of whom were experiencing ongoing crises including mental illness and homelessness.

Families involved in the Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness activity received support through an eight-week group activity program; information regarding the social and educational needs of young children; information on community resources including playgroups, kindergarten and childcare; and opportunities for parents and young children to develop social connections with their peers. Table 14 below presents the participation data for this activity.

Table 14. Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – activity final report, August 2008

No. of members in	Data
Parents participating	15
Children participating	25
Professionals participating	9
Sessions offered & average number of participants	16 sessions 3–4 families

As outlined in the table above, the activity provided 16 sessions to 15 families and 25 children who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. These families may not have otherwise had the opportunity to participate in a supportive and therapeutic group together with their children.

The Supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness activity provided three playgroups: Rising stars (incorporating referrals for parents experiencing depression, guilt or anxiety), Beyond baby blues (supporting mothers with postnatal depression) and Meadowbank Primary School (supporting the development of formal and informal social networks) over four terms. Table 15 below presents participation rates for these periods.

4.2 Outcomes for families



Table 15. Playgroup participation rates

Numbers of	Rising stars	Meadowbank Primary School	Beyond baby blues
Term 2 – 2008			
Sessions	4		
Children	7		
Parents	5		
Term 3 – 2008			
Sessions	10	7	8
Children	9	15	9
Parents	5	11	5
Term 4 – 2008			
Sessions	8	9	5
Children	10	12	16
Parents	6	12	9
Term 1 – 2009			
Sessions	4	4	
Children	11	10	
Parents	6	9	

(Anglicare Rising stars report, March 2009)

As reported in the Rising stars report, 42 different families in total attended the Rising stars, Beyond baby blues and Meadowbank Primary School playgroups. It is believed that some families attended more than one activity.

The most common mental-illness symptoms experienced by parents were clinical anxiety (particularly post-traumatic stress disorder) and depression. Family distress was reported as high among participants. Parents in the groups were recruited from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, were often relatively newly arrived in Australia and were in all possession of either a pension or healthcare card.

The Aboriginal partnership project consisted of three key activities. These were family days for local Aboriginal parents and children, development and distribution of Burndap Bopop – good little kids, a behavioural-management resource for Aboriginal parents, and an ongoing network for practitioners working with Aboriginal families.

Attendance figures at the two family days, participation rates of families in the development of the Burndap Bopop baby book and the number of professionals involved are documented in the following table.

Table 16. Aboriginal partnership project quantitative data

Activity	Attendance/involvement
Partnership working group meetings	4 partnership meetings
Family day 1 2008 Mid-year family day	25 parents and 25 children
Family day 2 2008 Christmas family day	30 parents and 65 children
Burndap Bopop baby book	4 professionals as critical reference group for book development 3 parents participated in baby book development reference group

The *Burndap Bopop* baby book was designed for local Indigenous families with children aged between 18 months and 3 years. The book was developed in response to community consultation with the purpose of creating a resource useful to Indigenous families and also for the development process, to encourage families to become more involved in the community. Local parents, grandparents and aunts from the community participated, sharing stories of raising and supporting their children, sharing the good times and the bad and how they dealt with challenges. The books were launched at the CfC celebration.

The Aboriginal partnership project six-monthly progress report (Jan–June 2009) indicated that 3 parents participated in the development of the *Burndap Bopop* book, as well as 6 professionals. Professionals were either working with Indigenous families in the mainstream service system or working for a specific Indigenous agency. Two hundred copies of the book were produced and most have been distributed to local Aboriginal families. A number were distributed to Aboriginal community services.

As indicated in Table 16 above, two family days were held as part of the Aboriginal partnership project. The objective of these days was to increase involvement in the community for local Indigenous families, to offer an enjoyable experience to children and parents alike, and to share information with a greater number of families about the local organisations and services available to support them. The first family day was held in the middle of the year and was well attended. A second family day was held as a Christmas celebration and entertainment was provided by a visiting Santa and a band (the Kazoos). In total, 30 adults and 65 children attended the 2008 Christmas family day.

The Confident parenting in challenging times program consisted of six information sessions per term in English, Vietnamese, Turkish and Arabic. The program aims to support parents to develop their parenting skills and confidence in dealing with their children's challenging behaviours and provides referral to other support agencies when necessary.

4.2 Outcomes for families



Table 17 below has attendance details regarding the number of children and parents who participated in the Confident parenting in challenging times program.

Table 17. Participation data for parenting information sessions

Confident Parenting Program delivered in:	No of Parents	No of Children
January-June 2008		
Vietnamese	7	4
Turkish	15	17
July-December 2008		
Turkish (1)	15	16
English	8	4
Turkish (2)	12	8
Arabic	16	10
January-June 2009		
Turkish	19	16
English	9	7
Arabic	9	8
Totals	110	90

As indicated in the table, a total of 110 parents and 90 children participated in the Confident parenting in challenging times program over the period Jan 2008 to June 2009.

Findings

Professionals provided qualitative feedback in their professional journals. There were 65 journal entries completed by six project workers. The majority of the professional journals were completed in 2008.

In addition, professionals involved in the playgroups “Supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness” were interviewed to gain their views on the activity’s contribution to the expected outcomes of families.

Face-to-face interviews with the co-facilitators from the Royal Children’s Hospital and Anglicare, and analysis of facilitator journals kept by project workers were conducted, along with a facilitated discussion with steering committee members in March 2009 (Anglicare, Rising stars report, March 2009):

Facilitators and steering committee members believed that providing logistical support was beneficial in enabling regular attendance at the playgroup. The members believed that the free bus service and the childcare that was provided to siblings of child participants who were not age-appropriate for the group helped retain participant families during the playgroup term and improved the quality of the program for those children who did attend. Communication and follow-up with parents between groups was also believed to be successful in encouraging parents to stay engaged with the group. The project worker telephoned all parents before each group to encourage them to attend the next session. Depending on their mental health on the day, some parents needed to be supported and encouraged.

The assessment of the facilitators was that the families attending the supported playgroup would not have attended a mainstream playgroup. Similarly, steering committee members acknowledged that this playgroup really engaged ‘hard to reach’ families, including those not currently accessing any children’s services.

(Anglicare, Rising stars report, March 2009)

Parents reported many benefits from getting together and offering support to each other, along with activities for the children. The program offered a sense of belonging for the child and parent, as the activities were well organised and welcoming. Each had something to learn and gain from the program and made changes at home as a result of the program.

Feedback from a parent about the playgroup:

Everything about the program, like meeting other mums, making friends, the children are involved in activities, and it gives us the opportunity to spend time with our children, whereby the focus is on the children and on us.

Feedback from a parent about the impact on their parenting at home:

I’ve started becoming more patient with my children. I’m putting a lot of effort to spend more time with them, also ways in which I can teach them new skills.

Parents also indicated that they were using GP and family support services and planning to use the following services as a result of attending the group: other playgroups, community health, early-childhood programs, maternal and child health, library, toy library and neighbourhood houses (Anglicare, Rising stars report, March 2009).

The case study below demonstrates a CfC activity supporting a family with complex needs.



Supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness 2008

This family arrived in Australia as refugees in 2002 from Iraq with two children and the third child on the way. Family initially settled in Perth and moved to Melbourne in 2006. Since settling in Melbourne, the mother has given birth to twin girls who are currently three years old, and now their sixth child is two years of age.

Soon after settling in Melbourne the mother was informed that her parents, two brothers and their families were killed in a bomb blast in the family home in Iraq during the war. The mother had no way of contacting her remaining siblings and did experience extreme grief and loss, which has manifested in psychotic depression. The mother was admitted to a psychiatric ward for treatment. After she returned home, she was not able to care for herself or her children as she continued to experience major depression.

The husband was the primary carer for his wife, as well as the carer for the children. However, with six children and an unwell wife, he struggled to maintain the family's wellbeing. The family was also extremely isolated from their community, with no other family or friends residing in Melbourne. This has resulted in several notifications to child protection, as the parents have left the children at home when they needed to attend urgent hospital appointments, having no supports to assist with childcare.

The Department of Human Services has decided not to remain involved, as the Royal Women's Hospital and Anglicare have commenced work with the family.

The mother's major depression has improved over a period of 12 months; however, she remains so low in mood and functioning that she is unable to interact with the children or perform any homecare duties. The husband struggles to provide care for all of the children as well as his wife, and thus many tasks fall on to the eldest child; the youngest three struggle for attention and are demonstrating signs of anxious attachment and speech delay.

Having the mother and the three younger children involved in this activity enabled the mother to have the space and time to overcome her grief and isolation, whereby she was able to make connection with other group members, make friends and receive support from particular individuals that she became quite close to. Also it was crucial for the children to be involved in an activity whereby they are stimulated, supported and encouraged in the enhancement of their development.

