

Linking Schools and Early Years - a project case study

Supported by The R.E. Ross Trust and Education Foundation Australia

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Murdoch Childrens
Research Institute



About the Centre for Community Child Health



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Our Mission

*To support communities to improve
children's health*



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About CCCH

CCCH is a key research centre of the
Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and
an academic centre of the University of
Melbourne

- Our work
 - Clinical Services
 - Research
 - Programs



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Linking Schools and Early Years Project



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Overview

- About the Project
 - Background
 - Rationale
 - Defining the project goals
- Achieving the project goals
 - Creating a local action plan and work plan
 - Implementation of the local action plan
- Evaluating the project



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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



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About the LSEY Project

- The project is currently in its second year, and will run for a period of six years, until 2012
- The focus in 2007 was on developing action plans with the selected sites
- 2008 onwards involves project implementation and evaluation



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About the LSEY Project

- A project advisory group has been established to oversee the project
- An independent evaluation will be conducted throughout the project, following an action research model to assess both processes and outcomes



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Project Sites

- The project is being implemented in three sites, in Victoria:
 - Corio/Norlane in the Greater Geelong City Council
 - Hastings in Mornington Peninsula Shire
 - Footscray in the City of Maribyrnong
- The first round of the project will be implemented in selected schools and their feeder early years services in each of the project sites



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Project Sites

- The inclusion of the three project sites has been based on:
 - Relevant demographics
 - Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) results
 - The capacity of the community to engage



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Project Rationale



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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 Rationale

The Project will build on:


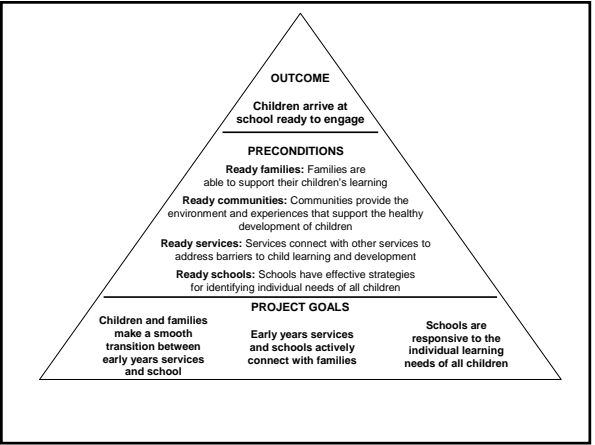
- The significant resources already invested in children and their families through their participation in early years services and
- The expertise of early years professionals and primary school teachers

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




Defining Project Goals Starting with the end in mind

Project Outcome


- The outcome that '*children arrive at school ready to engage*' is the ultimate aim for the whole 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

- The Project is 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 provide the environment and experiences that support the healthy development of children
- 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



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Project Goals



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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



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Project Goals

- The project goals are tangible outcomes that are able to be achieved within the scope and time frame of the Project
- The project goals are based on research evidence and have been informed by the project preconditions, that research suggests need to be achieved to be able to bring about the outcome that '*children arrive at school ready to engage*'



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Achieving the Project Goals Working with Schools and Early Years Providers



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What is an action plan?

An action plan is:

- A document that provides a clear understanding of the outcomes/goals and objectives that are desired (the ultimate achievement) and the strategies (how) and activities (specific actions) required to operationalise these outcomes and objectives
- The Projects action plans are created using an Outcomes-Based Model



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Why is it important?

Why is it important to create an action plan?

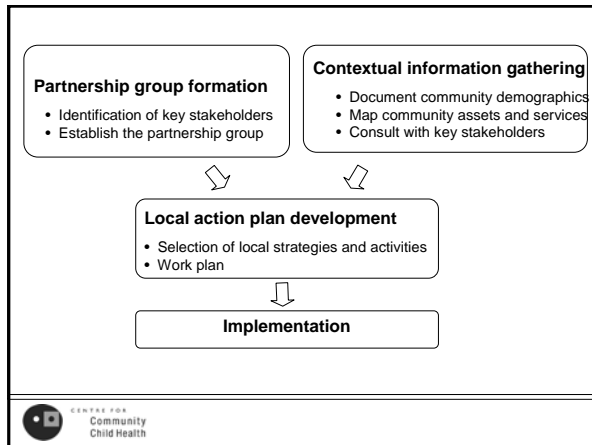
- Based on experience, *not* having well defined action plan for an initiative can greatly limit the success of the initiative. It is necessary to create an action plan to be clear about:
 - What the initiative is ultimately working towards achieving
 - What steps need to be taken to get there
 - When the initiative has achieved its ultimate aim



Creating local action plans

The steps involved in creating local action plans:

- Formation of a local partnership group
- Gather contextual information to inform the local action plan
 - Document community demographics
 - Map community assets and services
 - Conduct consultations with key stakeholders
- Development of the local action plan
 - Selection of local strategies and activities
 - Work plan



Forming local partnership groups



Local partnership groups

About the local partnership groups:

- A Community Partnership Group has been established in each project site
- Each partnership group is comprised of school staff, early years service providers, local government and representatives of community agencies

The role of the local partnership groups?

