

Linking Schools and Early Years

Project Newsletter
September - November, 2008

Welcome to the third edition of the **Linking Schools and Early Years** project newsletter. As the end of the year approaches, Phase I (2008) action plan delivery in each of the project sites is drawing to a close and Phase II action planning is now underway. In this edition you will find information on the progress of the project during in the last three months and what's up next for everyone involved in **Linking Schools and Early Years** and those hoping to learn from it.

Linking Schools & Early Years - Progress so far?

The past 12 months has seen a number of exciting activities happening across the three project sites; Corio/Norlane, Footscray and Hastings. Whilst implementing a number of activities there has been a strong focus on developing the community partnership groups that drive the project locally.

What are we working towards?

Children arrive at school ready to engage.

What are the project goals?

There are three specific goals for the project:

- Children and families make a smooth transition 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.

What's been happening?

A flurry of project activity has been happening since our last project newsletter. In **Corio/Norlane**, the activities outlined in the Phase I action plan have commenced and project activities in the **Footscray** and **Hastings** sites have continued to be strengthened. Some recent project activities that have been implemented for each goal are detailed below.

Goal 1: Children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and schools:

So far, the **Corio/Norlane** site has focused on building local networks and strengthening relationships with a view to enhancing transition to school support and activities. Local networks were strengthened at a Partnership Forum where early years professionals came together to share information about themselves and their services and schools. Professionals worked in small groups to identify current transition practices and brainstorm ideas for enhancing transition and

orientation programs. Local relationships are also being strengthened through 'Peer Swaps' which are being undertaken between kindergartens, childcare services and schools. Corio/Norlane was the final project site to complete the Peer Swaps. All those involved found the time spent in each others services to be valuable and felt it would be a great activity to undertake at the start and end of each year.

The **Hastings** Practitioner Network Group has commenced development of a community-wide transition plan for Hastings families and children. The group is made up of practitioner representatives from all of the childcare services, kindergarten and primary schools in Hastings as well as the pre-school field officer.



Hastings Practitioner Network Group

The Practitioner Network Group will work with all community stakeholders, to create the community-wide transition plan. **Their vision is ...**

To support children and families to make a smooth and positive transition from their early childhood setting to school, by having a shared understanding of the importance of a smooth and supported transition and important role of parents, children, early learning and care professionals and the community.

Goal 2: Early years services and schools actively connect with families:

The **Footscray** Partnership Group is running transition activities in the two Linking Schools and Early Years schools, specifically tailored to the needs of local families whose children have not attended any preschool services before going to school next year. To engage these families, local community services got together to identify resources required to support these families to attend transition activities (i.e. transport, translated materials, interpreters, childcare, etc). The aim of this activity is to provide an opportunity for children and parents to become familiar with a school environment, school staff and to provide practical information about school and school readiness.

Goal 3: Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children:

The **Hastings** Partnership Group has successfully hosted their second 'Linking Together' forum, which was attended by about 40 local early years, child and family services and school representatives. The forum was one of a number initiatives in Hastings that is working towards building strong and active service provider networks and strengthening understanding of each others practices, with the aim to increasing local capacity to respond to the diverse needs of children and their families in a timely manner.



Hastings 2nd 'Linking Together' Forum

In **Footscray** and **Corio/Norlane** the working groups have developed an 'Information sharing tool' to be completed by kindergartens/childcares and sent to schools (with parental consent). The tool will be trialed throughout the 2008/09 transition to school and the working groups will evaluate its effectiveness early next year. The Information sharing tool is strength-based and the intention is that the information provided will enable schools to build on children's earlier learning experiences, be responsive to children's individual needs and provide an ongoing learning environment.

The external evaluation

Data collection from each of the project sites for the baseline evaluation is now complete and the external evaluation team at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW is currently collating the data. The baseline data will help partnership groups in each site to identify and prioritise Phase II (2009) action plan strategies and activities to be implemented.

The next round of impact data collection for the project will occur in 2010. In addition, to this the project's progress is being documented on an ongoing basis.

Congratulations!

Congratulations, to the **Hastings** and **Footscray** Partnership Groups and the City of Greater Geelong (including **Corio/Norlane**) for their successful submissions to be pilot sites for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development *Transition: a positive start to school* project. Thirty pilot sites were selected out of 195 applications. The 6 month Transition pilots, are now underway and will run until the end of 1st term 2009.

Thank-you and farewell



Thank-you Tracey! Over the last six months, Tracey has supported the creation of strong local partnerships between Hastings primary schools, childcare services and kinders, and ensured engagement of all key stakeholders in project partnerships. Hastings service providers now look forward to continuing to work together in representative local partnerships.

What's next for Linking Schools and Early Years?

The Partnership groups will review their locally developed action plans to consider:

- What activities have become part of their day-to-day practice?
- Have there been any significant changes to local contextual data, i.e. AEDI results
- What should the focus for Phase II Action Plans be?

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