



Early Years Literacy & Language Development Strategy for Bendigo

2015

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Executive Summary

The recent second edition of the State of Bendigo's Children report (2013) reveals that Bendigo's children, particularly those in the 0-5 age group, rank lower than the Victorian average on a number of developmental indicators, including language development, cognitive skills, communication and general knowledge (by age 6). Since the first report in 2011, there has also been a decrease in the reading standards of children in years 3 and 5. Overall, literacy and language levels for Greater Bendigo children aged 0 to 5 years are lower than the Victorian average.

The Early Years Literacy and Language Development Strategy, an initiative of Communities for Children (C4C) Bendigo, has been developed to address these issues. The strategy brings together research, data and stakeholder feedback. This has been collated into an overview of the key issues impacting on literacy and language development for Bendigo's children and culminates in an Early Years Literacy and Language Development Action Plan for Bendigo. The primary goal of the strategy and action plan are to improve literacy and language development outcomes for children aged 0-5 (particularly 0-3 year olds) across Bendigo from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

The C4C Early Years Literacy and Language Development Strategy for Bendigo aims to do the following:

- Articulate the issues and consequences of poor literacy and language skills
- Identify and summarise key data pertaining to the current situation, locally and nationally, in relation to children's literacy and language levels
- Highlight key priorities for improving literacy and language development in Bendigo
- Make recommendations for practical actions to address these priorities.

The Action Plan, contained in the second section of the strategy, outlines a number of key recommendations.

They include:

- Establishing an Imagination library for Bendigo, which would provide one book per child per month for the first five years of life
- Employing two full time literacy workers for Bendigo
- Developing a media campaign promoting the importance of laughing, talking, reading and playing with your child every day
- Developing a website for workers and families that lists all local language development programs, initiatives and available resources
- Establishing a community agreement, whereby all local organisations and businesses sign up to commit to taking two actions per year to support language development in children aged 0-5 in Bendigo
- Seeking financial support to expand successful local initiatives such as Talking Matters (a free drop-in Speech pathology service) and programs such as Mother Goose, HIPPIY, Small Talk, Let's Read, guerrilla libraries

The strategy also articulates the socio-economic consequences of not addressing children's literacy. We can invest now, ensuring positive conditions for healthy future development, or pay significantly more later on in the form of costly remediation, health care and other interventions, supports and services.



Early Years Literacy & Language Development Strategy for Bendigo

Introduction

Communities for Children Bendigo were concerned to note that, by age 6, Bendigo's children ranked lower than the state average on a number of key Australian Early Development Index 2012 indicators, particularly in relation to their language, cognitive skills, communication and general knowledge. When children don't develop strong literacy and language skills in their early years, the impact on future educational attainment and employment outcomes are significant. However, the impacts are not confined to education and employment outcomes. A lack of strong early literacy and language skills in children has been linked to poor socio-economic wellbeing and health outcomes into adulthood. This, consequently, impacts significantly on the social and economic strength of communities.

The acquisition of fundamental literacy skills in the early years of childhood continues to be of national and international concern at the highest levels, as evidenced, for example, through the reform agendas of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education . The C4C Early Years Literacy and Language Development Strategy for Bendigo aims to align with these broader national and international reform agendas by implementing strategies to increase language and literacy in a local context.

Investing in child development is critical for strong future socio-economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society. When we invest wisely and adequately in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. When we fail to provide children with what they need to build a strong foundation for healthy and productive lives we put our future prosperity and security at risk . The Communities for Children Early Years Literacy and Language strategy aims to articulate how we as a community can use our collective resources most effectively and efficiently to help build that strong foundation.

Who are we?

Communities for Children (C4C) Bendigo is part of the Communities for Children national initiative funded by Department of Social Services (DSS) through the Family and Communities Support Program (FCSP). The overall objective of the FCSP, which includes the Communities for Children Initiative, is to provide integrated services for families, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged families, to improve child wellbeing and development, safety and family functioning.

St Luke's (Division of Anglicare Victoria) coordinates the C4C initiative locally, working with several partner agencies/organisations (Community Partners), supporting them to deliver specific projects that aim to improve long term outcomes for children and families.

Projects being implemented under C4C Action Plan 2015-17 include:

- Off to an Early Start (a family home visiting program)
- Children’s Language and Literacy Project
- Family Violence Prevention Project in the Early Years sector
- Supported Playgroup Project
- Aboriginal Early Years Access Project
- Building Aboriginal cultural safety in the early years sector
- Family and Services Facilitator Project (Supporting the voice of children and families)
- Maternal & Child Health and Family Services Project
- Mother Goose

In 2012, the C4C Reference Committee agreed to establish a series of working groups to address key priority areas, including children’s language development. The C4C Language Development working group includes representatives from Bendigo Health, City of Greater Bendigo, Maternal and Child Health Services, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative, Bapcare, Goldfields Library, La Trobe University, Lightning Reef Primary School, St Luke’s, as well as other community and business stakeholders.

