

Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY)

Research Snapshot

Snapshot six

Building the evidence-base

The LSEY project built an external evaluation in from the beginning. This has meant the project has contributed to the Australian evidence-base on the effective elements of place-based community partnership models to plan and deliver activities.

Each of the LSEY communities implemented collaborative, innovative, low-cost and replicable ways of working towards 'all children arriving at school ready to engage in all learning opportunities'. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected by the LSEY external evaluation team and through local activity evaluations and partnership analysis commentary (by site facilitators). All of these elements then fed in to the external evaluation.

All children arrive at primary school with knowledge and experiences because they grow up within families, neighbourhoods, services and communities. The LSEY evaluation has demonstrated that when communities work together to plan and implement strategies for children and their families, relationships between services strengthen and local leadership and capacity grows. This enables more effective and responsive support for children and their families from early education services, schools and child/family support services.

Change over time in LSEY

This research snapshot focuses on practice change over the six years of LSEY implementation. The information has been drawn from the 2008–2012 LSEY evaluation findings: Building effective partnerships; A smooth transition to school; Actively engaging families and; Responsiveness to individual children.

Learn more about the activities that have contributed to practice change throughout LSEY implementation at www.rch.org.au/lsey

Building effective partnerships

Practice change through LSEY has seen community partnerships and network groups established, many of which will continue beyond the conclusion of formal LSEY support.

Specifically:

- Community Partnership groups with 15–25 active core members that collaboratively plan, implement and evaluate locally responsive actions for children, families and services.
- Educator Leadership Groups of up to seven educators who are responsible for facilitating Educator networks and leading planning towards the LSEY goals.
- Educator Networks with up to 25 active members sharing practice and contributing to planning and activity delivery.

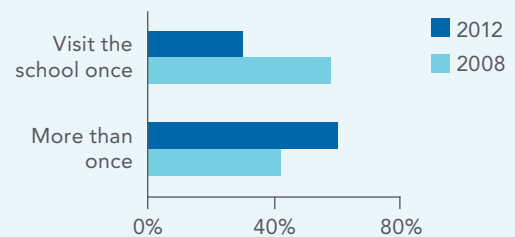
The average school rating of the effectiveness of their relationship with early years services increased, as did early years services' rating of their relationships with schools.

What has LSEY found?

The LSEY external evaluation has found positive changes in the way that early years services, schools and community services work together to respond to the individual learning needs of children. The findings below show change over time between 2008 and 2010 (SPRC, 2008 & 2010):

Goal one: A smooth transition to school

In 2012, 60% of children visited the school more than once before starting school



Goal two: Actively engaging families

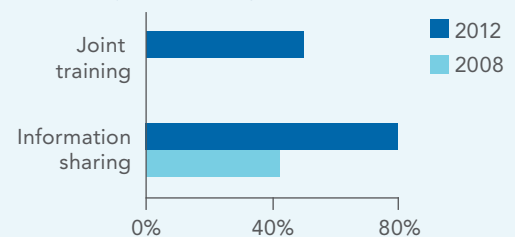
There were consistently high parent ratings in regards to their connection to schools. On average, parents reported an increase from 2008 to 2012 in:

- useful info about their child's day (80%)
- activities/resources for parents (69%)
- knowing who to speak to when (95%)
- a good relationship with the staff (85%).

Goal three: Responsiveness to individual children

80% of services shared information

Half of early years services and schools conducted joint training



"As we have learned together, time and time again, it is the quality of our relationships that makes the difference"

— Prep Teacher

Goal one: A smooth transition to school

Goal one sought to encourage ongoing communication between early years services and schools to develop a shared understanding of each other's roles, share practice, and provide transition programs that enable children and their families to make a smooth transition to school.

In addition to an increase in children visiting the school more than once before starting, positive progress in LSEY communities contributed to a:

- 5% increase in parents attending transition information sessions
- 36% increase in early years services staff/management visiting schools
- 47% increase in early years services providing child profiles to schools.

Goal two: Actively engaging families

This goal focused on activities that supported parents to feel welcome and comfortable in their children's education environments as a foundation for further engagement in their children's learning experiences.

Although parent engagement in schools stayed steady (44–49%), some valuable data was collected about parent engagement:

- 1–5% increases in parent engagement in relationships with their child's educators, use of the school library and communication with early years services and schools
- 14% increase in parent participation in cultural events at schools from 2008–10, but this dropped again in 2012
- Parents whose first child was starting school were more likely to participate in reading and classroom activities at school, but parents who had older children at school were more likely to work in the canteen or participate in parent committees.

Goal three: Responsiveness to individual children

The foundational elements of this goal included relationships between early years and prep educators; child/family community services and families to facilitate information sharing; and joint professional development and learning to enable responsiveness to children's learning needs and circumstances.

Activities in the LSEY communities contributed to a:

- 26% increase in family services referring a child to early years services
- 17% increase in family services receiving referrals from early years services and a 26% increase in referrals from a school
- 20% increase in family services communicating with schools about a particular family (with consent)
- 4–9% increase in family services communicating with families about schools and early years services
- 18% increase in schools making resources and grounds available to child/family service activities and groups.

Implications:

Policy, research and communities

- Further research is required to explore the processes and environments that enable community level relationships, planning and action to occur and be effective.
- LSEY process change has been around service system capacity for collaboration and engagement. Governments and communities need to continue focusing resources in areas that can build this capacity and a strong 0–8 early years profession.
- Further research is required to explore the capacity, barriers and enablers that enable service system process and environments for place-based community partnerships that can effectively improve outcomes for local children and their families.
- Measuring the impact of complex community-level approaches is challenging. Further qualitative and quantitative research is required to better understand how this can be achieved.

About LSEY snapshots

The LSEY snapshot series aims to share findings from LSEY's approach and activities. Findings are based on the experiences of three Victorian communities: Corio–Norlane in the City of Greater Geelong, Footscray in the City of Maribyrnong and Hastings in the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

The LSEY pilot has a cross-sectional external evaluation being conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. Data was collected in 2008, 2010 and 2012. These research snapshots explore the 2008–2012 data.

This time-limited series of snapshots will run from 2012 into early 2013 to communicate evaluation findings and highlight examples of good practice from six years of community implementation.

The series will explore:

- The LSEY approach
- Supporting smooth transitions
- Engaging families
- Responsive schools
- Sustainability
- The final findings

For more information about the LSEY project see:

www.rch.org.au/lsey

LSEY is a project of The Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health.

References

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