In working with this family, a number of referrals were necessary. The twins were referred to speech therapy; the family was referred to a family support service, financial assistance, the Office of Housing, an assessment by Adult Mental Health and childcare for the youngest child. Also the mother was supported by another group participant in finding a GP that she was comfortable with.

According to the mother and through the facilitator's observations, there has been a major improvement of the mother's mental-health state. At the start of the group in term three, the mother appeared to be very reserved and displayed little interest in interacting with her children. Over the course of the activity, the mother showed increased interest and confidence in communicating and engaging with her children.

As a result, it appears that the children's speech development, coordination skills and their social/emotional development have improved. The husband reported that he has observed the mother was interacting more with the children at home, taking on opportunities that would assist the children to learn new skills and further develop their abilities. He also reported that he himself feels less isolated and more connected to the local community, whereby he was able to make friends when he attended the family fun day and has joined with other fathers of children attending the group in a soccer team in their local area.

By having the mother and the three youngest children involved in this project, there was a flow-on effect whereby all the family benefited in a positive way.

4.2 Outcomes for families



Feedback recorded in the Aboriginal partnership project professional journal offered the following reflections on the success of the *Burndap Bopop* baby book consultation process:

Community members and service providers worked well together on Burndap Bopop good little kids, project. Opinions and ideas were at times very different, but with ongoing participation from the local community, the book is better than anyone expected.

Local artists were from the (Aboriginal) community and their willingness to actively participate in the project and their designs were fantastic.

The constant consultation with participants worked well as it hands the control of the project to the community members and highlights the community project.

Distribution of the *Burndap Bopop* baby book occurred for the following groups: local community members; services who work directly with Aboriginal families (Northern hospital and Enmarileek Aboriginal Co-op); and the State Government department working on Indigenous early-childhood initiatives in policy and practice (Department of Education and Early childhood Development).

Feedback was sought from Aboriginal parents about the book in informal discussions. Comments made reflected a positive reaction to the look of the book, its length and the approach taken to communicate the messages within:

WOW! I love the cover, it's so colourful compared to the usual Koori stuff that comes out.

Love how the book comes across 'cause it don't tell you, it suggests ways to support us.

I like the size, I read this cause it isn't too big.

A shame they never had positive things like this when I was a young parent.

Parents provided about their enjoyment of the two family days:

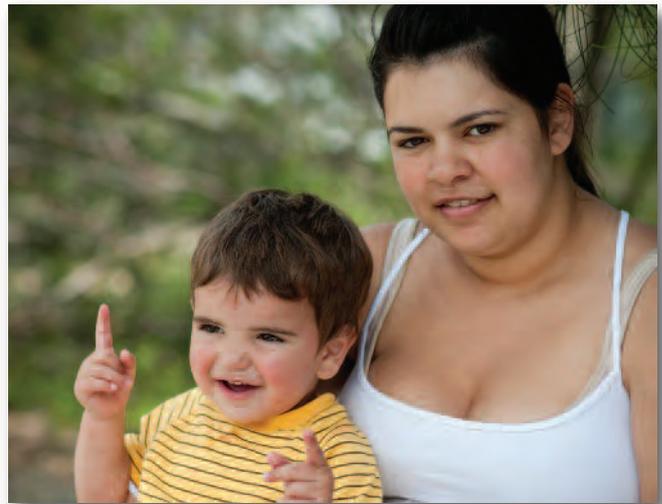
I brag my grandson, he had a ball with the other kids and it was the first time in ages I got to spend a whole day on my own with him, loved the environment.

All in all the family days are great and we get to see a concert that most of us don't have the money to take the kids [to].

A family support worker from Orana Family Services attended the second family day. The following comment was made by this worker about the potential of the day to help new families gain access to Orana's services:

I really enjoyed it. I have made a connection with a number of mums and will follow up with them. This is a great informal way of doing that.

Confident parenting in challenging times program professionals reported on the impact of sessions on parents in a staff professional journal. Here it was noted that three parents had joined the Arabic women's group at Orana and many parents had joined the school playgroup as a result of taking part in the Arabic-speaking information sessions. A local school, Orana Family Services and Arabic Welfare Services each attended the final information session to share details about their services.



Confident parenting

Details were also recorded in professional journals about the topics covered in sessions and discussion points addressed. The journals highlight that parents were given an opportunity to bring up any specific issues they were struggling with in terms of their children's behaviour, sleep, eating etc, thus offering an interactive element to the sessions as well as an informative one. One comment from a professional journal suggested sessions had impacted parents directly, in terms of awareness of services available to them:

Parents learned that they are not alone to deal with their children's conflict and that there are services to ask for help when they need to.

One single parent/father who is attending is fitting in very well to the group and is challenging stereotypes of fathers within a community that regards parenting as a female-only role. He is respected by the group because he is seen as a caring father and open to sharing his parenting difficulties of a child who has a significant language delay.

The father was seen individually for some period of time by a counsellor around parenting issues. He has made significant changes, e.g. putting the child to bed before midnight, since he has been in the parenting group and is sharing a great deal more of himself than when he first started. The father is now accessing support services for his child while he is attending the international playgroup at Orana Family Services. Prior to his participation in both the playgroup and the parenting group, he was not making use of any early intervention services available for his child.



The Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness activity professional journals reflected on the number of participants being fewer than anticipated. However, the professional journals reported that feedback obtained from families who participated in the program were overall extremely positive. The professional journals stated that families recognised the benefits of the group, not only for themselves but for their children as well.

Several parents commented on feeling well supported and that this was a different experience to other groups that they had attended. They commented on feeling more connected to the community by becoming more familiar with other services and appreciated the opportunity to meet together with other families that had experienced similar situations. Many of the families felt isolated at home and enjoyed having something regular to attend. One comment from a family was that they wished more families would attend, not only so she and her children could meet with more people but so that others in similar situations to her could also benefit from the group experience.

(Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – final activity report 2008).

The following case study demonstrates the impact of this activity on a family with complex needs:

Julie presented with a number of support issues including borderline intellectual disability, familial conflict, poor financial management and deficits in certain living skill areas. As the playgroup had not commenced, Julie was offered individual support and a thorough assessment of her needs and those of her child Julie was supported with breastfeeding issues, appropriate play, safety/supervision, general health and nutrition. There was also ongoing liaison with other professionals involved, given existing links established by the Crisis Support Service. As Julie was housed in transitional housing away from Broadmeadows, the project worker offered Julie free transport. As a result, Julie attended all the playgroup sessions, was valued and contributed to the development of the group. While Julie had not socialised outside her family network before, she quickly developed social skills and made social links with other participants. She has since joined a mainstream playgroup in her local area. Her child also benefited enormously from the support and other activities offered by the project.

Outcome summary

Participation in an early-years service took place for approximately 200 families with complex needs who might not otherwise have participated in the early-years service system.

In many instances the service was the activity itself (e.g. Rising stars, Meadowbank Primary School and Beyond baby blues playgroups) but, in other cases, there was data to suggest referrals occurred to a secondary source such as housing and mental health services. Those families who had participated in the activities provided positive feedback about their experience of the service and staff commented on the positive impact they noted on families' wellbeing.

The data suggests that CfC initiatives provided an opportunity for families and children with complex needs to participate in early-years services where they may not have otherwise. All activities made additional efforts to meet the needs of these families, integrate them into mainstream activities and develop their capacity to be active and contributing members of the local community.

Some of the activities in the Catching them ALL strategy encountered difficulties in engaging families and children with complex needs, initially into an activity and with attendance over the life of the initiative. This was seen in particular for the Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and Supporting and learning from parents with a mental illness programs, where the families' life circumstances may have prevented them from participating on a regular basis.

Families included in this outcome were targeted by the demographic group they belonged to, for example, Aboriginal families, or by the secondary or tertiary services they were already accessing, including housing and mental-health services, as an indicator of their possible level of need. Strong anecdotal evidences from a range of CfC programs suggests that many families who were taking part also had "complex needs" but were not able to be targeted in this way. CfC has also worked with a range of target groups with identified additional needs, including homelessness and mental health issues. Those projects have worked directly with organisations providing specialist services.

The experience across all the outcome areas is that universal or so-called 'soft' entry points that are not stigmatising, for example by requiring a mental-health diagnosis, and do not require assessment and referral or involve waiting lists, are effective entry points for families, providing that their level of need is able to be met within the program. Again it is the experience across the CfC program that experienced workers in universal services, for example, playgroups or community hubs, can provide assistance and support through the referral process and waiting period for more intense services. It is the long-term aim of almost all intensive services to link families back into community programs that allow families to participate in community life and build stronger social connections. The relationship between families with complex needs and the universal service system is itself complex. It is important to ensure that programs like CfC continue to have a role in prevention and early intervention into complex issues.