- The partnership groups are responsible for driving the project locally
- In partnership with the CCCH project team, the groups are responsible for conceptualising, developing and implementing a set of local strategies and activities that are relevant to the local site
- Partnership group met 3 times in 2007, and meets bi-monthly in 2008



Contextual information gathering



Community demographics

What are community demographics?

- The collection of information about the characteristics of the families living in the community

Why is it important to reflect on contextual information?

- Provides information about who the community is made up of
- Can be used to highlight the community's highest priority needs
- Can be used to highlight strengths in the community



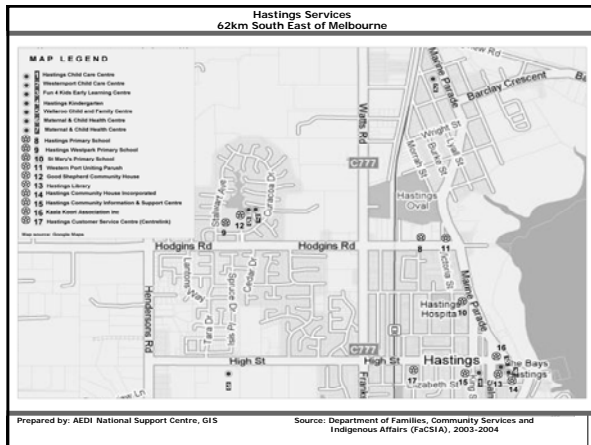
Community assets

What are communities assets?

- Skills and resources that already exist in the community

Why is it important to reflect on assets?

- To allow a focus on and celebration of what is good about the community
- To enable the action plan to build on the communities assets



Consultation with key stakeholders

About the consultations:

- Key stakeholders consulted 07-08 (school staff, early years staff, parents)
- Key stakeholders to be consulted starting in 2009 (prep children)
- Consultation questions framed around the project goals

Why is it important conduct consultations:

- To identify:
 - Perceived needs of different stakeholder groups
 - What strategies and activities are currently in place? How these may be strengthened?
 - Share and build on successful strategies and activities?
- This information is very valuable in informing what will be appropriate strategies and activities to implement



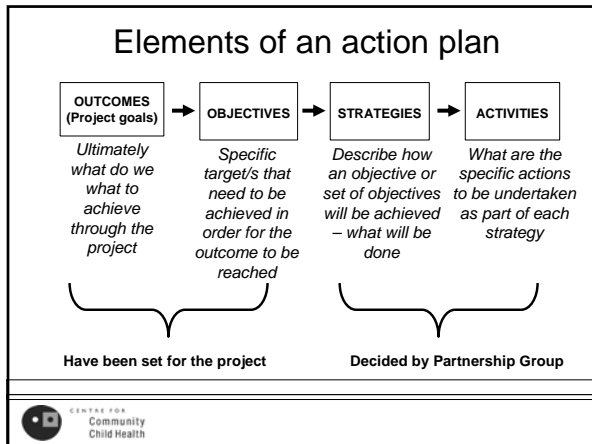
Local action plan development

Components of the action plan

The action plan document will outline:

- The three project *goals*
- *Objective/s* for each of the project goals
- *Strategies* for the project
- The *activities* to be undertaken as part of the initiative, and details of 'by whom' and 'by when' the activities will be completed
- *Workplan*





Elements of an action plan cont.

WORKPLAN PROFORMA

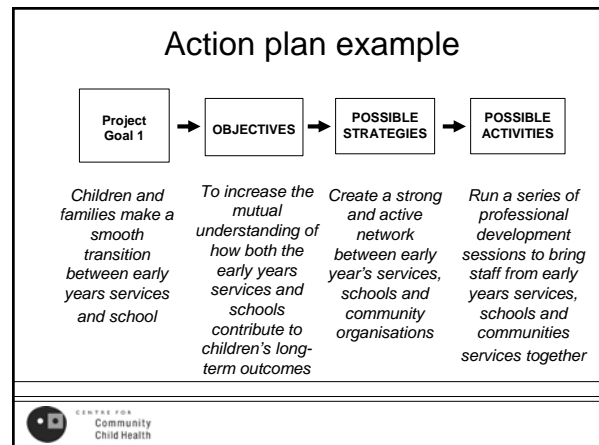
OUTCOME (Goal):
Objective:
Strategy:

Methodology <small>What is the activity – what tasks does it involve?</small>	Accountability <small>Who is responsible for?</small>	Resources required <small>What resources are required to enable this to happen?</small>	Timeline <small>When will it be completed?</small>	Indicator / Deliverable <small>How will we know when it has been completed?</small>	Status of achievement <small>Is the task achieved? (in completed, ongoing, etc.)</small>
Activity 'x' =					

Selection of local strategies and activities

The Community Partnership Groups decide on activities to be implemented locally that are:

- Relevant to the community's needs
- Linked to the Project Goals
- Based on research evidence
- Easily replicable
- Low-cost
- Not funded by other sources



Action plan example cont.

