

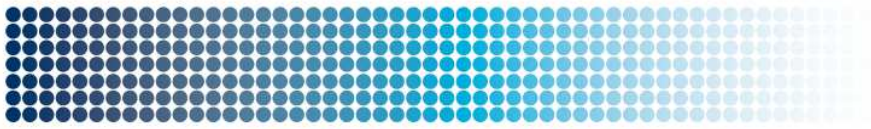
Queensland Platforms Project

Executive summary

The Centre for Community Child Health

Prepared for: Queensland Government - Department of Education and Training

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The Queensland Platforms Project was undertaken by the Centre for Community Child Health on behalf of the Queensland Department of Education and Training.

The Centre for Community Child Health is a research group of the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and a department of The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

Centre for Community Child Health

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

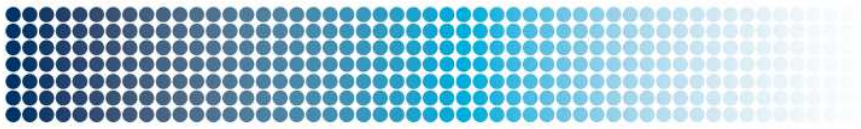
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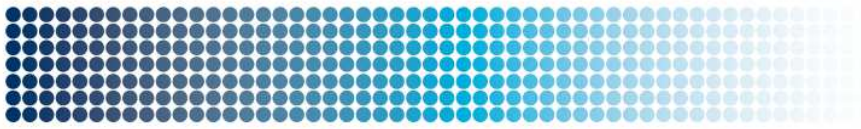
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Contents

<i>Glossary</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>iii</i>
Executive summary	1
Project overview	1
Findings	2
Key achievements	2
Key enablers.....	2
Key challenges	3
Final recommendations	4

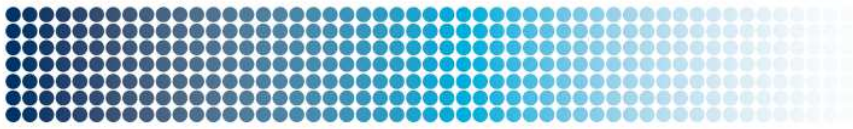


Glossary

CCCH	Centre for Community Child Health
DET	Department of Education and Training
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECCE	Early Childhood and Community Engagement
QPP	Queensland Platforms Project

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the individuals and organisations that have contributed to the Queensland Platforms Project (QPP) throughout all its phases. This includes those involved in initial community scoping and consultations, development and delivery of the Platforms training workshops, participation in the Platforms site-level coaching and leadership groups, planning and participation in the reflective workshops, and all QPP evaluation activities. These contributions have been invaluable to inform, develop and evaluate the Queensland Platforms Pilot Project.



Executive summary

From July 2014 to December 2015, the Queensland DET's Office for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (now Early Childhood and Community Engagement) (ECCE) engaged the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute to provide training and support to three Queensland communities to facilitate a collaborative community-based model of service integration.

Platforms was identified as an approach to support local capacity to improve integration of early childhood development services and programs. As such, the Queensland Platforms Project (QPP) was a key task within the DET ECCE Division Operational Plan 2014-15.

Eighteen months later, real progress has been made. Each of the three communities has established an active partnership group that meets regularly and continues to build new connections to respond to local needs and drive better outcomes for children and families.

This executive summary details the findings from the QPP's evaluation, highlighting its achievements, strengths, challenges and recommendations. The accompanying report provides the full detail of the project's implementation and stakeholder engagement.

Project overview

The CCCH used the Platforms service re-development framework to support progress towards the QPP's broad outcome: *the establishment of: common and collaborative partnerships that understand and address local needs and priorities; and a shared commitment to improve outcomes for local children and families.*

The three identified sites for the QPP were:

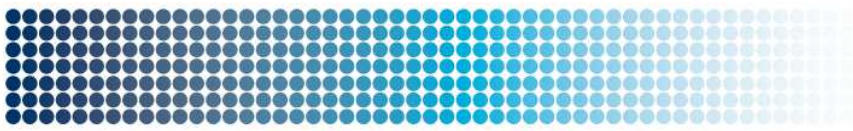
- Gold Coast (Burleigh Miami)
- Gympie
- Lockyer Valley (Laidley and Hatton Vale).

The QPP included a series of phases which were implemented across each site: initial site scoping and engagement; a Raising Awareness forum; Platforms training for approximately 20 local and regional service providers and community members; and coaching and support for a self-selected group of local leaders. A communication and stakeholder engagement strategy developed key messages for all QPP activities, and resulted in the broad dissemination of a range of communication materials.

