

Footscray Transition Pilot - A model for engaging families

The Pilot

The aim of the Footscray Transition Pilot was to engage families whose children haven't participated in a pre-school program and provide transition activities and information to support a smoother transition to school. The strategies used to achieve this included:

- Engaging the target families through their existing relationships with community services
- Developing transition activities targeted to families whose children haven't attended a preschool program
- Using the learnings from the pilot to develop a model for future engagement of these families

Key Learnings

The following findings from the pilot can be applied to developing transition activities for all children and families and can be targeted to engaging families whose children haven't attended a preschool program before entering school.

Creating a community approach to transition is important to support all children and families to transition smoothly to school from either a preschool program or from home.

- A community approach, involving key stakeholders such as schools, early education and care services and community services will support the development of relationships across the early years profession and increase access to information for families about the importance and availability of local early learning opportunities for their children.

Consultation with families should inform the development of transition activities to ensure they meet the needs of local children and families to support their transition to school.

- Consultations will provide valuable information about families' information and support needs regarding the transition to school and can be targeted to identify the needs of families whose children haven't attended a preschool program before entering primary school.

Engagement of some families requires targeted strategies responsive to their individual needs.

- Targeted strategies could include providing information in an environment they are already comfortable in, such as a community house, church hall, etc.

Development of the Transition Model - The Early Childhood Ecological Model

The Early Childhood Ecological model¹ illustrates the layers of support structures surrounding children:

- Immediate family
- Kinship and informal networks
- Community environments, networks and formal services
- Broader economic, policy, social and environmental influences

This model can be used to develop and target transition strategies at each layer of support around a child, supporting families to involve their children in a preschool program before entering primary school.. The model illustrates the importance of multiple strategies targeting children, families, social networks, services and at the community level to improve transition experiences.

The Transition Model (informed by the key learnings from the pilot) begins by detailing how the Ecological Model can be used, and then details key elements to consider in the process of engaging families whose children haven't attended a preschool program before entering school, and families with young children who aren't involved in any formal early learning experiences, such as playgroups.

¹ Bronfenbrenner (1979)

The Early Childhood Ecological Model¹

Using existing the support and structures surrounding children in supporting families to involve their children in a preschool program before entering primary school

Immediate family

Outcome:

Families that are informed about the importance of children's early learning and development and local early years services and programs.

Possible strategy focus:

A variety of opportunities for families to receive information about the importance of the early years and local early learning experiences, particularly preschool programs.

