

# *Linking Schools and Early Years*

*working towards...*

***‘Children arriving at school ready to engage’***

**Funded by:**

The R.E. Ross Trust and  
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development



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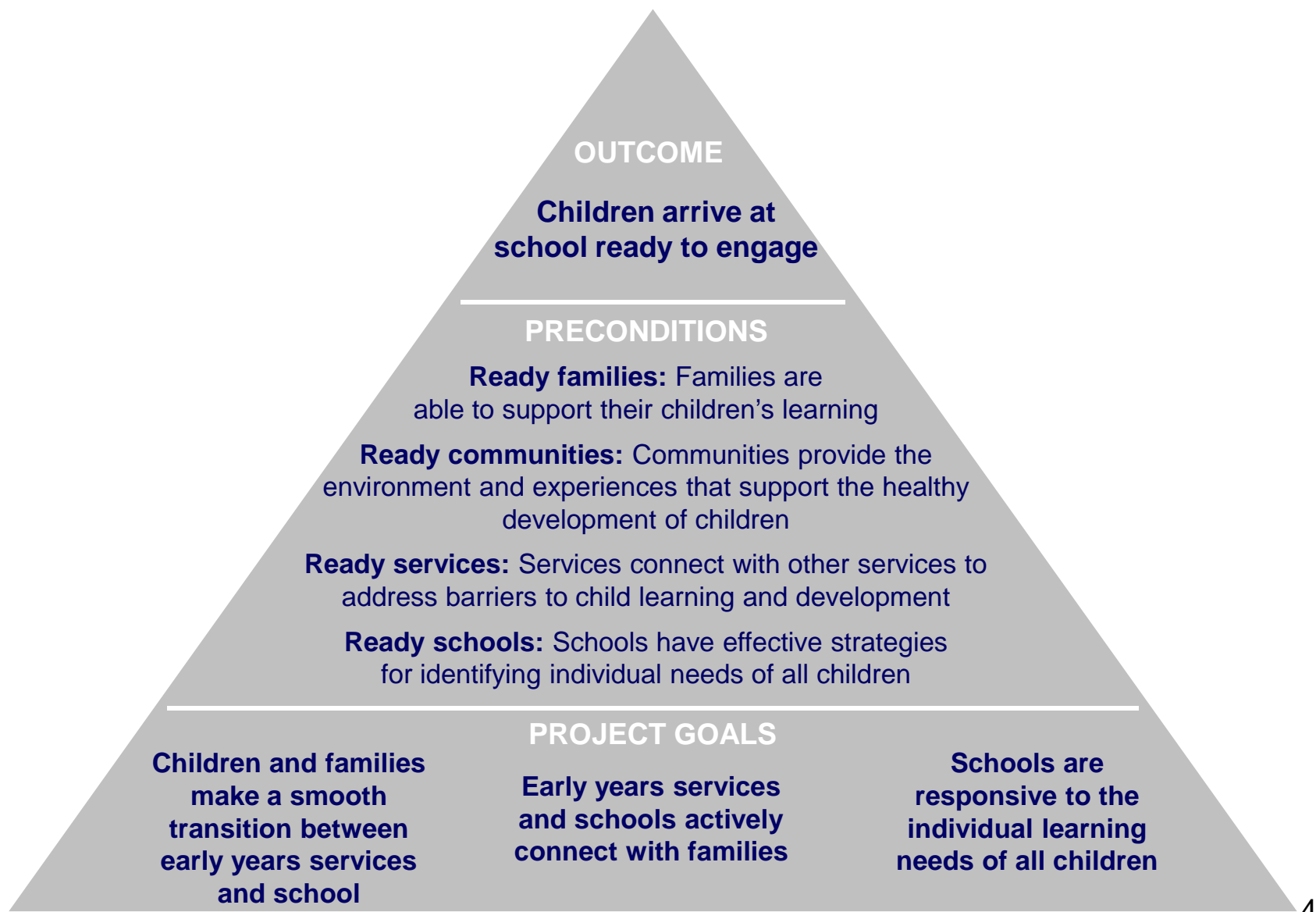


## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

*All children arrive at school ready  
to engage*

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### Project goals

1. Children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and schools.
  2. Early years services and schools actively connect with families.
  3. Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children.
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## Internationally

Outcomes of good practice in transition processes for children entering primary school.

