



Australian Early Development Index
Building better communities for children

AEDI Community Workshop
Improving early childhood development
outcomes across Australia:
Community strategies and action
Community Feedback

A Partnership Between



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July 2006

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Workshop Summary

The Centre for Community Child Health, Melbourne, in partnership with the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth, convened a one-day workshop for Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) communities in July 2006, funded by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). The objectives of the AEDI Communities Workshop, *'Improving early childhood development outcomes across Australia: Community strategies and action,'* were to:

- Present the findings and experiences from utilising the EDI in Canada and Australia to key stakeholders.
- Continue to actively engage key government and non-government stakeholders in the AEDI project.
- Provide an opportunity for current and potential AEDI communities to meet, share experiences and suggest how communities might best implement the AEDI and subsequently utilise the data, focusing on actions that might lead to better outcomes for children.

Attending the AEDI Community Workshop were Dr Magdalena Janus and Joanne Schroeder, representatives of the two major organisations that have successfully implemented the EDI in their respective Canadian provinces, Ontario and British Columbia, representatives from current and past AEDI communities (2004 to 2006), AEDI Stakeholder Reference Group and Technical Advisory Group members and other key government and non-government stakeholders.

The workshop included a combination of presentations that provided updates on new developments in the AEDI/EDI in Australia and Canada, and small group discussion workshops. These provided the opportunity for community representatives to share experiences and network.

There was very positive feedback about the structure of the workshop. Participants valued most highly the opportunity to learn about actions resulting from the AEDI results by other AEDI communities (through both the presentation and discussion sessions). They also appreciated the opportunity to share their ideas with other community members and to discuss solutions to common problems. From the evaluation it was clear that participants increased their knowledge about the EDI/AEDI and the way the AEDI results can inform community actions.

Themes that emerged from the workshop focused on the importance of a committed and enthusiastic AEDI champion, continual support from the AEDI National Support Centre, the difficulty of raising funds, and the importance of collaboration amongst all community stakeholders.

There were also a number of recommendations suggested, including formats for future workshops, and additional potential supports from the AEDI National Support Centre.

1. The workshop format

The AEDI Community Workshop agenda was developed to both share information about current EDI/AEDI developments with participants and enable community representatives to have the opportunity to share their learnings and actions resulting from the AEDI implementation. The workshop agenda was made up of four sessions, the theme of each session respectively was:

- Session 1: Current Developments: The EDI/AEDI in Australia and Canada.
- Session 2: Community mobilisation and action.
- Workshop 1: Data to action (*small group discussions*).
- Workshop 2: Optimising outcomes (*small group discussions*).

Sessions 1 and 2 consisted of presentations and open question and discussion time. (Session 1 and 2 PowerPoint presentations are available on the AEDI website.)

For both of the small group sessions (workshop 1 and 2) participants discussed and recorded their responses to a number of questions. These explored how different communities have translated the AEDI '*data into action*' and how they have used the AEDI results as a vehicle to '*optimise outcomes*' in their community.

2. Data into Action – Workshop 1

A summary of group responses to the '*data to action*' small group discussion workshop is outlined below.

Q1. What are communities doing to ensure that AEDI results translate to actions?

The key message emerging from the group workshops was that communities are at different stages of ensuring that their AEDI results are being translated into actions. Each community fell into one of five common stages. The five common stages of AEDI results being translated into actions are:

Stage 1 – Pre-implementation/Implementation

Still in the process of collecting AEDI data or waiting to receive AEDI community results.

Stage 2 – Interpreting and contextualising results

Interpreting the AEDI results, and developing a clear understanding of their meaning within the specific local context.

Stage 3– Dissemination phase

Disseminating the AEDI results to **all** key stakeholders in the community.

Stage 4 – Action phase

Encouraging all key stakeholders to use the AEDI results as a vehicle to:

- Inform existing programs/services.
- Identify if and where there is need for new programs/services.
- Implement new services/program delivery.

Stage 5 – Maintaining momentum

Sustaining the AEDI momentum.

Q2. How did you make these actions happen?

The establishment of key champions (individuals who are dedicated to the AEDI initiative) was identified as an essential part of ensuring the AEDI results are being translated into actions. The methods that community champions were using to translate the AEDI results into action for each stage are outlined below.

Stage 1 – Pre-implementation/Implementation

- A good time to build networks between community stakeholder organisations and learn from other communities' experiences.