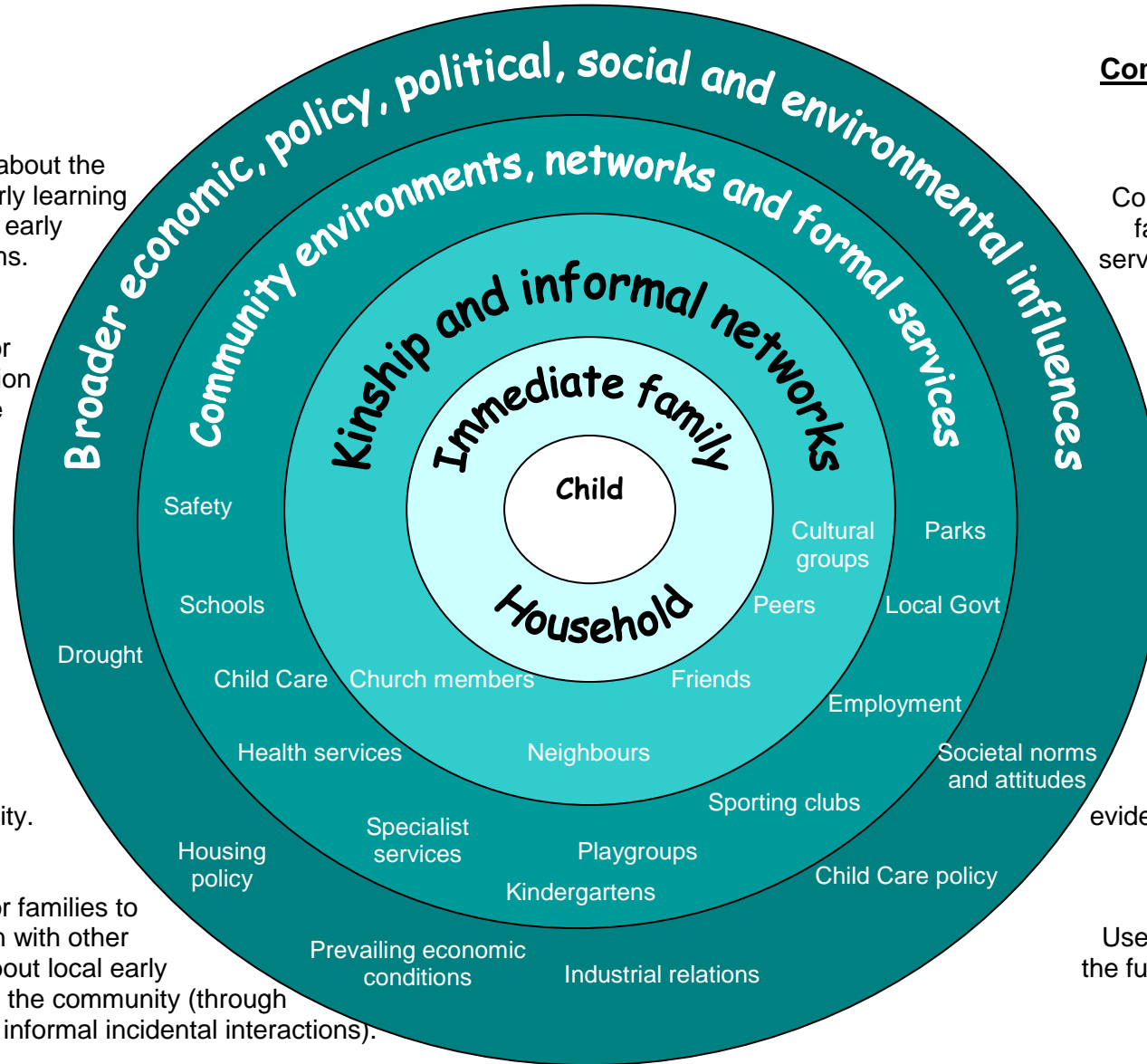
Kinship and informal networks

Outcome:

Families that are socially connected to their community.

Possible strategy focus:

A variety of opportunities for families to informally share information with other families (word-of-mouth) about local early learning experiences within the community (through both organized groups and informal incidental interactions).



Community environments, networks and formal services

Outcome:

Communities that meet the needs of local families, through responsive community services, family friendly places and spaces and strong relationships between the early years profession and families.

Possible strategy focus:

Developing relationships between the local early years profession to create a community approach to providing pathways for families to involve their children in a preschool program and other early learning experiences.

Broader economic, policy, social and environmental influences

Outcome:

Local strategies and activities that are evidence-based and consistent with current policy directions.

Possible strategy focus:

Use the current policy direction to promote the funded preschool opportunities available to families.

Child

Outcome: Children attend high quality preschool programs and participate in other early learning experiences before attending school

Key elements of a model for engaging and supporting families to involve their children in a preschool program before entering primary school

1. Local Engagement

Engage local schools, early years services, community services and local government (existing early years networks could be utilized):

- To initiate discussions around engaging families whose children don't attend a preschool program before entering primary school
- To start developing local relationships across the community to support families to involve their children in preschool programs and activities

*In the Footscray Transition Pilot the existing Linking Schools and Early Years project Partnership group (consisting of schools, early years services, community services and local and state government) was used to engage community services to be involved in the pilot

2. Identifying Families

As a community, identify families whose children often don't participate in a preschool program before entering primary school.

*In the Footscray Transition Pilot some of the families identified were newly arrived families, many of whom were from refugee backgrounds, more established CALD groups, Indigenous families and families of a lower SES.

3. Knowing the Community

Investigate needs of the identified groups through consultation with families whose children didn't attend a preschool program before entering primary school.

- What are the barriers that face these families?
- What information do they want and need about the transition to school?

*In the Footscray Transition Pilot some barriers to participation in a preschool program (identified by community services) included a lack of awareness of:

- The importance of the early years
- Early education opportunities
- Education in the Australian context

4. Professional Development

Increase awareness amongst local community services about the importance of children's early learning and development and the key role they can play in supporting families to involve their children in a preschool program before entering primary school.

5. Developing Local Strategies

Informed by the findings from consultations with families and considering the existing local context, systems and services for families, develop local strategies for engaging and supporting families to involve their children in a preschool program/experience before entering primary school.

*From the Footscray Transition Pilot some strategies have been considered based on learnings from the pilot.

- Initially identify a small number of key community services to trial the strategy
- Increase their awareness about the importance of the early years and children's early learning experiences, such as a preschool program
- Strengthen the relationships between community services, schools and early years services creating pathways to support families whose children haven't or aren't attending a preschool program
- Each local school and early years service identifies a person or group of people to take responsibility for liaising with families identified by the community services as not having attended a preschool program.
 - Families whose children are entering primary school are introduced to a liaison person at a local primary school:
 - To support families and children who are entering primary school to become familiar with a school environment and school staff, providing opportunities to informally receive information about starting school for a smoother transition for children and families
 - Families whose children are not currently participating in a preschool program are introduced to a liaison at a local kindergarten, childcare or playgroup:
 - To support families to involve their child in a preschool program or other early learning program (depending on a child's age, needs, etc)

A key aspect of engaging families in Footscray will be ensuring access to and availability of interpreters both professional agencies and through the local community

- Relationships are developed between teachers, community services workers and early years services

6. Evaluation

When developing local strategies it is important to set clear goals and objectives and to consider:

- How will local impact be measured?
- How will strategy processes be measured?
- What evaluation indicators will be used as measurements?

*For the Footscray Transition Pilot strategy detailed above, these could include:

- How will local impact be measured?
 - AEDI results as baseline data – Teacher reported information about children's early education experiences before arriving at school
 - DEECD Kindergarten participation rates
- How will strategy processes be measured?
 - Feedback from services, schools, early years services involved
 - Feedback from families supported throughout the strategy
- What evaluation indicators will be used?
 - Data comparisons
 - Number of children who participated in early education programs, compared with previous year

