

Linking Schools and Early Years

Project Newsletter
March – May 2009

Welcome to the fifth edition of the **Linking Schools and Early Years** project newsletter. In this edition you will read about project activities around engaging families, strengthening local relationships, language and literacy, and find out how the Linking Schools and Early Years sites are informing the DEECD policy around transition. Look out for the new section of the newsletter, examples of '**Good practice in Linking Schools and Early Years**'. Information in this newsletter will be helpful for everyone involved in **Linking Schools and Early Years** and those hoping to learn from it.

What's been happening?

The first half of 2009 has seen a range of activities happening across the three project sites, including a language and literacy forum, strategies for engaging families and a new Links Worker. These strategies and activities are detailed below under the three project goals.

Goal One: Children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and school

- **Footscray** is the project's only metropolitan site and has provided some important learnings around working in communities where children go to school from a high number of early years services. Recognising that local relationships are a key aspect of creating a smooth transition for children and families, the Footscray Partnership group has employed a Links Worker to develop and strengthen relationships between schools and early years services.
- We would like to welcome Jenny Vran (right), Footscray's new Links Worker to the project. Jenny has started visiting early years services and schools and setting up Peer Swaps providing opportunities for staff and teachers from early years services and prep teachers to spend time in each others services.
- **Corio/Norlane** recently held a community Partnership Forum focused on transition. The group identified they wanted an opportunity for schools and their local early years feeder services to work together to develop a



coordinated transition program for children and families. This forum is very timely as the City of Greater Geelong has recently distributed their newly developed Transition Kit to all schools and early years services across the municipality..

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

- **Corio/Norlane** has started developing a tool to review the family friendliness of their school and early years environments and how they currently engage and communicate with parents. The tool will be completed by schools and early years services and then as a Working group they will identify and share examples of good practice and how current practices and environments could be strengthened.
- The Working group is also undertaking a review of current staff/teacher position descriptions to ensure that communication with and engaging families is included as a key aspect of the staff/teacher role.

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

- In 2008 **Corio/Norlane** and **Footscray** developed an information sharing tool and parent consent form that was trialed throughout the 2008/09 transition to school (this is also an activity of the **Hastings** Phase II Action Plan for 2009).
- The effectiveness and usefulness of these tools will be evaluated this year and from the evaluation reflections changes will be made and the information sharing tool will become part of common practice for project sites.
- To ensure the information sharing tool is consistent with government policy, the pending DEECD Transition policy directions will also inform changes made to the tool, particularly around implementation.

'GOOD PRACTICE' in Linking Schools and Early Years

Hastings 'Interactive Peer Program' (Peer Swaps)

The Interactive Peer Program has become a key element of a Hastings community transition program. It involves prep teachers spending time in early years services in term three to start getting to know children before they arrive at school and then in term one, early years teachers/staff spend time in prep classes to see how the children are transitioning to school. The Peer Program is also aiding to strengthen local peer relationships and provides the opportunity for school, kindergarten and childcare practitioners to gain a greater understanding of each other practices.

Goal Three continued:

- **Hastings** recently held a community forum focused around 'Exploring Language Development'. Close to 40 early years professionals from kindergartens, childcares, schools and child and family community services, came together to find out more about different approaches to supporting children's language and speech development.



- Those who attended found it very beneficial to:
 - Hear about local initiatives to support children's language and speech development
 - Be exposed to new ideas and strategies that they can apply to their early years service, school and community services settings and environments
- The 'Linking Together' community forums in Hastings continue to be very successful as they provide an important opportunity for Hastings early years professionals across different sectors to come together for shared professional development, to network and to identify ways in which they may work collaboratively to better meet the needs of Hastings children and families

DEECD Transition Pilots and Policy

All three project sites have been involved in the DEECD: A Positive Transition to School pilots and have recently completed a final report to provide key messages, from their experiences, about successes and challenges of the transition to school. This information will contribute to the development of the DEECD policy around transition to be launched in the second half of 2009. Some of the key messages from the **Footscray** and **Hastings** pilots include the importance of:

- Creating a community approach to transition involving schools, early education and care services, community services and families
- Creating a shared understanding between all stakeholders about the role that families, schools, early years services and community services play in children's early learning and development
- Time and resources being available to enable effective partnerships between all transition stakeholders to be developed and maintained
- Developing transition programs that are informed by local needs and therefore relevant to the community's children and families
- Ensuring transition programs consider the differing needs of families such as, culturally and linguistically diverse or families whose children haven't attend a preschool program

R.E. Ross Trust Seminar Series

Upcoming seminars in 2009

Responding to the Early Years Agenda: System Change at a Community Level

Seminar: Wednesday 15th July, 2009

Keynote Speaker: Naomi Eisenstadt, Director, Social Exclusion Task Force, Cabinet Office, UK

Integrated Service Delivery: How does the System Work? What does it mean for practice?

Seminar: Thursday 30th July, 2009

Keynote Speaker: Anthony Semann, Director, Semann & Slattery, Newtown, NSW

For more information about these and other seminars and workshops go to:
www.rch.org.au/ccch/

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