*A background paper prepared by UNESCO, 2006*

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

### Nationally

The Australian Government's agenda focuses on providing families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated early childhood education and child care with a strong emphasis on connecting with schools to ensure all Australian children are fully prepared for learning and life.

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

### State-wide

To support a positive start to school, a common Victorian approach has been to guide families, early childhood services and schools ... to provide a shared understanding about what is important for children and their families during this exciting time.

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## At a community level

“It's about planning for individual children ... to make their transition or that learning experience best for that child ... it's about how they can cater for the individual needs and I think that's been a quantum shift.”

Julia - Prep teacher

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## For children

“Yeah I went to school ... they had shapes cut out for us to glue on paper ... they didn’t know I can cut my own shapes.”

Eliza, expert with scissors

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

# Why Linking Schools and Early Years?

How well children transition to school is important as it can impact on their long term development (CCCH, 2008)

23.6% of children are arriving at school developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDI domain

(Australian Early Development Index, 2011)

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

“School  
readiness  
does not  
reside  
solely in the  
child ...



## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

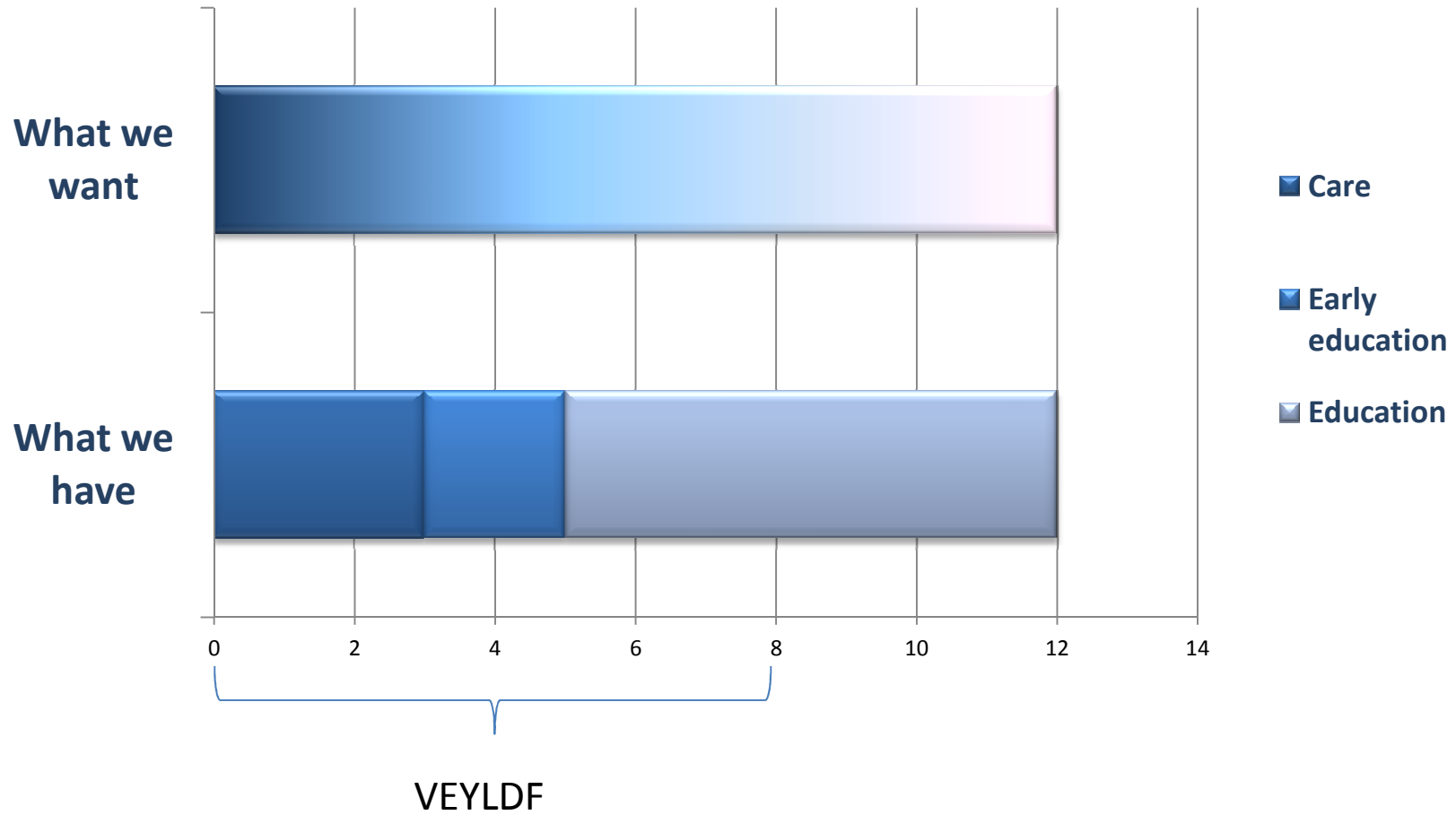


... but reflects the environments in which children find themselves”

