

Linking Schools and Early Years Project

June McLoughlin

August 20th, 2007

Supported by The R.E. Ross Trust



CENTRE FOR
Community
Child Health



Murdoch Childrens
Research Institute



R.E. ROSS
TRUST

About the Project

- The Project was established with the aim of developing processes and structures that:
 - Support all children to enter the formal primary education system ready to engage and be successful in school.
 - Support schools to be more prepared for children of all abilities and backgrounds when they first attend.
 - Support families, services and communities so that they are more able to support children's learning.



CENTRE FOR
Community
Child Health



R.E. ROSS
TRUST

Background

- The Project is based on research conducted by CCCH (supported by The R.E. Ross Trust) since 2001, which explored the refocusing of community-based services for young children and their families.
- The importance of developing better linkages between schools and early years services and the community was also identified.
- The research found there was potential to bridge a gap between early years services and primary schools to ensure better planning for the individual needs of children entering school.



CENTRE FOR
Community
Child Health



R.E. ROSS
TRUST

Background

Stage one (2005/6):

- Literature review
- Documented current Government policies
- Documented of a number of community school models both in Australia and Internationally.



CENTRE FOR
Community
Child Health



R.E. ROSS
TRUST

What is a community school?

"A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, services, supports and opportunities leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Schools become centres of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends"

(Coalition for Community Schools website, 2006).



CENTRE FOR
Community
Child Health



R.E. ROSS
TRUST

Community School Models

The international models documented include:

- Full Service Extended Schools (UK)
- Toronto First Duty (Canada)
- Schools of the 21st Century (USA)
- Coalition for Community Schools (USA)
- Elizabeth Learning Center (USA)



CENTRE FOR
Community
Child Health



R.E. ROSS
TRUST

Key activities

- Child care
- Holiday care programs
- Opportunities for learning to whole family
- Parental guidance and support
- Integrated early years learning environment
- Provision of Information about and referral to a range of specialist support services



Key activities

- Health education and direct health care services
- Networks and training for child care providers
- Core early learning framework
- The promotion of the use of school facilities by the community



Key approaches

- Early childhood part of staff team
- Recognition of the broader needs of young children and their families
- Emphasis on parent participation not just involvement
- Strong focus on community engagement
- Integrated governance models



International Findings



International Findings

- Increased student and parent participation
- Increased flexibility and choice for families
- Parents using child care at some community schools report:
 - spending less money on child care
 - missing less work because of child care-related problems
 - recording significantly lower scores on a parent stress index



International Findings

- Student motivation and attendance has increased
- Smoother transitions for children between early years services and schools
- Earlier identification of children with additional learning needs



International Findings

- General improvement in student learning
- Children, involved in community school programs for longer periods reported to record higher scores in mathematics and reading
- 'Other' activities reported as complementary to 'teaching and learning'



International Findings

- Services more accessible to disadvantaged families
- Facilitated the development of a significant number of new local services to support families



International Findings

- Increased community awareness of what schools can provide
- Greater awareness from within the school of the value of early years services and the importance of connecting to the local community
- Increased awareness of the complexity of integrating services and working collaboratively



What is happening in Victoria?

- Several Victorian school based programs designed to assist with transition to school
- Documented some case studies of school based initiatives in the Hume Region of Victoria:
 - Meadowbank Primary School
 - Upfield Primary School
 - Meadow Heights Primary School



Type of initiatives/programs

- Early Learning Centre
- Playgroups
- Parents rooms
- Parenting sessions
- English language programs
 - Intensive classes for recent migrants
 - Prep Language Development Program (PLDP) in the first year of school



The Linking Schools and Early Years Project



Project Rationale

- In Australia, a significant proportion of children, especially those from disadvantaged communities, arrive at school developmentally vulnerable.
- Evidence indicates that forming stronger links between early years services and schools and enhancing engagement with parents can help to overcome barriers faced by vulnerable children when starting school.



Project Outline

The Project will build on

- the significant resources already invested in children and their families through their participation in early years services
- the expertise of early years professionals and primary school teachers

By supporting strategies that

- strengthen the links between early years services and schools and
- enable schools and early years services to better engage with families



Project Sites

- Hastings township in Mornington Peninsula Shire
- Footscray in the City of Maribyrnong
- The two project sites have been selected based on:
 - Relevant demographics
 - Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)
 - The capacity of the community to engage



Project Outcome

- The outcome that '*children arrive at school ready to engage*' is the ultimate aim for the Project.
- Being ready to engage at school means that children have the social, emotional and learning skills and attitudes that will enable them to benefit from the school environment.
- To achieve the ultimate aim, research suggests that certain preconditions need to be achieved.



Preconditions

- Based on the Ready Child equation (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005):

Ready Families
+
Ready Communities
+
Ready Services
+
Ready Schools
=
Children Ready for School



The Ready Child Equation

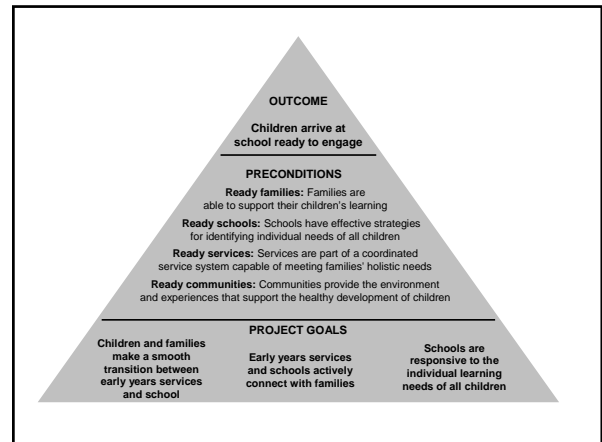
- **Ready Families** support children's learning more effectively.
- **Ready Communities** engage with early years services and schools in the delivery of integrated services to families.
- **Ready Services** connect with other services to address barriers to child learning and development.
- **Ready Schools** develop effective strategies for identifying and responding to the individual needs of all children



Project Goals

The Project has three specific goals:

- 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.



Achieving the Project goals

- At each project site, a Community Partnership Group will be established to work with the project team to conceptualise, develop and implement a set of local strategies and activities relevant to the local site.
- Local school staff, early years service providers, representatives of community agencies and parents are invited to join the Community Partnership Groups.



Project timelines

- The project will run for a period of six years, beginning in 2007.
- The first year undertaking consultation and planning.
- Subsequent years will involve implementation and evaluation.



Project Advisory Group

- Experts from Education, Health, Research, Early Childhood Services Local, State & Federal Government will guide the overall project.



Evaluation

- An independent evaluation will be conducted by Professor Ian Katz from the Social Policy and Research Centre at the University of New South Wales.



- Copies of the Stage One Report are available from:

www.rch.org.au/ccch/resources



CENTRE FOR
Community
Child Health



R.E. ROSS

- For further information about the project contact:

june.mcloughlin@rch.org.au

bella.laidlaw@mcri.edu.au

www.rch.org.au/ccch



CENTRE FOR
Community
Child Health



R.E. ROSS