Stage 2 – Interpreting and contextualising results

- Using the AEDI website and other available web based resources.
- Meeting and discussing results with other stakeholder parties.

Stage 3 – Dissemination phase

- Holding forums and workshops for stakeholder groups.
- Reporting the AEDI findings in the local media, such as community newsletters/papers.
- Presenting the findings at relevant community group meetings, such as early years strategy groups.
- Using schools as a vehicle to disseminate the AEDI results via school newsletters, information mornings/evenings.
- Referring stakeholders to the AEDI website (www.australianedi.org.au).
- Employing an individual to disseminate AEDI results to key community stakeholders (eg. via letters, meetings etc.).
- When disseminating the AEDI results community representatives felt that it was important to ensure that the results were disseminated to all stakeholders in the community; were presented in a clear and easy to interpret manner; were presented in context; were presented as an opportunity to inform change rather than an endpoint; and that any key issues surrounding the communities results were highlighted.

Stage 4 – Action phase

- AEDI champions encouraged individuals in their organisation and extended networks to reflect on the value of existing community programs, in light of the communities' AEDI results.
- AEDI champions encouraged schools, health and community services to reflect on the AEDI results and think about program/service gaps that need to be addressed.
- Applying for grants to gain funding for new services was identified as an exercise that could also be used as an opportunity to strengthen partnerships between stakeholder organisations.
- The local media had been used to apply pressure to indifferent local governments, to encourage them to implement new services.
- Example of new services and programs that have been implemented by communities include:
 - Breakfast clubs.
 - More universal home visiting.
 - New playgroups.
 - 'Let's read' programs.

Stage 5 – Maintaining momentum

- Continuing to promote the AEDI results within the community.
- Holding launches for new programs and inviting influential stakeholders to open (e.g. The Mayor) and attend the launches.

Q3. Who are your community partners?

The community partners identified were any organisations or individual considered to have invested interest in and/or influence on the wellbeing of children within the community. These included:

Educational organisations:

- Government and independent school communities.
- Principals, teachers and parents.
- Pre-schools and kindergartens.
- Early learning centres.

Health organisations:

- Community health organisations
- Child health nurses.
- Child and youth health agencies.

Government organisations:

- State government.

- Local government.
- Mayor and councillors.
- Libraries.
- Family centres.

Non-government organisations:

- The Smith Family.
- St. Vincent de Paul.
- Salvation Army.
- Lutheran Community Care.
- Local businesses.

Other organisations and groups in the local community that work with children and their families:

- Child-care centres.
- Playgroups.
- Breastfeeding groups.
- Aboriginal groups.
- Sports groups.
- Parent action groups.

Q4. How did you involve them?

Methods used by communities to get their local partners involved are outlined in *Stage 3 & 4*, under the heading 'Q1. How did you make these actions happen?'

Q5. What were the difficulties and challenges?

The key difficulties and challenges community AEDI champions face are:

- Getting resistant stakeholders on board.
- Ensuring that the AEDI results are seen as an opportunity to create change rather than a community judgement.
- Managing media releases and reports so the press is an enabler of positive actions, not a barrier.
- Explaining and demonstrating the benefits of the AEDI to stakeholders, when the rewards will be long-term and not a 'quick fix'.
- Gaining grants and sustaining funding.
- Managing complacency in areas where the AEDI results are perceived to be 'good'.
- Keeping stakeholders engaged.
- Competing with other community projects.

Q6. Would the actions have happened without the AEDI?

Many groups reported that their AEDI results were important in allowing them to:

- Elevate the importance of children in their community and children focused community services.
- Highlight how existing services and programs may be improved to better respond to the needs of children in their community.
- Identify the need for new programs and services in their community.
- Bring together education, health, local government and community organisations to inform present and future program planning within and between these organisations.
- Challenge inadequate standard practices.

These factors were enablers of children focused actions within communities, as a result of community involvement in the AEDI initiative.

The general consensus was that children focused actions in the community would have continued to be implemented if the community had not been involved in the AEDI initiative. However, the AEDI results were an extremely useful tool to accelerate the implementation of actions, to prioritise community actions and to inform the direction of present and new actions. It provides an 'evidence base' on which to move forward and initiate change.

3. Optimising outcomes – Workshop 2

A summary of group responses to the '*optimising outcomes*' small group discussion workshop is outlined below.