(Kagan & Rigby, 2003)

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# An early years profession



# **The LSEY Project**

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# The Project

- Currently in its sixth and final year 2007-2012
  - Operating in three sites, across Victoria:
    - Corio/Norlane in the City of Greater Geelong
    - Footscray in the City of Maribyrnong
    - Hastings in Mornington Peninsula Shire
  - Independent evaluation
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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

- Turning research into practice
  - Building Australian research evidence
  - Supporting implementation of state and federal policy programs
  - Building on existing good practice
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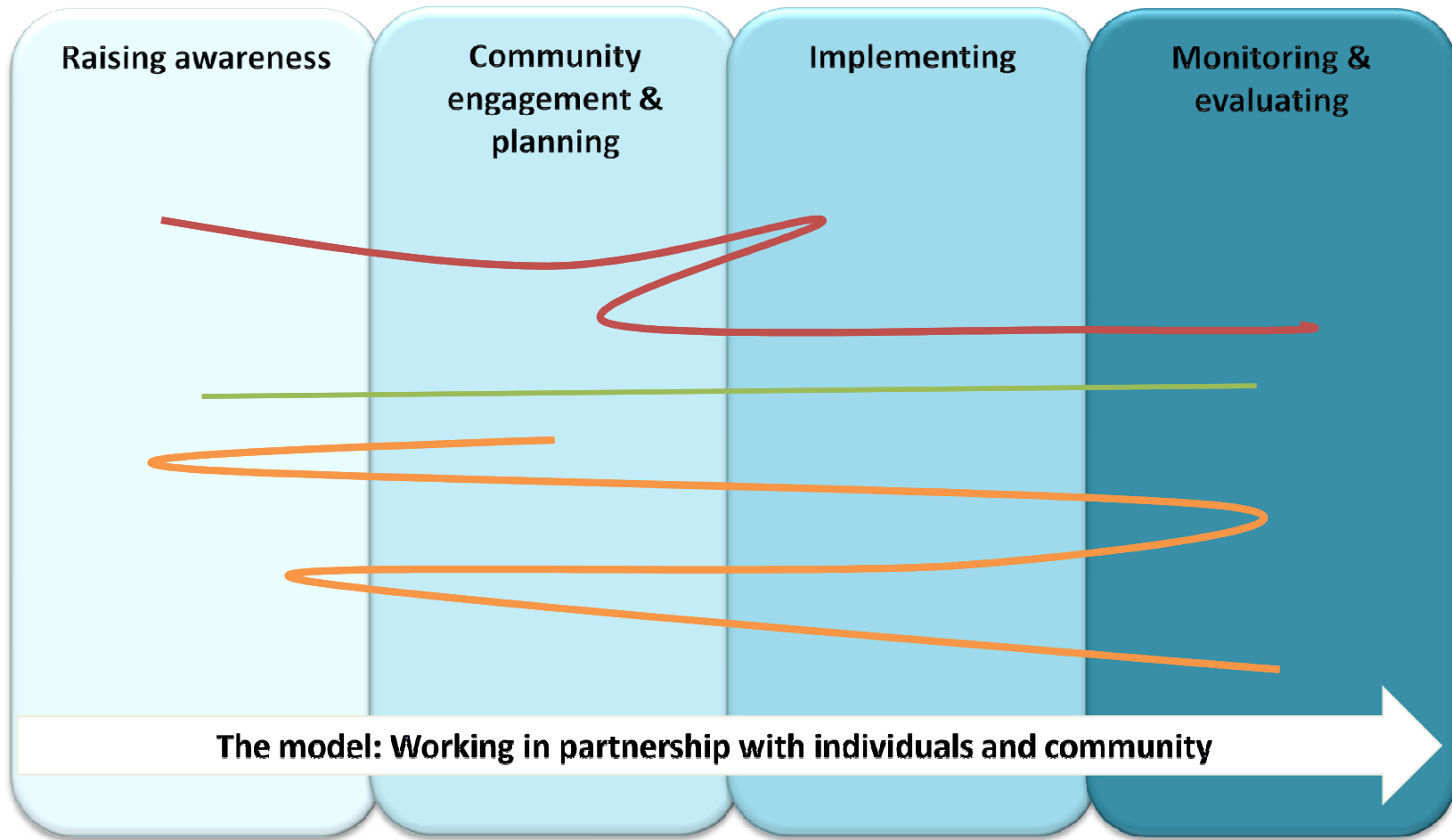
# **The LSEY approach**