It is worth noting that this outcome, while arguably providing more depth of assistance to families, did not achieve the same reach as other strategies. The numbers are considerably smaller and the costs of providing a more intensive service considerably higher. This is a consideration in planning the next phase of CfC in Broadmeadows.

4.3

Outcomes for children





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

Background

Recent theoretical debates regarding school readiness have challenged the traditional understanding of school readiness as dependent simply on the individual characteristics of a child. The questions that are increasingly being asked are not so much *Is this child ready for school?* but *Is the environment in which the child is developing (from birth onwards) conducive to school readiness?* and *Is the school ready to support the children?* Are the preschool and community agencies ready to support the families? In this sense, school readiness has recently been conceptualised as the shared responsibility of a range of domains including families, schools, services and communities, that begins when a child is born and is not confined to the year before school.

According to this holistic perspective of school readiness, all of the outcomes listed in this report have the potential to contribute to school readiness. For example, if parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children such as playgroups and kindergartens, then children are more likely to be exposed to learning experiences that will assist them when they get to school. Additionally, if families are supported by their community, then they are more able to support their children and their children's social, emotional and cognitive development. The Hume Early Years Partnership structure has been able to work at the multiple levels of service system readiness, encouraging schools that are ready for the children who arrive, communities who are ready and able to support children through their schooling and families who are ready to support children in the multiple ways necessary as they begin the big adventure that is formal schooling.

Evidence

This outcome covers a wide range of domains for children, including language and literacy in English and other languages social and emotional skills.

In focusing on school readiness, this outcome seeks to emphasise transition to school as a significant life transition that has taken five or more years to shape. It also seeks to focus on the development of important life skills that will be important in the school environment in which almost all children will spend many years; skills related to language and pre-literacy in whatever language or languages are part of the child's home environment. Emotional and social skills which enhance children's lives and their comfort and performance in the school environment are central to children's development (Baydar et al., 1993; CCCH, 2008; Dadich, 2008; DEST, 2005).

Early-childhood education and care to develop school readiness

The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) strategy (2009) identified attendance at a quality early-childhood education and care (ECEC) program, specifically those delivered in the year before primary school, as an important component in preparing children for formal learning at school. UK evidence suggests it is important that programs focus on access, quality and the home learning environment, if outcomes are to improve for children in disadvantaged communities (Sammons, 2007). The impact of preschool education is understood to offer a four-to-six month developmental boost for children at school entry. However, the quality and duration of the program are important contributing factors. In addition, the combination of parent participation in ECEC and parent-child interaction in the home learning environment, offered alongside regular preschool participation, provides great potential for improvements in outcomes for children in the early years (Sylva et al., 2004).

Language and literacy

Shared book reading is one of the characteristics of a "literacy-promoting" environment (CCCH Policy brief 13, 2008). Early literacy experiences at home and through programs such as early language and literacy groups are critical to promoting literacy success in schools (Baydar et al., 1993; CCCH, 2008; DEST, 2005). Interactive reading has been shown to enhance the language benefits of reading to children (Hargrave & Senechal, 2000; Huebner, 2000). Research has also shown that shared reading has a positive impact on vocabulary development, listening comprehension and understanding of print concepts (High et al., 2000; Senechal & Cornell, 1993). A literacy-promoting environment in the home can have an influence on emergent literacy skills among children. The quality of the home environment is one of the most important factors in literacy development (Hood et al., 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008; Weigel et al., 2006).

Story telling and singing

The Parent-Child Mother Goose program enhances the parent-child relationship through songs, rhymes and storytelling. Children gain communication and social skills by boosting their language development, while parents experience new ways of relating to their child and develop a resource that can be used anywhere, anytime (Hume Libraries 2009, available at <http://www.humelibraries.vic.gov.au>). Singing can play a role in enhancing children's language and literacy skills (CCCH, 2008). Songs offer children examples of rhyme, rhythm and repetition and singing may assist with memory (Butzlaff, 2000; Forgeard et al., 2008).



Bilingual storytelling works on the 'parents as child's first teacher' theory and supports parents in developing their children's literacy and learning (Williams et al., 2006); We are ALL community.

Social and emotional skills

Play is significant to children's development, contributing to their self-esteem, social skills and emotional development (Erwin et al., 2002; Sroufe, 1995). Through play, children are learning how things work, how to use their bodies, how to solve problems, and how to get along with others. Play is an avenue through which children can express their emotions, build relationships with others and master difficult experiences (Powers, 2009). In many ways play is critical to children's development (McArdle, 2001:510). Playgroups enhance early child social, emotional and cognitive development before school (Plowman, 2003; Sneddon & Haynes, 2003).

Strategies and outcomes

Children have developed language, literacy, social and emotional skills and are ready/prepared for school is an expected outcome of the following strategies:

- Setting the hubs humming
- Playgroups rule ok!
- Connecting dots and neurons
- We are ALL community.

Interim evaluation report findings

The local evaluation interim report (2007) indicated a measurable increase in children's language skills; a pre- and post-test survey showed an increase in oral language development for children taking part in the Upfield and Campbellfield Community links early-years language enrichment activities.

The evaluation identified improvements in children's wellbeing as a key outcome and went on to find that there had been some evidence of improvements in children's emotional maturity, a key skill for success in school. Qualitative data from professionals and parents found that children attending early-years programs in the Broadmeadows site showed: improvements in emotional maturity; responsiveness to programs that provided structure and routine; and enthusiasm for attending early-childhood programs.

The service users study showed significant improvement in children's social connectedness over a period of three years for a relatively small sample of families (n=32).

The evaluation findings also reported that parents demonstrated an increased capacity to engage in activities that are likely to contribute to improvements in children's language and literacy skills.

Final evaluation findings

Data collected for this outcome includes items from surveys of parents across a number of CfC activities, including playgroups; Kinder Movement; the Parent-Child Mother Goose program; bilingual storytime; CALD fathering; Confident parenting; and Supporting children who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. It also includes results from the Best Start program, participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs, Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) results, professional journals, case studies and activity reports.

Eight project workers including the playgroup coordinator, bilingual playgroup facilitators, hub coordinators and other project workers completed a total of 198 professional journals in 2008.

Early childhood education and care to develop school readiness

The concept of school readiness for a child is a multifaceted one and includes contributions from families, schools, services and communities. This outcome considered the development of language, literacy and the social and emotional skills of children as key indicators of school readiness.

The RE Ross Trust report (2009) written by the Broadmeadows CfC site in partnership with CCCH expands on this definition and provides many practical examples of how the concept of school readiness is used in the Broadmeadows community, and how community agencies including schools are working to improve the overall school readiness of children beginning school in their local area. Early childhood education and care plays an important role in improving school readiness. While attendance at early education and care cannot guarantee that individual children are ready and prepared for school, ECEC programs are designed to assist children to develop all the components of school readiness, including language and literacy and social skills.

Improving access to ECEC in the Broadmeadows area has been a priority of HEYP for the past five years. While all early-childhood services conform to service regulations, including teacher and carer qualifications, as indicators of quality, strong parent and community partnerships are also essential to achieve accessible, high-quality programs with an active partnership with parents. Barriers to access including waiting lists, complex and time-consuming enrolment processes and affordability constraints are considered as factors in why 20% of children in Broadmeadows do not access ECEC and thus do not benefit from it. Access to universal services including kindergarten are an explicit part of the Victorian early childhood agenda and the Best Start program action plan in Hume. Four-year-old kindergarten programs are designed to improve children's readiness to attend primary school.

