

Linking Schools and Early Years

Project Newsletter
March - May, 2008

Welcome to the first edition of the **Linking Schools and Early Years** project newsletter. In this edition you will find information on the progress of the project and what's up next for everyone involved in **Linking Schools and Early Years** and those hoping to learn from it.

Why Linking Schools and Early Years?

The **Linking Schools and Early Years** project was established with the aim of ensuring that all children enter the formal primary education system ready to engage and be successful in school.

The rationale for the project is based on research demonstrating that barriers to learning need to be addressed before a child starts school and that these barriers are most commonly identified in early years programs. The project also advocates the need for a more holistic approach to supporting families to create the best possible environment for children to develop. This includes engaging parents as active partners with schools to allow familiarity with the school setting before children commence attendance.

The R.E. Ross Trust

The **Linking Schools and Early Years** project has been made possible through the foresight of The R.E. Ross Trust. Chief Executive Officer, Sylvia Geddes, comments on the project:

"Linking Schools and Early Years is responding to indisputable evidence that children are learning from birth. This project is riding a wave of new knowledge and enthusiasm about the vital importance of the early years. It is in a strong position to develop both practical initiatives and to drive change in policy and service delivery."

What are the project goals?

There are three specific goals for the project;

- Children and families transition smoothly between early years services and schools.
- Early years services and schools actively connect with families.
- Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children.

Where is the project being run?!

The project is operating at three sites in Victoria:

- **Footscray** in the City of Maribyrnong
- **Hastings** in the Mornington Peninsula Shire
- **Corio/Norlane** in the City of Greater Geelong

Sites were chosen due to a high proportion of developmentally vulnerable children as identified by the Australian Early Development Index, with two to three schools chosen to participate at each location. Schools were selected using specific criteria developed in collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Regional Directors and the Catholic Education Office.

What's been happening ...

Much of 2007 was devoted to planning and the development of partnership groups at a local level. Each community has a partnership group made up of school staff; early years service providers, representatives of community agencies and parents. The partnerships have worked with the project team to develop an action plan and to begin implementing a set of local strategies and activities relevant to the local community.

Dedicating the first year to project planning has allowed a strong foundation for the project to be established, both at a project advisory level and at a community level.

The planning phase of the Project involved the input and expertise of the project team, the advisory group, governance group members, local Best Start facilitators and all members of local partnership groups. We are thankful to all of these individuals for their effort and time.

What's up next?

In 2008 we are in the exciting and challenging implementation phase of the project, and we are looking forward to working closely with the partnership groups at each site to support the implementation of Phase I.

Activities

A range of activities are already underway including joint professional development for early years and school staff that will build understanding and encourage networking.

Hastings will see a range activities to establish and enhance relationships between staff from early education and care services, schools and community organisations.

Hastings 'Linking Together' Forum

The Importance of the Early Years
Wednesday 4th June, 5-7pm
Old Hastings Leisure Centre

Footscray will see the launch of a supported playgroup facilitated by the Vietnamese Women's Association at Footscray Primary School. School Principal and playgroup enthusiast, Natalie Bakai, comments *"This playgroup is an example of an activity that has a positive impact on both the community and the school."*

Footscray Professional Development

Sharing Developmental Portfolios
Wednesday 23/30 July, 4 – 5.30pm
Location to be confirmed

Corio/Norlane has seen great progress with the Phase I Action Plan with completion anticipated by August.

Consultations and external evaluation

The project team is conducting consultations with parents, guardians, service providers and schools at each project site to inform future action plans. Baseline data is being collected for the evaluation which is being conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre and schools are completing the Australian Early Development Index for prep children across the project sites.

Special Thanks

The Linking Schools and Early Years team would like to make a special mention of The Smith Family and the Lets Read team for making resources available to support the collection of evaluation and consultation data.



The Centre for Community Child Health Policy Brief Series

Rethinking School Readiness

Translating early childhood research evidence to inform policy and practice

The latest policy brief from the Centre for Community Child Health focuses on what the research tells us about the nature of and pathways to school readiness. It emphasizes the importance of schools, services and communities supporting children and families and providing the conditions and experiences needed to ensure that all children reach school able to take advantage of the academic and social learning experiences that schools provide.

This and other policy briefs can be accessed at www.rch.org.au/ccch/policybriefs.cfm

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Bella (Left) & Jen