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## **A community partnership approach**

- Barriers faced by vulnerable children when starting school may be overcome by stronger links and partnerships between schools and early years services, families and the community.
  - There is potential to strengthen relationships between early years services and primary schools to ensure better planning for the individual needs of children entering school.
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# Platforms: A service re-development framework



# What does a community partnership approach look like?



**LSEY  
Partnership group**

**Collaborative strategic  
planning, decision making,  
inter-agency alliance  
building, reporting and  
accountability.**

**Practitioner/Educator  
Leadership group**

**Leaders facilitate  
Practitioner/Educator  
networks and are a link  
between Partnership and  
networks.**

**Practitioner/Educator  
networks**

**Implement and evaluate  
activities for  
children/families and  
sharing practice**

**LSEY-Best Start Partnership group**

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graph TD; A[LSEY-Best Start Partnership group] --> B[Practitioner/Educator Leadership group]; B --> C[Practitioner/Educator networks]; A --> D[Other Best Start networks/groups];
```

**Practitioner/Educator  
Leadership group**

**Practitioner/Educator  
networks**

**Other Best Start  
networks/groups**

**LSEY Partnership group**

```
graph TD; A[LSEY Partnership group] --> B[Practitioner/Educator networks]; A --> C[Other local projects 'Smiles 4 Miles'];
```

**Practitioner/Educator  
networks**

**Other local projects  
'Smiles 4 Miles'**



**Best Start, Municipal Early Years Plan,  
Community for Children - Partnership group**