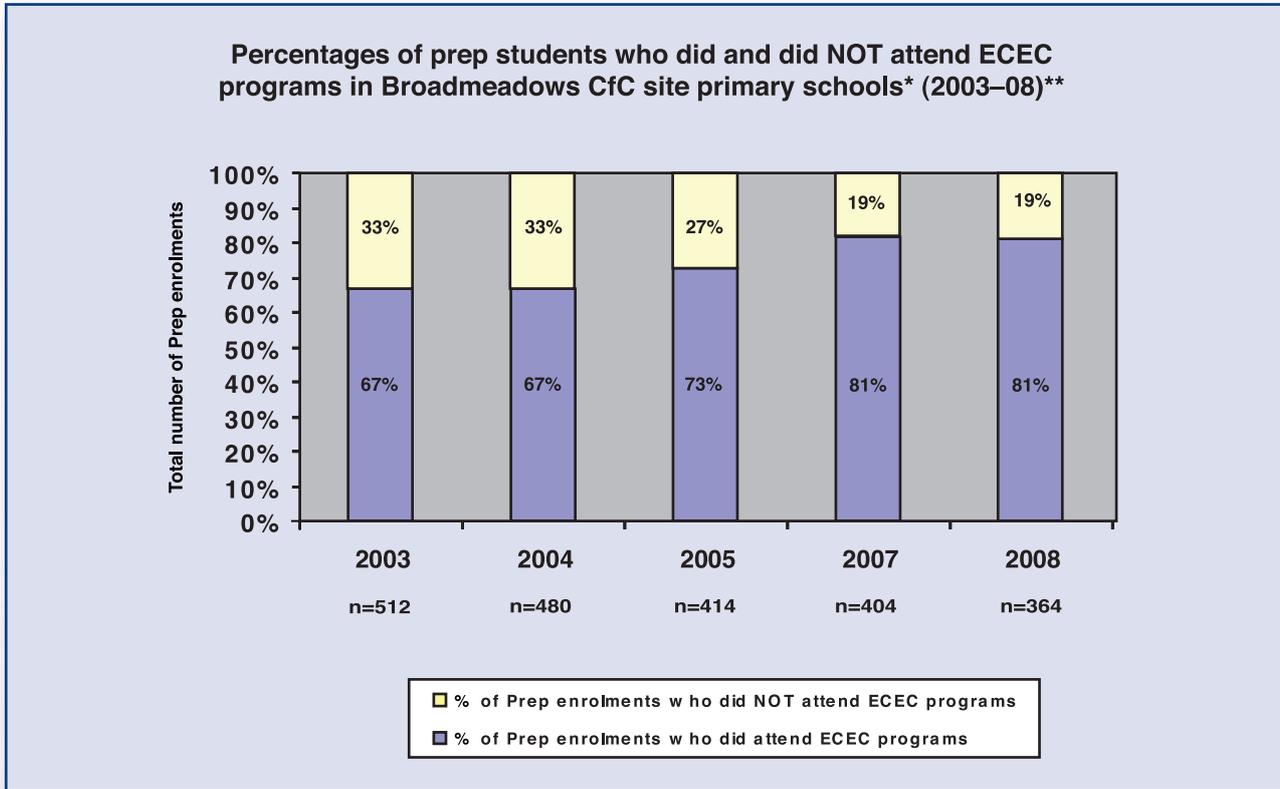
4.3 Outcomes for children



The following data was collected by the HEYP Primary schools prep entry survey 2003–08 at all 14 state primary schools in

Broadmeadows. The data is presented in Figure 30 below. Data was not collected in 2006.

Figure 30. Percentages of prep students who did and did NOT attend ECEC programs in Broadmeadows CfC site primary schools* (2003–08)**



Source: Primary school prep survey.

* This includes a total of 14 primary schools all located within Broadmeadows

** Data was not collected in 2006

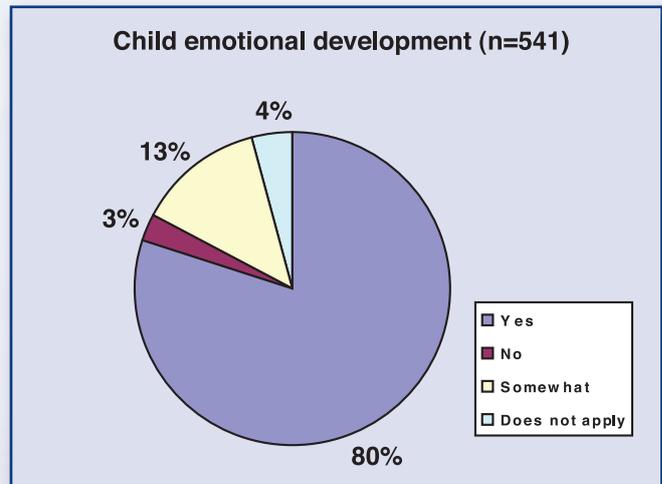
The data shows that over the 2003–08 period there has been a general downward trend in the proportion of prep students who have not attended early childhood education and care at state primary schools. In 2003 the proportion of prep students who had not attended ECEC was 33%; by 2008 that figure had fallen to 18.6%. The data is presented in the negative to draw attention to the problem of poor access.

Social and emotional skills

Social and emotional skills are important life skills for young children and affect their health and wellbeing over the life course. CfC activities used interactive learning approaches to increase children's social and emotional skills through play activities.

In 2008, parents in a range of activities were asked if they believed the program had helped in relation to children's emotional development. The results are outlined in Figure 31.

Figure 31. Has this program helped in relation to your child's emotional development?



4.3 Outcomes for children



Of the 541 respondents, 93% (n=485) reported that their child's emotional development had improved or had somewhat improved. Only 3% responded that the program had not helped and 4% said the question did not apply.

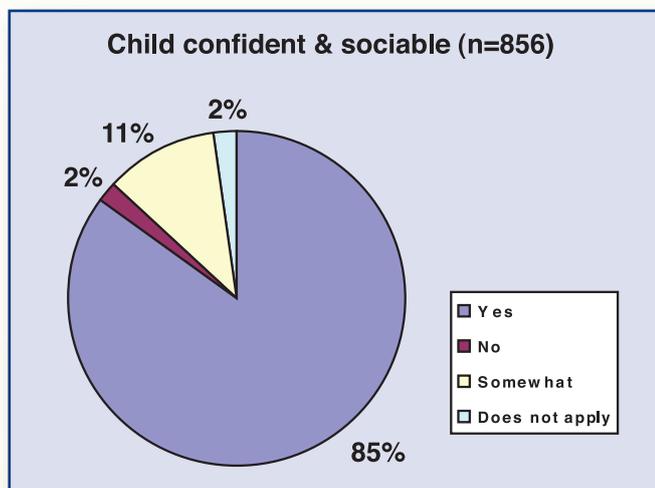
Qualitative data from parents and professionals supported this finding:

M pushed K so [a worker] reminded M of the friendship rule. M looked at K and then apologised. M smiled at K [and said], 'You're my friend, yes.

(MELC, 2008)

Parents were also asked if the CfC activity had a positive effect on their child's confidence and social skills. The results are outlined in Figure 32 below.

Figure 32. Has this program helped in relation to your child's confidence and social skills?



Of the 856 parent respondents, the vast majority (85%, n=722) were clear that the programs were having a positive effect on their children's confidence and social skills. A further 11% reported the programs were having somewhat of an effect. Nearly all parents (96%) believed the programs attended were improving their children's sociability.

Qualitative findings

The development of social skills was also a theme that emerged in a number of the qualitative data sources analysed for this report. Not only did children's social skills improve, but the opportunity to socialise was something that children enjoyed about the CfC playgroups. Almost a third of parents (32%) who participated in the playgroup surveys noted that socialising, playing with other children and meeting friends was something their children liked about playgroups.

Thirty-seven percent of 198 professional journals referred to children becoming more engaged, more willing to participate and join in on activities, for example:

A child used to be shy and not play with other children, stayed in his mum's lap. Today he began to join in with the other children.

(BG, 2008)

These professional observations indicate that children involved in the community hubs activities, playgroups, Kinder Movement, Parent–Child Mother Goose, bilingual storytime, CALD fathering, Confident parenting and Supporting parents with a mental illness programs were becoming more skilful in social situations and/or were demonstrating behaviours that would have a positive impact on the development of their social skills.

The Meadow Heights Language and Learning (MHLL) program reported that improved social skills were demonstrated through behaviours such as increased willingness and capacity to share with other children and take turns. Parents whose children took part in the MHLL program (n=12) and the bilingual storytime program (n=15) reported that their children had improved social skills as a result of their involvement in these programs. The example of a four-year-old girl involved in the Arabic language and literacy program illustrates how the program impacted on one child in particular:

[During the term] Mona started mixing with other children and she became a close friend to one of the girls her age, sitting together all the time and eating and playing together. It was only the fourth or the fifth session when she started to stand beside the facilitator when singing songs and she didn't mind if her mother was somewhere else.

The 2006–08 service users study participants (n=32) were asked how often their child saw or spent time with: grandparents, other family members, participants' friends, participants' neighbours and other young children (outside childcare or school). The findings showed statistical significance in the increase of children's contact with their neighbours, independent of their parents. This suggests that the CfC program did have a positive impact on children's confidence and social skills to increase their contact with their neighbours.

The 2007 and 2008 service users study (n=32) participants were asked to report on the 'most noticeable change in [their] child's development since the last survey'. The theme of 'increased capacity/willingness/confidence in socialising' was a key theme for both survey rounds. This theme was noted in 23% of responses in 2007 and 25% of responses in 2008.

