

Linking Schools and Early Years

Project Newsletter
December 2008 – February 2009

Welcome to the fourth edition of the **Linking Schools and Early Years** project newsletter. As we farewell 2008 and welcome 2009, this is an opportunity to share some of the key reflections from the project and some of the upcoming events and activities. Information in this newsletter will be helpful for everyone involved in **Linking Schools and Early Years** and those hoping to learn from it.

Goodbye 2008 – what have we learned so far?

As 2008 comes to an end, we would like to celebrate our strong partnership groups, who have driven the project direction and activities in each of their communities. Lessons we have learnt about partnerships are that:

- Creating effective, representative partnerships takes time and is worth the time it takes!
- When building local partnerships, it's important:
 - To engage all key stakeholders
 - To create structures that support and facilitate partnership to be able to operate effectively
 - To build on existing local knowledge, networks and initiatives. We particularly wish to thank Best Start coordinators in each site
- It is very powerful for representatives from schools, early years and community services to have the opportunity to come together at regular intervals and work towards a shared vision.

Ross Trust Seminar

These and other key reflections and learnings from the project so far were shared at a Ross Trust Seminar held in November 2008.

At this seminar, Dr Tim Moore took *'A look at the research evidence'* providing an overview of what the research tells us about linking schools and early years.

Then *'Putting the research evidence into practice'*, prep teachers, childcare staff, kindergarten teachers and principals from each project site shared some of the project activities they have implemented in their community, such as Peer Visits, the Information Sharing Processes, Community Forums and Playgroups in schools.

Finally, Kylie Valentine from the Social Policy Research Centre spoke about the Linking Schools and Early Years project evaluation and some of the early baseline data findings.



Top Left: Prep teacher from Norlane West PS

Top Right: Qualified Room Leader from Hastings Childcare Centre

Bottom: Panel: Kindergarten teacher (Hyde Street Kindergarten, Footscray), Qualified Room Leader (Hastings Childcare Centre), Prep teacher (Norlane West PS), Principal (Footscray PS) and Principal (St Marv's PS, Hastings)

Presentations from the day can be accessed at:

http://www.rch.org.au/ccch/profdev.cfm?doc_id=10492

Hello 2009 – what's coming up?

'Linking together' and 'Getting to know you'

2009 is off to a great start with local forums in all three project sites. The community forums are ongoing opportunities for local practitioners to continue strengthening networks and relationships.

Corio/Norlane identified that professional development around working in partnership with parents would provide a valuable foundation for their next suite of local activities which focuses on engaging parents and families in schools and creating family friendly environments. A 'Working in Partnership with Parents' session provided an opportunity for early years professionals to come

together around the key principles of family centered practice and to reflect on and share current practices around engaging families.

Footscray have recently held a Community Forum to support the development of local relationships amongst early years professionals and to identify innovative ways community services, schools and early education and care services can link together to more effectively support children and families. Feedback from the forum indicated it:

Provided a great opportunity to meet other services, schools, kinders and childcares in Footscray and share information about our work and programs

Provided good ideas about how we can link together to better meet the needs of local children and families

Hastings, as part of regular forums that have been held in Hastings during 2008, Hastings early education and care practitioners and primary school teachers attended a joint workshop facilitated by Helen Eades that focused on "Planning and responding to the individual needs of children" The workshop provided them with practical ideas and strategies that they could use in their professional practice.

Details of the next Hastings *Linking Together* forum:

Exploring Language Development
If you work with 0-8 year olds in Hastings—
please come along.
Wednesday 6th May, 5-7pm
Hastings Community Hall

What's been happening?

The Linking schools and Early Years Partnership groups in the **Footscray** and **Hastings** sites were successful in receiving funding as part of the DEECD transition pilot project.

Footscray Transition Pilot – The aim of this pilot is to engage families whose children haven't participated in a preschool program, in activities that will support them to transition smoothly to school. In particular, the pilot focuses on developing strategies that are appropriate for communities that are highly culturally and linguistically diverse.

Pilot Activities

- Utilising community services' existing relationships with families to engage families whose children haven't participated in a preschool program.

- Transition/orientation activities tailored to meet the diverse needs of these families, e.g. interpreters and translated materials, information about starting school for parents and children and practicalities such as childcare and transport.
- Developing a model for engaging these families (based on pilot experiences)

Hastings Transition Pilot – The aim of this pilot is for school, kindergarten and childcare practitioners to develop a mutual understanding of each other's practices and gain a shared understanding of current transition practices and how they can be strengthened.

Pilot Activities

- Opportunities for prep teachers, kindergarten teachers and childcare workers to spend time visiting and observing each other's practices.
- A professional development transition forum
- Development of a shared community-wide transition plan

The **Hastings** and **Footscray** transition pilots have been established in the wider context of the Linking Schools and Early Years project. This will enable the local Partnership groups to use learnings from the pilots to inform future project activities.

The **Corio/Norlane** project site is also involved in a transition pilot that involves implementing a locally developed Transition Kit across the City of Greater Geelong.

Upcoming seminars and workshops

R.E. Ross Trust Seminar Series Upcoming seminars in 2009

Issues in quality care for infants and toddlers
Seminar: Monday 6th April, 9.00am - 3.00pm
Professor Ron Lally

Service integration and school transition
Seminar: Tuesday 7th April, 9.00am - 3.00pm
Professor Jane Bertrand

For more information about these and other seminars and workshops follow this link:
www.rch.org.au/ccch/policybriefs.cfm

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