```
graph TD; A[Best Start, Municipal Early Years Plan, Community for Children - Partnership group] --> B[LSEY Community Partnership group]; B --> C[Practitioner/Educator Leadership group]; C --> D[Practitioner/Educator networks];
```

**LSEY Community  
Partnership group**

**Practitioner/Educator  
Leadership group**

**Practitioner/Educator  
networks**

## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

# **Implementation**

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### **Form the Partnership group**

- Identification of key stakeholders
- Establish the partnership group
- Maintain and strengthen the partnership group

### **Gather contextual information**

(On an ongoing basis)

- Document community demographics
- Map community assets and services
  - Consult with key stakeholders



### **Develop the local action**

- Develop a shared understanding of the project goals
  - Selection of local strategies and activities
  - Create a work plan



### **Implement and evaluate activities**



### **Review action plan & evaluate partnership**

# **Project goals and activities**

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## An action research model

What  
we  
have



What  
we  
want

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

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

- Peer swaps...used as:
    - Engagement activity, professional development, a community transition program, an orientation program
  - A coordinated approach to transition
    - Joint planning of transition activities – formal and informal
    - Community Transition Calendar
    - Targeted transition activities/opportunities
-

## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

continued...

- Consistent transition information for families through:
    - Starting School and Early childhood Expos
    - Informal starting school sessions
  - Seamless early learning environments
    - Play-based prep programs
    - Consistent teaching approaches between early years and prep
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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

Early years services and schools actively connect with families

- Partnerships with parents – professional development
  - Ongoing consultation with families
  - Family friendly reviews
  - Mapping community strengths – existing examples of relationships/partnerships with families
-



## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

continued...

- Family places, spaces and activities
    - Schools as community hubs
    - Playgroups in schools
    - Other informal and formal activities for families
  - Nested research studies
    - Speech and Language in the Early Years
    - Community connections
-

## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

Schools are responsive to individual learning needs of all children

- Information Sharing Tools
  - A partnership approach to Transition Learning and Development Statements
    - A common language tool
    - Local processes to share meaningful/relevant information
  - Transition research – using the VEYLDF to support a positive transition Tools
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# *Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY)*

Practice evidence from five years of  
Linking Schools and Early Years



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# External evaluation

- Social Policy Research Centre, University NSW
  - Cross-sectional – 2008, 2010, 2012
  - Tools
    - Parents (questionnaires)
    - Schools (questionnaires & interviews)
    - Early years services (questionnaires & interviews)