Parents who participated in the service users study surveys were also asked whether the service they had been involved in had contributed to this change. Ninety-five percent of respondents said that the service had contributed to this change. Some responses to this question were as follows:

He's speaking more to adults and children [and he's] not shy anymore [and] more confident. He's always asking questions to get help. His behaviour [has] changed – [he] used to hit other kids.

[My daughter is] opening up from her shell because she was a very shy baby, but now she seems to be communicating better.

"He's become more confident and able to speak to others without hiding behind my back.

4.3 Outcomes for children



Children's play

Thirty-nine (20%) of the 198 professional journal observations referred to play in a range of different ways including: increased play among children; increased play between children; children enjoying play; children learning how to play; and parents learning how to play with children. Some examples were:

J encouraged his new friend to join in partner play. [J said], 'Here, sit like this and hold hands'.

(MELC, 2008)

Her son is learning to play more with other children.

(Dallas Hub, professional journal, 2008)

When asked What are you doing differently as a parent since attending this program? 30% (n=84) of respondents to the Kinder Movement survey noted that they were playing with their children more and/or their children were playing more among themselves. Survey respondents also commented on what their children did differently. When asked the same question, 17% of parents involved in the playgroup survey noted that they were now playing more with their children and allowing their children more time to play. Participants stated:

[I'm] trying to get involved in their games more often.

We play more at home the games we learn at playgroup. My child becomes more happy when we do.

I'm not doing so much differently but I am making sure that as a mother [I] be more interactive with my daughter and play with her as much as I can.



Increased play among children

Children involved in Kinder Movement playing more and children enjoying playing at playgroup are positive findings. Similarly, the fact that the parents involved in Kinder Movement and the CfC playgroups were playing with their children more is also significant.

Parents playing with children

Parents and staff involved in Broadmeadows CfC activities reported that the programs brought about an increased parent knowledge of play. Eighty-five percent (n=15) of participants involved in the bilingual storytime program evaluation reported that the program had given them new skills about how to play with and teach their children. This theme is touched on in outcome 7: Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge.

Evidence of staff encouraging parents to learn about play and play with their children can be found in the professional journals:

We have purchased educational toys for a home lending program. Instead the parents wanted to sit in the corner with their child and have 'special play' as we call it. They may spend 5 or 10 minutes playing and learning this activity. Parents have time with their children and don't expect the coordinators to join in.

(Dallas Hub professional journal, 2008)

The Let's play together resource kits were developed to promote social interaction and social acceptance of children. Activities such as musical instruments, skittles, a felt face activity and a building and construction activity assisted children to practise their turn-taking and sharing skills, which are pivotal skills in developing friendships. Feedback from the professionals in relation to the Let's play together resource kits pilot indicated that the development of the resource had the potential to be very useful in improving children's social skills, by both parents and professionals.

All respondents reported that they felt it was a great resource to help improve children's social skills and they would use or recommend it. Comments included:

Many skills developed and enhanced in young child through social interaction and play.

Recommend it to families when their children are having trouble making friends.

(It has the) potential to loan out to families where children are struggling with social skills. Also suggest to services to use.

A total of 10 surveys were distributed to and collected from parents. All 10 parents were positive about the usefulness of the kit to further develop their children's social skills. Nine of the 10 parents in the pilot survey believed that the kit would help children to be socially included by other children in activities that they were involved in. All 10 parents reported that they were either satisfied (n=4) or very satisfied (n=6) with the content of the kit.

It was observed and reported by the professionals that the building and construction activity, which forms part of the kit, resulted in three occasions when children who did not know each other worked cooperatively to build something together, another critical skill in the development of social competency (Activity final report, June 2009).

Parents commented on the potential of the resource kit in helping their young children to share and learn turn-taking. Some of their comments included:

4.3 Outcomes for children



Play nicely and show him how to play.

Good for making him learn how to wait.

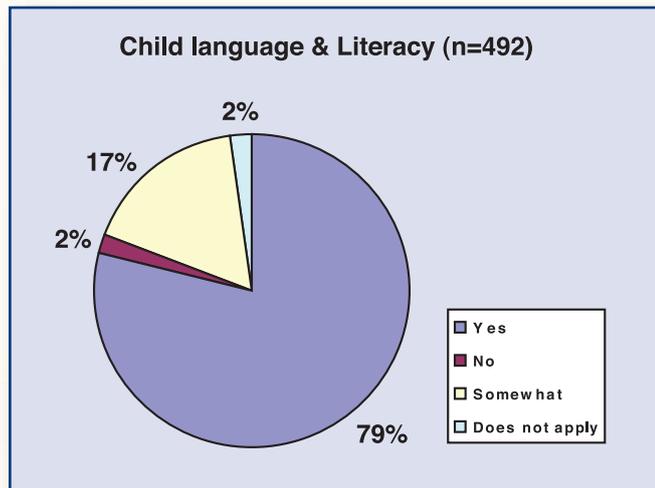
They have to share.

Initial findings of this resource indicate that widespread distribution and use of the resource could have an impact on children's social skill development.

Language and literacy

A range of quantitative and qualitative data was collected across a number of projects to explore improvements in language and literacy for preschool-aged children and their families. CfC activities aimed to increase children's language and literacy skills through reading books, listening to stories and singing songs and rhymes to children at an earlier age. Parents participating in a range of programs were asked whether they believed that their child's language and literacy had improved since being involved in the program. The results are outlined in Figure 33.

Figure 33. Has this program helped in relation to your child's language and literacy?



Of the 492 respondents to the question regarding language and literacy, 96% (n=422) reported that their child's language and literacy had improved or had somewhat improved as a result of being involved in the programs.

In order to develop language and literacy skills, children need to be exposed to printed material such as books and take part in reading activities such as storytelling and shared reading. A survey of 15 parents from the bilingual storytime program asked parents to respond in relation to a number of areas relevant to early literacy. The results are outlined in Figure 34.

Figure 34. Bilingual storytime survey results on early literacy



All of the parents surveyed indicated that the program had increased their child's interest in relation to reading books, listening to stories, singing songs and rhymes. Fourteen of the fifteen parents surveyed indicated that being involved in the bilingual storytime program had led to increase in their child's interest in being read to more often.

These changes are illustrated in detail by various case studies relating to the program, such as the following example of Ruba and her son Mohammed:

In early 2006 Ruba starting attending Arabic bilingual storytime sessions with her son Mohammed who is four years old. Ruba is a new migrant [who] is not confident with the English language. Ruba has commented on the change in her son over the last 12 months and the skills her son has developed. The program has had a big impact on Mohammed's pre-literacy skills. Ruba states: 'When I get home my son... looks at the book and pretends he is reading – he makes up words. At night time he asks me to read all the books before bed. Mohammed also learned about the library – he gets to choose a book and DVD and learns about borrowing from the library.'

Parents whose children participated in the Meadow Heights Language and Literacy (MHLL) program noted that their children demonstrated an increased interest in books. One parent stated:

My son will get books and wants us to read books to him; even with his cousins he wants us to sing the songs and read the books.

(professional journal reporting a parent comment)



Storytime sessions were a popular activity for children at the MHLL program. Parents reported that these sessions encouraged and brought about an improvement in children's concentration skills. By the end of the term, parents noted that children were taking a more active role by sharing their favourite book with the group and creating their own stories.

Reading books and telling stories

Parents who responded to the playgroup survey noted that reading, books and storytelling were activities that children involved in these playgroups enjoyed. Twelve percent referred to these themes when asked what their child liked about playgroups. Moreover, 24% of the 166 parents who responded to the question What are you doing differently as a parent? noted that they were now reading more with their children. Almost one quarter of parents involved in playgroups are now reading to their children. This is significant, as it demonstrates the impact that the playgroups have had on the enrichment of these families' home learning environments.

When asked what they were doing differently as a parent, participants stated:

We are reading a book together every day. I'm asking my child questions about the books we read.

I set time to sit with my child. I spend more time and read him a story before he sleeps.

[I] sit with my son and [we] read story together.

This finding also suggests that, through their involvement with these playgroups, children have an increased potential to develop the language skills they will need to succeed at school.

The bilingual storytime program introduces CALD families to the library and in doing so these families are involved in a literacy activity that has the potential to contribute to children's emergent literacy skills. The following example illustrates how having books in a parent's first language encouraged her to read more often to her daughter:

Sevgi came to Australia from Turkey four years ago with her husband and toddler. Her husband works in the city and she felt quite isolated as she did not have any family or friends here. In 2006 she saw a leaflet about the Turkish bilingual storytimes in the library. She started to attend with her two-year-old daughter. Her daughter really benefited in meeting other children as she was isolated as well. Her mother was able to borrow books in her first language, which encouraged her to read more often to her daughter.