The QPP's evaluation broadly sought to address three questions:

- Was the project delivered as intended?
- What was the impact of the project?
- How could the project be improved?

In addition, the evaluation used a mixed methodology to measure three short-term outcomes directly related to the following representative groups: professionals, community members and service managers.



Findings

The findings from the QPP evaluation are documented under key achievements, key enablers and key challenges.

Key achievements

The establishment of common and collaborative partnerships

The establishment of early years' partnerships, the development and strengthening of relationships within these, and the beginnings of local governance structures, including 'working together agreements', demonstrate positive progress towards the growth of collaborative cultures in each of the three sites. Professionals reported that the QPP had increased their understanding, knowledge, skills and confidence to work in collaboration. They also reported that they were supported to develop a shared language and consistent framework for collaborative work, and the QPP increased their commitment and intention to work collaboratively with other services and community members.

Diversity of engagement

The 107 participants in the QPP's activities represented a diverse range of services and professional disciplines across the three sites. Participants indicated that the QPP's initial engagement phase was key to engaging interest and establishing an enduring commitment. Each local collaborative continued to broaden its membership throughout the QPP coaching phase, inviting new members, establishing strategic links with other agencies and networks, and maintaining strong inter-sectoral and cross-disciplinary approaches.

Relationships

The QPP resulted in a significant increase in networking between early years' services in the three sites. During each phase of the QPP, the facilitators observed local practitioners establishing professional relationships with others who worked within close geographical proximity, but who had, prior to the QPP, been unfamiliar with each other and their role/service.

Commitment

Each of the Platforms leadership groups are committed to building local capacity, and acknowledging community strengths and barriers. Each site has acknowledged the lack of community participation and is planning engagement strategies to support and encourage community members' involvement. This commitment reflects the QPP's intended outcomes of developing an enhanced culture of collaboration among service providers and community members.

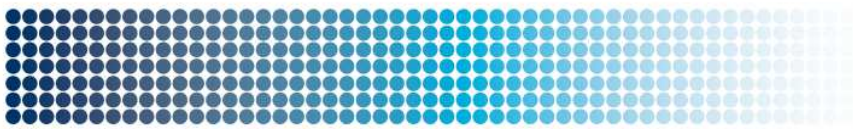
Shared understandings

The QPP's activities helped establish shared understandings and agreement between participants about ways to move forward together. While many participants were involved in collaborative work previously, the Platforms approach (a step-by-step guide fortified with relevant resources and materials for each stage) supported their collaborative practice and increased their confidence in working with others in their community.

Key enablers

Investment in site engagement

The investment in initial site engagement and in bringing people together to raise awareness proved invaluable in establishing support and a shared understanding of the QPP across services. This resulted in the active participation by diverse stakeholders in project activities at each site.



The Queensland Platforms Project processes

Participants saw value in the implementation of a phased approach to Platforms within their communities. Those involved in QPP generally expressed a high level of satisfaction with their experience. Participants also placed a high value on the accompanying resources, including the Platforms roadmap that supported the quality of their ongoing work within their respective communities.

The role of CCCH

The qualities and skills demonstrated by the CCCH project coordinator and other team members were identified as a strength, particularly in the site engagement phase of the QPP. The ongoing availability of the QPP coordinator to attend face-to-face meetings across the three sites was an important factor in establishing and maintaining momentum.

Local participation

Despite small numbers of community members participating, a strong level of enthusiasm and participation by key service providers acted as a catalyst for involving others and inspiring people to work together towards a common goal. A strength of the local groups was their willingness to discuss the Platforms approach, reach out to their clients and colleagues, and welcome broad participation.

Regional DET commitment and leadership

DET regional officers were instrumental in forging relationships during the initial engagement phase and throughout the QPP. Their involvement emerged as an important influence in the progress of each local partnership group.

Key challenges

Engagement of local community members

The engagement of local community members was very limited across all three sites. As a result, limited progress was made towards community members feeling empowered and confident to work in partnership with professionals to address their community needs and priorities. The community members who did participate were generally already active members of the community, and therefore, could be considered to be 'less at risk' than those that the QPP needed to engage.

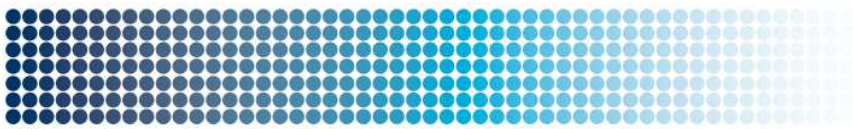
From their participation in the QPP, professionals reported a greater appreciation of the importance of community representation and participation. Factors that contributed to the lack of community representation were: limited time and resources; the lack of a designated local 'connector' with the appropriate local knowledge, skills and qualities to engage community members; delivery of QPP activities during working hours; and an over-emphasis on the engagement of professionals and services. Each site will continue to negotiate effective ways to meaningfully engage with their communities.