    - Child and family services (questionnaires & interviews)
-

# Lessons from LSEY

- The LSEY approach
    - A place-based community partnership approach
  - Project activities
    - Progress made towards the three project goals
  - Building community capacity
    - Local relationships, leadership and sustainability
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## The Community Partnership approach

- More effective relationships between ECEC services and schools

“As we have learned together, time and time again, it is the quality of our relationships ... that makes a difference and shines a light on our way forward”

Prep Teacher

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

- Strengthened relationships between ECEC services and schools
- Collaborative planning and implementation
- Over time, partnerships have matured and gained momentum

“It is about establishing relationships. It’s about understanding where individuals are coming from and then bringing those common things together.”

Early Years Educator

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

### A smooth transition (Goal one)

- Children participating in transition activities  18%
  - Parents participating in transition activities
    - Visited the school  17%
    - Information session or other activity  14%
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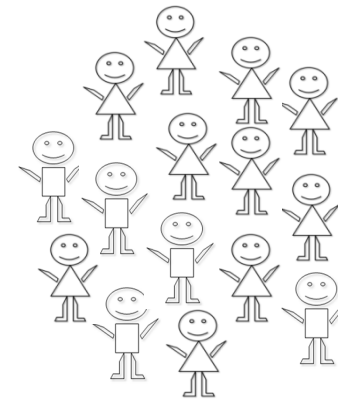
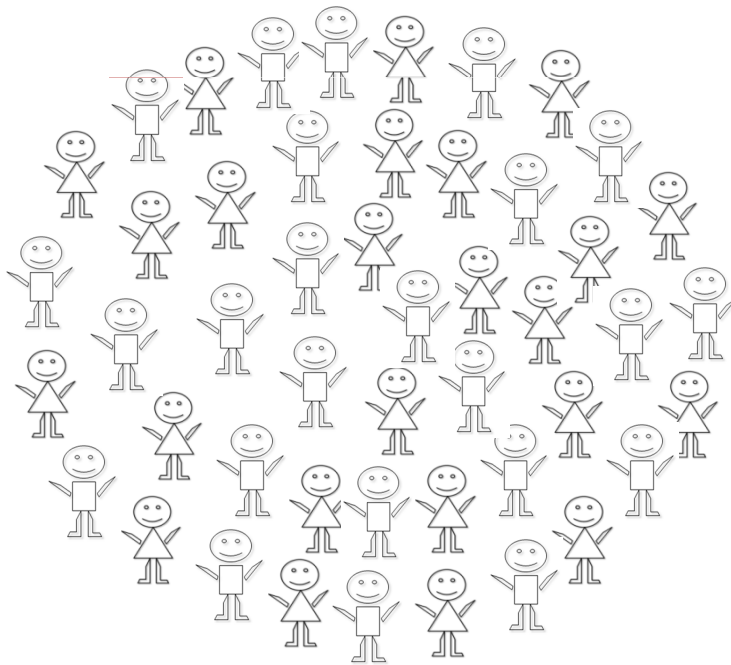


- Children spending only one day at the school before starting school

2008  
48%



2010  
15%



“The children who don’t go through it [the transition program] we can identify, they don’t seem as settled, they don’t know school as well.”

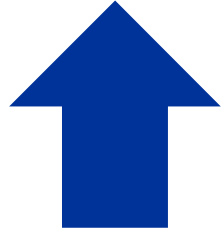

Prep teacher

“We have noticed that previously children would be enrolled at the school but not attending on a regular basis. Since LSEY attendance has improved considerably for children in the prep year and this is attributed to improvement in transition.”

School principal

## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

### Actively connecting with families (Goal two)

- Schools providing more opportunities for parents and families to spend time at school
  - Parents participating in community/cultural events at school  39%
  - Parents spending time in classroom activities  14%
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“Relationships are helping us support families in a coordinated and responsive way instead of reactive.”

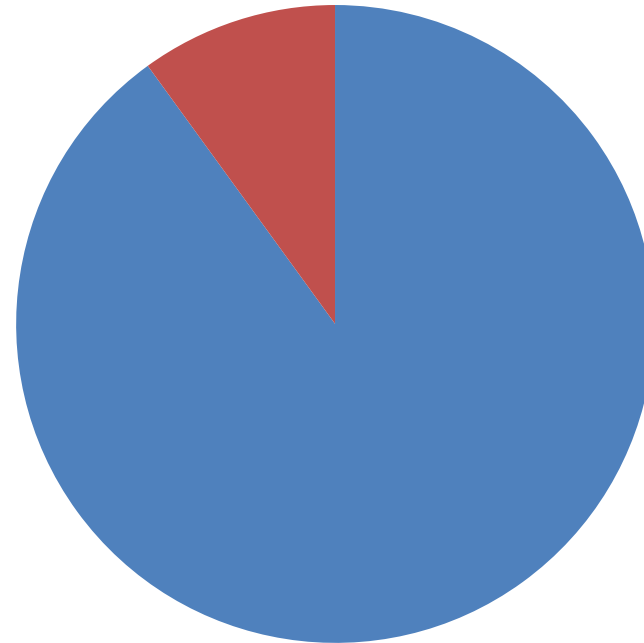
School principal

“Building relationships is the key. It starts with informal chats with parents and simple things like welcoming younger siblings into the classroom.”

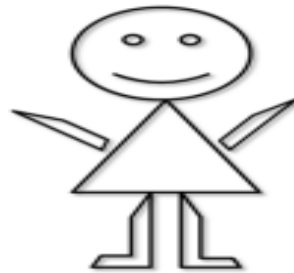
Prep teacher

## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

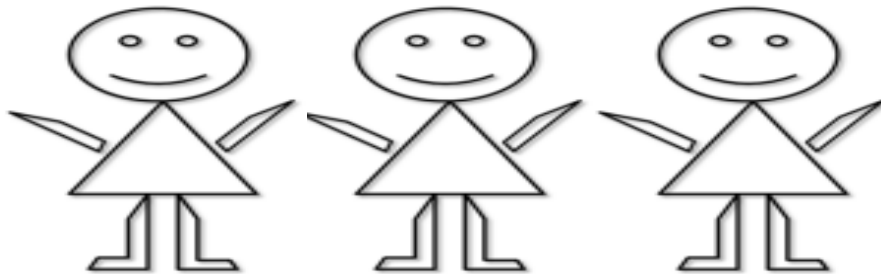
90% of parents get information about school from their child's early childhood service



## *Linking Schools and Early Years*



More likely to participate in classes and groups



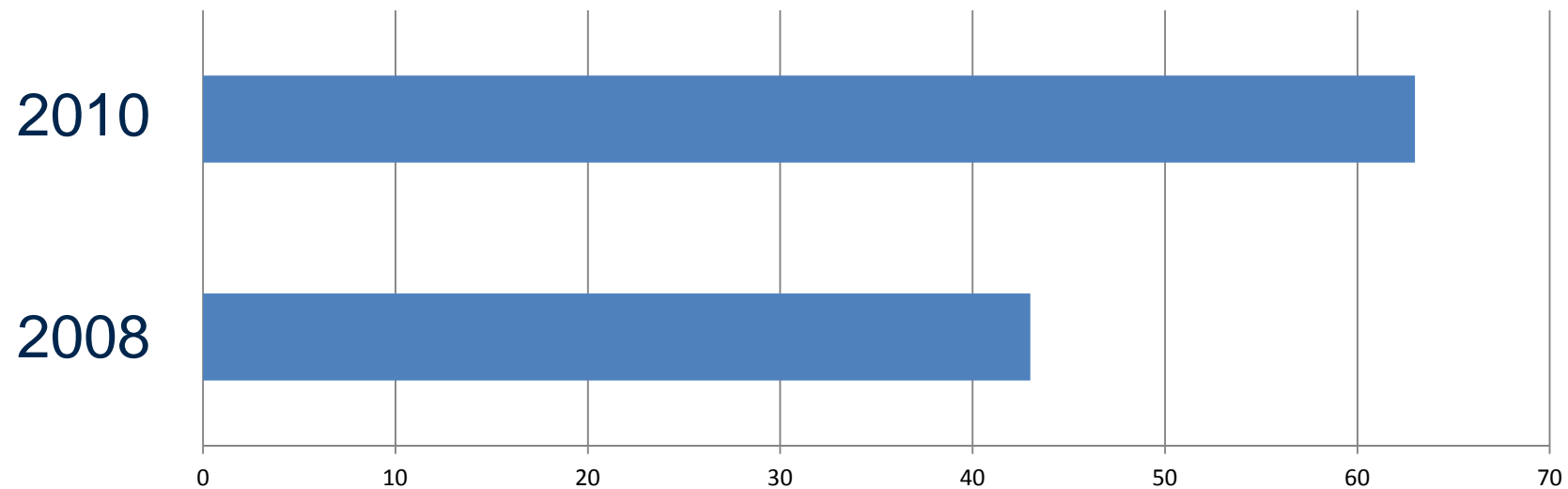
More likely to work in school canteens, participate in parent committees and spend time in the classroom

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

### Responsive schools & services (Goal three)

- Increased information sharing between ECEC services, and schools



# Joint planning/training

**2008**

**2010**

- Schools ran joint planning/training sessions with ECEC services
- ECEC staff attended planning/training sessions with schools

0%



45%

39%

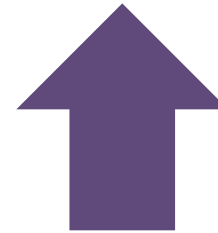


90%



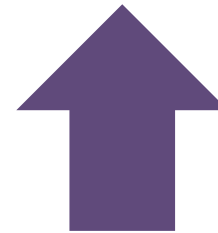
# Increased referrals from 2008 to 2010

- ECEC to child and family services