(bilingual storytime program, 2008)

For a parent involved in the Meadowbank Early Learning Centre, Arabic books provided a means for her to teach her children her first language:

Z said she has been reading the boys the Arabic books at home as they do not speak Arabic. She mentioned that she reads in Arabic so they will learn her language and translates the words back to English for reinforcement.

(Meadowbank Early Learning Centre community hub, 2008)

Improvements in spoken language

Fifty-one (26%) of the 198 professional journal entries referred to increases in language skills as a significant theme, whether children were talking more, talking more clearly, showing an increased willingness to talk or talking for the first time.

Improvements in language and literacy skills among children involved in Broadmeadows CfC activities were referred to directly in the service users study and in reports regarding the Dallas speech pathology early years language enrichment program.

A number of parents in the service users study (n=32) commented on changes that occurred as part of their child's natural development, particularly around improvements in language and literacy of their children. Some parents' comments included:

My child talks more, her language ability has improved. She's a year older. She developed better. Talks, moves and wants to draw attention.

She's ready now. Knows her numbers, ABC, counting and (is)writing her name.

The Dallas language enrichment program involved 35 families. Families attended weekly sessions with a speech pathologist (and interpreter when required). The sessions were 30–45 minutes in duration. The average attendance was six sessions; however, attendance ranged from 1–14 sessions in total. In September 2008, the speech pathologist working with families in the Dallas language enrichment program reported that at the beginning of the program:

Every child assessed has demonstrated language skills below the average expected levels... vary[ing] from one standard deviation below to four standard deviations below what would be expected.

However, by the end of the program it was reported that:

The language results usually show[ed] a marked improvement and sometimes the language results increased by a standard deviation of two.

A case study of one of these children is presented below:

Y is a four-year-old boy who comes from a non-English-speaking background. He has one sibling. His mother attended all 12 sessions [of] the language enrichment program. The sessions were delivered in English by the speech pathologist. Y's mother actively participated in the sessions and continued to play with the activity kits in a similar manner at home each week in both English and their home language.

The results from Y's initial language assessment, shown below, suggest that his level of expressive and receptive language is below what would be expected for his chronological age. The post-test data results reflect a significant improvement (37% overall). This progress and level of ability place Y in a much more advantageous position within his community and at school than if he had not attended the program.

4.3 Outcomes for children



YW UpF	RAPT info /40	RAPT-G /37	Concepts /18	Body /9	Nouns /9	Verbs /9	Categories /9	Functions /9	Prepositions /9
Pre-test	11.5	3	8	4	3	4	1	0	0
Post-test	23.5	16	15	5	4	9	6.5	4	4
Mean	29	21							
increase	30%	35%	38%	11%	11%	55%	61%	44%	44%

Additionally, of the 34 prep students at Dallas Primary in 2008, 5 who had taken part in the language enrichment program were reportedly all well-orientated to school due to the transition/orientation program they had undergone. Four of those children were post-tested in December 2008 and all showed considerable progress. They were all close to the appropriate VELS standard. The fifth child is receiving speech pathology support and has been found to have an intellectually disability.

Singing

Singing and songs emerged as a key theme in a number of the qualitative data sources analysed for this report. Forty-four percent (n=87) of the 198 professional journals referred to singing and/or songs. Singing and/or songs were referred to in a number of different ways in these journals. For example, the authors noted that children taking part *enjoyed* singing, requested singing as an activity and participated in singing activities.

Singing and activities revolving around music were joyful activities for children and adults:

Each session children and some adults sing and dance to music. The children are familiar with this activity and join in happily.

Singing and music activities also led to interactions between children and between children and adults. For the child with developmental delay profiled in the case study below, singing was not only something she enjoyed, but also something which became a means of communication and engagement. A case study of this child's development illustrates how singing contributed to her development:

One baby who is nearly 20 months old who is differently abled and with developmental delay looks at us, raises her hands and wiggles her fingers as if she is asking for 'Twinkle twinkle little star' and also claps her hands to ask for 'Zoom zoom we're going to the moon'.

It was observed that the child enjoyed singing. Her favourite song was 'Twinkle twinkle little star.' Every week, as soon as the mother handed the child to the childcare workers, the child looked at the workers, smiled and wiggled her hands. The following week, she started wiggling her fingers. On the seventh week, the mother noticed that her child started lifting her hands up 'up in the sky'. On the eight week, the mother approached the project worker and said, 'Listen to my daughter. She wants us to sing 'Twinkle twinkle little star', look at her hands wiggling up high, and listen to her saying 'up, up'.

(Community links, 2008)



Children are confident and more ready for school

Twelve parents whose children had taken part in the Meadow Heights Language and Literacy program noted that, subsequent to their involvement in the program, their children had an increased interest in songs and singing. Similarly, 15 parents who were involved in the bilingual storytime program evaluation survey also noted that their children demonstrated an increased interest in singing and reciting rhymes as a result of their involvement with the program. When asked what their children liked about the activities at Kinder Movement and playgroup, singing, dancing and music were dominant themes for survey participants; 30% of playgroup survey participants and 23% of Kinder Movement participants noted this theme.

Parents singing to their children

As well as children demonstrating interest and joy in singing, 21% of the 166 parents who participated in the playgroup survey noted that, as a result of their involvement in the program, they undertake more singing/dancing and music activities with their children. These parents stated:

[I'm] singing songs with the girls that they can sing along to, what they have learned at the playgroup, and [we] do the actions.

[The playgroup] taught me activities of how to help my son. [We have] so many songs to sing together at home and do the actions etc.



Parent involvement in singing activities is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it suggests that, through their involvement in playgroups, parents are becoming more engaged in their children's development. Secondly, it suggests that these playgroups are having an impact on the home environment. A literacy-promoting environment is one where, among other things, children are provided with general language exposure. Singing is one way of teaching and sharing language with children. Thirdly, playgroups provided families with resources to create literacy-promoting environments through the development of songbooks in languages other than English.

The Samoan songbook had a significant impact, as illustrated below:

A Samoan mother with her four-year-old daughter attending Samoan playgroup at Dallas neighbourhood in the municipality of Hume was given the Samoan and English songbook. She took the book home and started singing with her daughter. [The mother] was overwhelmed because, even though she sings most songs at playgroup, she does not know all the words in order to sing with her daughter [at home]. Now she is confident to sing with her [at home].

[The mother] also mentioned that she has older children attending school and [that they] are singing from the song book [too]. They never had it at the early learning centres they attended.

(Samoan playgroup, 2008)

Translating a song into Syriac also had a significant impact on an Assyrian/Chaldean family:

The Assyrian/Chaldean playgroup leader translated 'Old McDonald had a farm' song into Syriac. One of the mothers learned the song, and taught it to her sister who lives in Sweden. When the two sisters talk, they also talk about the song, how everyone learned it and how it is spread now among the Assyrian/Chaldean community in Sweden.

(playgroups for parenting among CALD communities, 2008)

Outcome summary

There has been an improvement in children's access to kindergarten and other early childhood learning and care programs in the year immediately before school, which suggests that some systemic barriers have been removed. For example, four-year-old kindergarten is now free to all families in receipt of a healthcare card. This was not the case in 2003 when data collection began.

Much of the qualitative data from various activities indicates that reading books and storytelling and singing have become important in the lives of CfC Broadmeadows children, both in activities and at home. Reading books and singing have strong links to improved language and literacy; singing in particular has been demonstrated to be an important and culturally appropriate part of improving language. This interest is likely to give children a good start in their formal schooling and parents' and carers' interest in reading with their children is also likely to sustain long-term learning.

Parents overwhelmingly report improvements to children's emotional development, confidence and social skills as a result of participating in a range of CfC programs. Qualitative data from parents and professionals reports children had increased, improved and enhanced social skills and provides numerous examples of how that has assisted children in social and educational settings.

Parents and professionals reported increased amounts of play in activity programs, and this has influenced parents and carers to play more with their child and other siblings in the home environment. Parents are identifying how enjoyable these activities are for themselves and their child. As a result, parents are reporting on the improved enjoyment of their children and greater parenting confidence and transference of play activities in the home. Play is recognised by professionals and increasingly by parents as an important part of both social and emotional development, as well as a valuable way for children to learn new skills.

Improvements in language and literacy skills, as well as social and emotional skills, are valuable in and of themselves for children's overall development. In addition, they are very relevant to children's readiness to participate enthusiastically and meaningfully in the more structured school environment. Overall, the findings indicate that families in the Broadmeadows CfC site have been provided with opportunities and support to improve children's readiness for formal learning, across the domains of language and literacy and social and emotional skills. Parents report that those opportunities have increased their children's confidence, social skills and emotional maturity. In addition, results show that there is increased participation in early education and learning programs including childcare, which have been shown to assist children's readiness for school.