Q1. How can schools use the AEDI data and stay engaged in the early years agenda?

Schools can use the AEDI data to:

- Inform planning and curriculum development.
- Support funding applications.

Schools can stay engaged with the early years agenda by:

- Forming partnerships with relevant early years stakeholder agencies (eg. playgroups, community health, kindergartens, parents, childcare groups).
- Sharing the AEDI data with early years stakeholders.
- Acting as an advocate to increase community knowledge about early years development.
- Providing a venue/meeting place for 'early years' meetings and stakeholder gatherings.

Q2. What support is needed centrally – for example, how does the AEDI National Support Centre provide support in the phase after implementation?

Support that is needed and **is** presently being provided by the AEDI National Support Centre includes:

- To process and map the data collected, and give reports back to schools and communities.
- A website including:
 - Up-to-date information on the AEDI.
 - Data collection capabilities.
 - Links to education departments and other relevant organisations.
- Ongoing support (telephone and e-mail) to overcome questions or issues that arise.
- Organisation of workshops/forums, for AEDI communities (to gain new knowledge and share their experiences).
- To provide support to communities in interpreting and acting on their data.
- Regular contact with AEDI community representatives.
- The translation of key information into languages of culturally and linguistically diverse CALD groups.

Support that is needed and is **not** presently being provided by the AEDI National Support Centre includes:

- Provide facilities for e-list, e-mail discussion groups between AEDI communities through the website.
- Provide case studies/community newsletters to AEDI communities.
- Acknowledgement of the community's AEDI involvement (i.e. certificate, letters of acknowledgement to teachers).

As a result of this feedback the AEDI National Support Centre is now working towards providing support in these areas.

Q3. What support is needed locally?

To make AEDI work at a local level, workshop participants identified the following:

- Committed and enthusiastic AEDI champions.
- Mentoring from community AEDI experts (to explain the AEDI results).
- Local government support.
- A committee/group to facilitate community building and to maintain the relationship between key stakeholders over time.
- Funding (to resource teacher relief, volunteers and community programs).
- Community awareness of AEDI.

- Sister system amongst neighbouring AEDI communities and/or AEDI communities in the same State/Territory.

Q4. What support is needed to develop evidence based community responses to the AEDI results?

- Support from the AEDI National Support Centre to:
 - Provide examples (case studies) of successful programs.
 - Keep the website up-to-date with any new AEDI developments.
 - To be available to answer questions.
 - Provide continual updates on AEDI research.
 - The ability to share results and actions across communities.
- Adequate funding and resources.
- To be able to measure a change in AEDI results over time, so that actions put in place can be evaluated to see if they are having an impact.

Q5. What is needed to ensure sustainability of AEDI-generated actions?

- For long term sustainability, the AEDI needs to have a paid representative/s in the community, so the AEDI agenda stays alive, and is not reliant on people doing things 'on the side'.
- The development and maintenance of partnerships between stakeholders.
- Commitment and support from all levels of government.
- Available and ongoing funding.
- Ongoing AEDI data collection.
- The AEDI National Support Centre to continue to operate in its current capacity.
- Dedicated and permanent staff operating at the community level.
- Funding for teacher relief, and appropriate management of teacher time.
- Whole community involvement.

4. Recommendations for future workshops

There were some recommendations for the workshop participants for future AEDI Community Workshops which included:

- To have a session on how to interpret AEDI data and how to present the AEDI data to other community members (at all levels of the community).
- More case studies of how the AEDI results are being used by communities.
- More information on how to get parents (of 0-4 year olds) engaged and involved.
- More information on how to secure funding and mobilise resources to respond to the results.
- More information on how to manage the media.

5. Conclusion

The AEDI Community Workshop was very successful. Some of the key outcomes were:

- The workshop boosted participant's knowledge about the EDI/AEDI; how communities have used the AEDI results and, how the AEDI results can inform community action. This knowledge will assist community representatives to use AEDI data to effect meaningful change in their community.
- Participants had the opportunity to share ideas and build networks with other community representatives.
- The workshop provided the opportunity to involve key AEDI government and non-government stakeholders with the AEDI communities.
- There were many key strategies discussed by communities that can be incorporated into the AEDI community guides and materials.
- A number of key recommendations were made about the role of the AEDI National Support Centre to support communities.