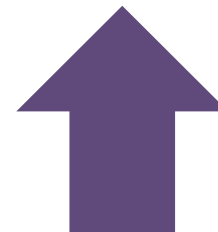
25%

- Schools to child and family services



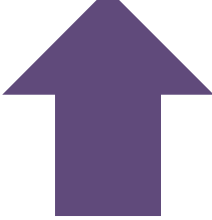
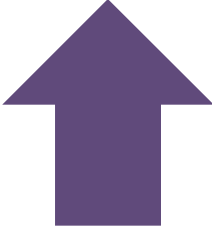
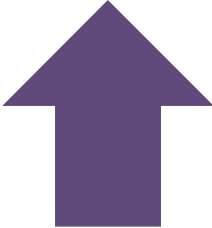
24%

- Child and family services to ECEC



33%

## Increased Communication from 2008 to 2010

- Child and family services with schools about particular families  31%
- Child and family services with families about ECEC services  22%
- Child and family services with families about schools  15%

“It helps me enormously to connect with other services in the area at meetings and events. I meet people and hear their discussions about their work and what programs they’re working on ... the information sharing is a really important thing.”

School nurse

“We’ve engaged a much broader range of community people ... and we now have a great network of people leading collaboration by working together to support the community needs”

Family services practitioner

## **Building community capacity**

- Developing relationships and partnerships
    - Multidisciplinary collaboration and practice
    - An early years profession
  - Identifying and growing local leadership
    - Community-led approach
    - Building on local expertise and good practice
  - Building sustainability
    - Sustaining incremental change
    - Building towards sustained systemic change
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# **Barriers and enablers**

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### Barriers

- Breaking down professional barriers
  - Lack of engagement by all key stakeholders
  - Time and resources — networking is not always core business
  - At times, a new way of thinking and working was challenging
  - Letting go of old ways of working
-

### Enablers

- Building on existing relationships and expertise
  - Dedicated time and resources
  - Paralell supportive government policy
  - Enthusiasm and commitment of workforce
  - Growing strength of relationships and partnership
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### Enablers

- Locally relevant (place-based) approach
  - Flexible model
  - Local leaders
  - Developing a common language
-



**Key messages**  
**from the LSEY evaluation**

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# **A locally responsive community partnership approach is effective**

When everyone works together to plan and implement supports for children, local relationships strengthen and develop

The strength of local relationships impacts on the effectiveness of local activities

Partnership take time to develop, but are worth the time they take

Communities are well placed to lead local service system change that can improve outcomes for children

## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

**Where to from here?**

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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

- Continue to plan and implement actions within LSEY project communities until end of 2012.
  - Undertake third round of evaluation and use findings to inform community activity planning beyond.
  - Translation and communication of LSEY evaluation findings and lessons throughout 2012 and beyond.
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## *Linking Schools and Early Years*

- Find out more about LSEY learnings and stories:
    - Visit the LSEY website ([www.rch.org/lsey](http://www.rch.org/lsey))
    - Subscribe to the LSEY newsletter
    - Participate in LSEY workshops
    - Stay tuned for Centre for Community Child Health publications
-

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