5 Discussion and Conclusion

The final evaluation reports on the implementation of five strategies to achieve nine broad outcomes for preschool-aged children, their families and the community in Broadmeadows. The report covers a three-year period from early 2006, when the first CfC programs become operational, to mid-2009, when the first phase of funding was completed. The report demonstrates that all five strategies were successful in working towards the nine identified outcomes.

The full achievement of the identified outcomes is aspirational, in that they are long-term, broad and difficult to measure within a limited time span of three years. With that caveat, the program has been very successful in engaging large numbers of families with preschool-aged children within an economically disadvantaged area. It is difficult to accurately measure the reach of the program; however, evaluation data shows as many as 900 parents reporting on outcomes or aspects of outcomes. Many families attend a range of activities in their neighbourhood. Those activities are both regular, for example, ongoing playgroups, and episodic, for example, annual National Playgroup celebrations. However, it can only be beneficial for families to elect to attend a range of early-childhood activities, all designed to improve social connectedness and many with an educational aim for parents and children. Parents reported that participation in CfC programs has contributed to the support they need and has helped them make friends. CfC has also been successful in targeting and reaching families with complex needs; over 200 families identified as having complex needs participated in programs. It is very likely that many more families with complex needs have participated in CfC activities but have not been identified as being within that target group.

Outcomes are divided into three areas: *outcomes for the community*, including professionals working with families in the site; *outcomes for families*, including parents and other carers; and *outcomes for children*. There is significant overlap between those areas. Outcomes for the community ideally support outcomes for families, which in turn support outcomes for children. It has often been difficult to conceptually separate the detail of outcomes, especially between parent and child outcomes. For example, improvements in a range of children's domains, including language and literacy, primarily rely on parents' knowledge and skills in supporting their children's learning. Therefore there has been some deliberate overlap in reporting, to ensure that the report considers connections between outcomes and how collectively the outcome framework works towards a better 'community for children' in Broadmeadows.

Outcomes for the community

The aim of the CfC strategies that focused on community-based outcomes was to provide a solid base for positive change for families and their young children. This has been achieved through developing a coordinated service system, largely driven by a strategic partnership of agencies, that is able to seek and understand the perspective of the local community in relation to its needs for early-years services. Community outcomes have aimed to develop skilled, networked and well-trained professionals and volunteers working at a very local level in community hubs, who are better placed to meet the needs of a complex and diverse local community and the children of that community.

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

Four outcomes were identified that support positive changes for families and children at a community level. A central aspirational outcome was the development of a partnership approach with the benefit of the community as central and with collaboration between planners, services, the community and families as a key mechanism of community change that directly benefits young children and their families. This outcome is outcome 1: *Health, education and community services have strong links around early-years issues*. The Hume Early Years Partnership (HEYP) is the key linkage between health, education and community services. HEYP has developed its process and structures in the three years it has acted as the governance body for CfC. Over those years, it has developed into a central planning body for early-years programs in the local government area of the City of Hume. While this process is complex and always subject to improvements, it has impacted on the level of coordination of local services for families and children. For example, in 2009 maternal and child health services began outreaching to CfC hubs located in local primary schools. This is a significant innovation and one that assists maternal and child health in working with local families.

Considerable progress has been made towards achieving the outcome *Health, education and community services have strong links around early-years issues*. Progress to date is believed to be sustainable, because the partnership structure is ongoing and program and community level work towards local service system coordination is supported by the strategic leadership and planning it provides. However, there remains considerable development potential for the partnership structure and its ability to plan and implement local service system coordination for early-years services. For example, there remain many barriers to participation in universal early-childhood education programs and many barriers to access to more targeted services that families need.

Local hubs have strong links to the community through local participation

Developing a network of community hubs was a central strategy for increasing engagement at a very local neighbourhood level in the Broadmeadows CfC project. It was also a way of ensuring that each of the local suburbs benefited from the project. During 2008, participants in community hub activities were asked about their feelings of connection to the local hub and local participation in hubs. It is estimated that thousands of parents and children participated in free local events, including both occasional and regular activities coordinated by local hubs, usually based at primary schools. Those activities were increasingly decided on by the local community as a result of community consultation and local needs analysis. Outcome 2: *Local hubs have strong links to the community through local participation* has been achieved for existing community hubs, but there is considerable unmet potential for development at other sites, including Catholic and independent schools.



Community leaders/ playgroup facilitators (parents) are skilled and connected to each other

The CfC program in Broadmeadows has actively worked with existing community leaders. Many community leaders, program workers and playgroup leaders have developed, actively participated in and made use of a sustainable range of networks, working groups and training programs. Currently many of those training programs are becoming accredited and linked to professional qualifications. This is leading to the achievement of outcome 3: *Community leaders/playgroup facilitators (parents) are skilled and connected to each other*. However, there remain many community leaders, playgroup facilitators and local parents who would benefit from professional development and the opportunity to be involved in strong local networks. In addition, the more the capacity of the community and its workforce is developed, the greater the influence of services on the community, families and children.

It is via the range of community networks, and by working with and developing the leadership of those networks, that the best communication can be made with the greatest number of families and their children.

Early-years services communicate effectively with Parents

Communication is a central aspect of service coordination and access to services. Disadvantaged communities and families with complex and multiple needs within those communities are often referred to as 'hard to reach'. The CfC project in Broadmeadows has found that, by considering the perspectives and strengths of the community, families and children in the local community are very willing to engage and participate in education and community activities. Effective communication and service coordination are practical ways to improve community participation and prevent local services from becoming difficult for families to access. A DVD developed from cross-cultural workshops with early-years professionals, *Catching the rainbow*, provides a resource for continuing to improve the communication between professionals and the diverse local community. Therefore the project has focused on training and developing local professionals in communication and community engagement skills. Much progress has been made towards outcome 4: Early-years services communicate effectively with parents. The development of the Parent Advisory Group is a strategic way to maintain a more formal structure for this improved communication.

Outcomes for families

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

CfC has worked to ensure that parents were aware of services and were able to access them. This outcome has been a priority of HEYP since 2003. To date, significant progress has been made both in improving parents' knowledge of services and in improving accessibility to those services. However, there remains the challenge of ensuring that ongoing parent cohorts demonstrate outcome 5: Parents have knowledge of and access to local services for their children.

Quantitative indicated that a large majority of the parents accessing CfC activities believe that programs (81% = 808) are helping them to find out about other services. However, 17% of (178) respondents indicated that they could not get the service they needed. This finding is important and needs further exploration, although individual surveys suggest this was related to long waiting lists for some programs, including allied health, and the affordability of other programs, for example, childcare.

When the data around service provision was analysed and knowledge and information about particular services was examined, a steady increase in knowledge of services was observed from 2003 to 2008 and across several cohorts of parents. In general, where there was an increase in knowledge about a service, there was a corresponding increase in ease of access to that service.

There are strong indications that parents now have better knowledge of what is available and of what can be expected, and that CfC has directly helped improved that knowledge. Indications of improved community knowledge of services suggest that service providers are improving their communication with parents, both individually and collectively. CfC has used the successful playgroup development strategy Playgroups rule ok! to disseminate formal and informal information to parents and carers about services. In turn, parents have developed and used those networks.

Families are socially connected to and supported by their community

CfC focused on implementing one priority of parents identified in the 1995 community consultation: meeting and connecting with other parents. Being the parent of young children can be socially isolating. The site concentrated on activities such as playgroups, community hubs and bilingual storytime to develop social support and social cohesion. Those strategies also develop children's social and emotional skills.

An overwhelming majority (82%) of the almost 1000 respondents agreed that they have found support by talking with other parents in a range of CfC projects. In addition, the vast majority (81%) of almost 500 parents responded that they have made new friends through CfC programs.



Professionals observed and documented that meeting new people, social networking and learning opportunities, belonging and being a part of a community, as well as feeling less isolated were among the highest priorities for families. The surveys and professional journals documented many cases where previously isolated parents and families had made friendships and provided support for each other.

On a smaller scale, the service users study, which provided local longitudinal research over three years, shows that involvement in early-years social support programs has helped to ensure improvements in social connectedness for parents over an eighteen-month period and maintenance of that improvement over three years. For children, that connectedness kept improving over a three-year period. This result is very encouraging for the effectiveness of the CfC approach and shows that the social connections made are able to be sustained over time. The challenge, as always, is to ensure that future cohorts of families are able to develop and maintain the same high levels of social connectedness.

The range of universal and other services is an important support for the task of bringing up children. However, social supports and social inclusion are more 'everyday' parts of community life, including making new friends and being supported in parenting by other parents. CfC activities and programs provided a focus for developing community connectedness through making opportunities available for families to meet and connect with one another. This outcome area has an important role in the prevention of the development of social isolation, which in turn can lead to the development of chronic or complex needs in families.