Lack of a local community liaison resource

Although the QPP effectively engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders in each site, the absence of a local community liaison resource had implications for the project. The lack of this resource as a constant presence 'on the ground' made ongoing communication, the coordination of activities and the broader engagement of community members, difficult throughout the QPP.

Local leadership and an authorising environment

Local leadership varied across the three sites. Where leadership was present, it helped to establish an authorising environment in which to work. For example, the presence of both DET regional staff and



school principals in the training workshops brought a level of commitment that resulted in a strong momentum for the QPP within a particular site.

Although service managers reported an increased understanding and commitment to the principles of collaboration and reported evidence of increased collaboration between services, they saw their role as limited to authorising and supporting staff to participate. The professionals participating in the QPP saw a need for service managers to fully appreciate the necessary and ongoing processes of effective collaboration, in order to better support new ways of working within their local community. It was also acknowledged that a lack of engagement with and support from upper-level management, hindered engagement with some key groups, such as health sector workers.

Duration of the QPP and continued direction and support

The relatively short duration of the QPP has led to some uncertainty about the future for the community partnership groups. Experience tells us that where processes are reliant on relational change within a local geographic area (central to the Platforms approach), sufficient time is essential to achieve desired outcomes.

The participants also noted that they would have like to have heard stories from other communities that had used the Platforms framework to develop collaborations. They saw this as having the potential to assist them in establishing realistic expectations for the QPP. They also saw benefit in incorporating short-term goals to acknowledge progress and to recognise their achievements. There remains some uncertainty about how the work will progress without any further dedicated support.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the local partnerships was a concern reported by participants in all three sites. They noted that the establishment of a governance structure would build a stronger authorising environment to provide the partnerships with endorsement, support and legitimacy. They also indicated that the employment of community liaison worker would support sustainability into the future.

Final recommendations

Recommendations to build on the work of the three existing local partnership groups and to maximise sustainability

Recommendation 1

Investment in a local community liaison role is considered at each site to: facilitate ongoing communication; support the coordination and workings of the local partnership group; and to continue to build meaningful community engagement.

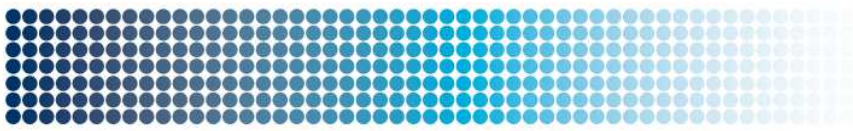
Recommendation 2

Regional DET staff maintain their level of involvement, in particular working toward vertical engagement and partnership development with service management and executive within participating and non-participating organisations

Recommendations to support future early years' service integration endeavours

Recommendation 3

Future projects involving cross sectoral and community involvement in service re-design and development embed a practice framework, such as Platforms, to guide all processes of collaboration.



Recommendation 4

The timeframe, rationale and intention of future projects are articulated to communities in ways that enable them to establish realistic expectations.

Recommendation 5

Future projects allow a minimum of three to five years investment in coordination and engagement support and include an exit strategy that explicitly addresses risks to sustainability and ensures that communities are adequately resourced.

Recommendation 6

Realistic timeframes are set to achieve appropriate levels of community involvement; adequate and ongoing resourcing; and provide appropriate structures and supports to build sufficient capacity within each site to achieve sustained change.

Recommendation 7

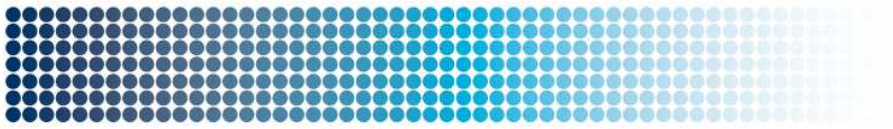
Future projects prioritise effective community engagement through specific agreement on minimum acceptable levels of community participation.

Recommendation 8

Future projects facilitate community engagement by providing resources to support sites to engage communities including: a local community liaison role; learning and development strategies to support the shift in culture from service-driven to community-driven; and the necessary funded timeframe for these processes to occur in a reflective manner.

Recommendation 9

In future projects of this type, DET consider taking a lead role in establishing cross-sectorial relationships with other government departments, such as Health and Social Services, and with other key strategic stakeholder groups. This 'strategic liaison role' would be most beneficial in the early stages of a project to provide an authorising environment when key relationships and governance arrangements are being established.



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