GOAL 1: Children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and school

Objective: To increase the mutual understanding of how both the early years services and schools contribute to children's long-term outcomes

Strategy: Create a strong and active network between early year's services and schools

Methodology <small>What is the activity – what tasks does it involve?</small>	Accountability <small>Who is responsible for?</small>	Resources required <small>What resources are required to enable this to happen?</small>	Timeline <small>When will it be completed?</small>	Indicator / Deliverable <small>How will we know when it has been completed?</small>	Status of achievement <small>Is the task achieved? (in completed, ongoing, etc.)</small>
Activity – Run a series of 2 professional development forums to bring staff from Footscray early years services, schools and communities services together					
Identify an appropriate topic for first professional development forum and general structure/length	COCH and Partnership group	No additional resources required	Feb Partnership group meeting	1 st Forum agenda set	Complete
Establish a suitable time and date for 1 st forum to be held on	COCH and Partnership group	No additional resources required	Feb Partnership group meeting	Date of 1 st forum set	Complete
Organise presenters, facilitators, venue, catering etc.	COCH	\$ for venue/facilitator/speaker	April – May	Venue organised, presenter's booked	Underway
Invite all key community stakeholders to attend and the first forum and promote forum in all local schools, early years services and community groups.	COCH (distribution of community wide invitations) Partnership group members to promote 1 st PD session in their service	\$ for forum promotion	April – May	All local stakeholders invited to forum, and forum advertised locally	Underway
Hold the 1 st PD forum	COCH	\$ for venue/facilitator/speaker	1 st half of year	1 st forum held	
Evaluate 1 st forum, use this process to also identify future PD topics of interest	COCH	No additional resources required	At the end of the forum	Evaluation feedback reviewed	

Phase I (2008) Strategies and Activities to be implemented

Goal 1 – A smooth transition

1. Create a strong and active network between early year's services, schools and community organisations
 - Actively engage local stakeholders who are not currently involved in the project and invite their participation
 - Run a series of professional development sessions to bring project stakeholders together
2. Gain a greater understanding of what local families current experience is around the move to school
 - Conduct consultations with local families and children



Goal 1 – A smooth transition

3. Build a shared understanding of practices and approaches undertaken by early years services and schools
 - Time release school staff and early years service providers to:
 - visit and observe each others practices
 - develop joint locally relevant transition activities for families and children
 - Run professional development



Goal 2 – Connections with families

1. Actively engage 'hard to reach' groups in schools and early years services
 - Work in partnership with local community organisation that are already successfully engaging 'hard to reach groups'
 - Build upon community activities that these groups attend
 - Run an obligation free activity targeted at connecting families (whom are not already actively connected) to school
2. Create opportunities for families to participate in activities held on school sites
 - Run playgroups in school



Goal 2 – Connections with families

3. Create welcoming family-friendly environments in schools and early years services
 - Conduct consultations with local families and children to find out what makes school and early years service welcoming and family-friendly
 - Respond to consultation findings
 - Foster and value parent staff relationships
 - Establish current prep parent to incoming prep parent relationships



Goal 3 – Responding individual learning needs

1. Create a strong and active network between early year's services, schools and community organisations
 - Actively engage local stakeholders who are not currently involved in the project and invite their participation
 - Run a series of professional development sessions to bring project stakeholders together
 - Employment of a local links worker
2. Develop a process of information sharing between schools, families and early years services
 - Develop a locally appropriate mode of information sharing



Evaluating the project



Project Evaluation

- The independent evaluation is based on an action research model to assess both processes and outcomes
- Data collection and analysis will occur at 3 points in time
 - 2008 (baseline), 2010, 2012
- The information collected from the evaluation will be used to help build Australian based research evidence



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Data collection

- Baseline data collection is currently underway
- Tools being used included:
 - Impact evaluation
 - Parent, early education and care services, schools and community services
 - Process evaluation
 - Reflection on workplan, individual activity evaluation
 - Partnership evaluation
 - VicHealth evaluation tool, reflective journal, questionnaires
- Baseline data available early 2009

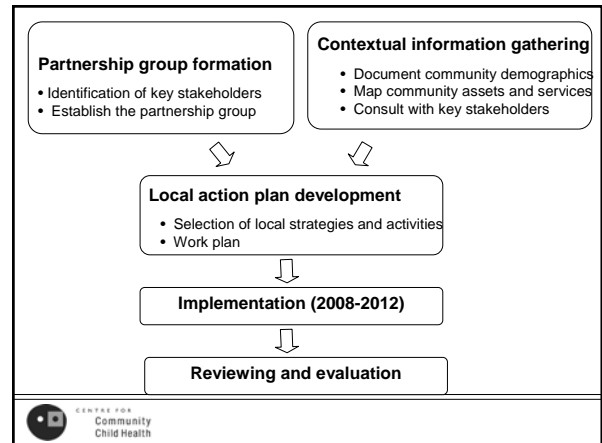


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Next Steps



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Keeping updated

We would like to invite you to:

- Please take a copy of our first project newsletter
- Provide your contact details for further newsletter distribution



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Contact details

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