Parents have parenting confidence, skills and knowledge

Broadmeadows CfC has also focused on *improving parents' confidence, skills and knowledge* in the myriad of micro-skills that parents need to raise their young preschool-aged children. Outcome 7 is, however, a complex one to report on, because it is difficult and not practically useful to separate the domains of knowledge, skills and confidence, given that they overlap. Reporting on this outcome highlights the micro-skills and knowledge that parents need to bring up young children. All programs and activities provided parents with the skills and knowledge to learn and understand child development, behaviour management and communicating and interacting with their children, by highlighting the importance of play, reading, singing and spending more time in playful activities together.

There are a number of areas where clear improvement of parenting has taken place. Parents became much more knowledgeable about the importance of reading to their children regularly. Many learned a range of skills in making the process interesting to their children and had a sophisticated understanding of the benefits and complexities of bilingualism. Parents also learned and were beginning to implement the skills of spending time playing with their children in order to build a better, closer relationship and to assist in children's learning. Quantitative data indicates that some parents still struggle to find the time at home to do this with each of their children.

There were also clear improvements in the area of behaviour management, with many parents reflecting on the importance of being patient and understanding their own and their children's personalities, and fathers in particular understanding the importance of praising and positively reinforcing children for good behaviour. Parents and professionals are reflecting on changing parenting techniques and parents are gaining a better understanding of the ages and stages of their children's development. As a result, parents report developing better relationships with their children and families, which is likely to create a more resilient community.

Families with complex needs participate in early-years services

Some families need additional supports. *Families with complex needs participate in early-years services* was designed to ensure that all families are able to participate in activities for families and children in the site. Families included in this outcome were usually targeted by the demographic group they belonged to, for example, Aboriginal families, or by the secondary or tertiary services they were already accessing, including housing and mental-health services, as an indicator of their possible level of need.

Strong anecdotal evidences from a range of CfC programs suggests that many families who were taking part in CfC programs also had 'complex needs' but were not able to be targeted in this way. The experience across all the outcome areas is that universal or so-called 'soft' entry points that are not stigmatising, for example, a mental-health diagnosis, and do not require assessment and referral or involve waiting lists, are effective entry points for families, providing that their level of need is able to be met within the program. Again, it is the experience across CfC programs that experienced workers in universal services, for example, playgroups or community hubs, can provide assistance and support through the referral process and waiting period for more intense services.

CfC has worked with a range of target groups with identified additional needs, including homelessness and mental-health issues. Those projects have worked with organisations providing specialist services that usually work with adults rather than family units. Mental health, homelessness and child protection all have complex service systems that require strategic partnership focus to ensure that the needs of children are taken into account. It is the long-term aim of almost all intensive services to link families back into community programs that allow families to participate in community life and build stronger social connections, and so it is important for services to work together and to develop structures that facilitate working collaboratively.

It is worth considering that this outcome, while providing more depth of assistance to families, did not achieve the same reach. The numbers are considerably smaller and the costs of providing a program are considerably higher. For example, the activities included in this outcome included approximately 200 families and their children. A conservative estimate of other outcome areas is more than 2000 families and children. Reach into the community is a consideration in planning the next phase of CfC in Broadmeadows.



Outcomes for children

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

The work undertaken by CfC has aimed to support children as they grow up and start school. The community, including universal and specialist services, aims to support families and children as they grow. A strong community and a strong service system are important, but are not sufficient in themselves for improving children's outcomes. Likewise, the home environment of children and the care and attention parents and other caregivers provide is a very important support for children in their development. Recent research has confirmed long-held professional and community views that the care and development of children in the years before school is very important for their longer-term social and educational life outcomes.

There has been an improvement in children's access to kindergarten and other early-childhood learning and care programs in the year immediately before school, which suggests that some systemic barriers have been removed. For example, four-year-old kindergarten is now free to all families in receipt of a healthcare card. This was not the case in 2003 when data collection began.

Much of the qualitative data from various activities indicates that reading books, storytelling and singing have become important in the lives of CfC Broadmeadows children, both in activities and at home. Reading books and singing have strong links to improved language and literacy. Singing in particular has been demonstrated to be an important and culturally appropriate part of improving language. This interest is likely to give children a good start in their formal schooling and parents' and carers' interest in reading with their children is also likely to sustain long-term learning.

Parents overwhelmingly report improvements to children's emotional development, confidence and social skills as a result of participating in a range of CfC programs. Qualitative data from parents and professionals reports that children had increased, improved and enhanced social skills and provides numerous examples of how that has assisted children in social and educational settings.

Data provided to show progress towards this outcome found that the overwhelming majority of parents reported that their preschool-aged children had improved language, literacy, social and emotional skills as a result of being involved in CfC programs. Professionals also found that children had benefited from the activities and programs they attended. This evidence is both qualitative and quantitative. Literally thousands of children participated in the programs funded by CfC. Local community partners also provided a range of programs alongside the CfC-funded activities. Many of those children are now commencing school.

Conclusion: where to from here?

While the CfC program has been very successful in the Broadmeadows site, it now faces a number of significant challenges. Like CfC sites across the country, the program has engaged large numbers of the local community, including service providers and community leaders as well as families, particularly parents of young children. Again, like many other sites, Broadmeadows has improved parenting outcomes and outcomes for children through their involvement in programs ranging from playgroup to parenting programs to literacy programs. While the engagement of these families has been impressive, partners in the site acknowledge that there are still many families who have not benefited from any exposure to early-years programs and activities. In addition, the population is transient, with many new families arriving each year and others leaving the area. The challenge now is to ensure improved outcomes for future cohorts by embedding strategies that have been successful to date and continuing those strategies for future cohorts of families with young children.

In 2009, the CfC program across Australia received further funding under the new Family Support Program. The revised CfC program will work with families from conception until the transition to high school. This is a significant change and a significant challenge. In the Broadmeadows site, the target group of children will effectively double. In addition, the primary-aged cohort has different social and educational needs to those of the younger cohort. Parents of primary-school aged children may also have different needs and concerns. However, the expansion of the age group allows the site to continue working with the current cohort of families through the formative primary school years.

The reach of the program to date has been broad rather than deep, with an emphasis on enhancing access to universal services for young children and their families. A further change of emphasis for the future has been FaHCSIA's interest in a stronger focus on vulnerable and isolated families within the already disadvantaged communities targeted for CfC. The current project is well placed to undertake more intensive work with some families, because of its history of working with the range of health, education and community service agencies in the site.

While there are many community strengths in the site, there are also a number of service gaps which have been identified by local stakeholders. Many families are unable to access services and programs that would benefit them because, while those services are available, they are not accessible to families because of the cost, the waiting lists or the distance to the service. Other service gaps include targeted services for *Indigenous families*; there are currently no specific Indigenous services for families in the City of Hume municipality, and the local community has highlighted the need for locally available services and supports for their families, especially the children.



Access to allied health services, in particular speech pathology and psychology services, is another identified gap. The waiting list for speech pathology has been a concern for the site for many years. Families often wait more than twelve months for publicly funded services. There are few private services and they are usually beyond the reach of families in this site. The same is true of psychology services; while they are available through the Medicare system, there are few registered psychologists in the local area and even fewer who speak community languages.

While there are a number of challenges and service gaps in the Broadmeadows CfC site, there are also a number of exciting current opportunities. Significant infrastructure projects are planned or underway.

Broadmeadows will become a central activities district and as such will be a focus for commercial and government activity. The Broadmeadows School Regeneration program has been in place for several years now and new schools will open over the next two to three years. Each of those new schools will include a focus on preschool years.

The Broadmeadows CfC site has undertaken a large-scale consultation with the local community for the next phase of CfC in Broadmeadows. That consultation included professionals, parents and carers, as well as school-aged children. Overall, the consultation confirmed that the current directions of the program were in line with family and professional priorities. Professionals made language and literacy and support for families with complex needs their top priorities. Those priorities will be an important focus for the next three years of CfC in Broadmeadows. The majority of parents confirmed health and nutrition and language and literacy as their top two priorities. Affordable, fun educational programs were the third priority for parents and an important priority for children.

The consultation has provided the program with a significant challenge, as preliminary investigations show there are very few regular programs for school-aged children that meet all three aspects of the criteria requested by children and the community.



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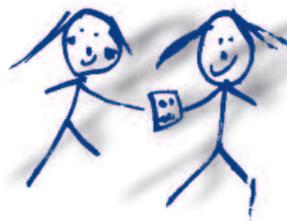
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*The local evaluation report, with full details of the evaluation methodology and local strategy findings is available from Broadmeadows UnitingCare
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