The Early Years Literacy and Language Development Strategy for Bendigo is an initiative of the C4C Language Development working group and builds on the 2011 Children’s Literacy Plan for Bendigo, which was developed by the Parent-Child Mother Goose Implementation Group (PCMGIG).

Vision

Given that literacy and language development is a community issue and requires a whole-of-community response, we would like to see the C4C Early Years Literacy and Language Development strategy adopted as a Bendigo-wide plan.

If the plan is fully implemented, we envisage that Bendigo will be a place where:

1. Every person and organisation/business understands and promotes the importance of language development.
2. Our families, community, services and schools have the necessary focus, resources, skills and will to improve literacy outcomes for children.

Our vision:

- Every child in Bendigo has rich, nurturing language opportunities to empower communication
- Children's language (development) is everyone's business

Methodology - How the information for this strategy was gathered

In order to obtain the data and information on which to base the strategy, the following consultations were undertaken:

- Ongoing consultation with members of C4C Language Development Reference Group (which includes representatives from early years services at Bendigo Health, City of Greater Bendigo, Maternal and Child Health Services, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative, Baptcare, Goldfields Library, La Trobe University, Lightning Reef Primary School and St Luke's)
- Interviews with key stakeholders from a variety of local organisations who work in the early years sector
- Two forums seeking input into the development of the Early Years Literacy and Language Development strategy for Bendigo
- Development of a survey to canvass ideas (with 61 respondents from local government, organisations, businesses and community)
- Interviews and focus groups with families.

A research process was also undertaken, to ensure that the strategy aligned with local, national and international data and research.

This process included:

- A review of local and national demographic data
- A review of local, national and international research of best practice in relation to literacy and language development in the 0-5 age group
- A review and update of data and research included in the earlier Children's Literacy Plan for Bendigo (2011 - discussion Paper)

**Children for
children's sake**

Summary

It is important to recognise that much work has already been done, and continues to be done to increase children's literacy outcomes. As such, the strategy acknowledges the commitment of families to provide the best opportunities to their children and the expertise, commitment and professionalism of those working with families in the services sector.

The strategy also aims to focus on the following:

- The need to ensure children from all cultural backgrounds have access to culturally appropriate resources and information
- The need for culturally relevant programs for all members of Bendigo's community
- The importance of new technologies and their evolving role in assisting children to learn and demonstrate their literacy capabilities
- The crucial role early years educators play in improving outcomes for children
- The significant role community can make to improve literacy and language development outcomes for children in Bendigo aged 0-5 years.

Whilst collating the data, research and stakeholder feedback, it became clear that there were several priority areas that needed attention, if literacy and language development were to be improved.

They include:

- Supporting families to be more involved and engaged
- Increasing community awareness of and commitment to improving children's literacy levels
- Providing the right services and programs, and enough of them, to promote improved literacy and language development
- Ensuring that these services have opportunities to link and support one another
- Focusing on building a community wide approach to:
 - i. Literacy and language development for Bendigo children
 - ii. Building parents confidence and skills.

These priority areas have informed the development of both the Early Years Literacy and Language Development Strategy and the corresponding action plan.

About Early Literacy & Language Development

Literacy and language development defined

The terms 'literacy' and 'language development' have been used in multiple ways in multiple contexts. Different sectors employ these terms in very different ways. As such, there are numerous ways in which we can define these terms.

UNESCO, for example, defines literacy as 'the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts' (UNESCO, 2013). It is recognised as the foundation for lifelong learning, and as 'fully essential to social and human development in its ability to transform lives. For individuals, families, and societies alike, it is an instrument of empowerment to improve one's health, one's income, and one's relationship with the world' (UNESCO, 2013). In this broader vision, literacy is a platform for individuals to develop their knowledge and to participate fully in society through diverse oral, written, printed and digital media .

For the purposes of this strategy, we have chosen to use the definition outlined in the Early Learning Framework from Department of Education, Employment & Work Place Relations, 2009.

"Literacy' means the capacity, confidence and disposition to use language in all its forms. Literacy incorporates a range of modes of communication including music, movement, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama, as well as talking, listening, viewing, reading and writing.'

This definition provides a broad understanding of the term that recognises that early learning opportunities need to be flexible, creative and engaging for young children. It also recognises the fact that 'literacy' develops when children are provided with multiple and varied opportunities to enact communication with others.

It is useful to note that the relationship between 'literacy' and 'language development' is not straight forward. While literacy acquisition (the ability to read and write) differs from language development, literacy is strongly influenced by language development. These links are well documented, with evidence identifying a clear link between speech and language difficulties and subsequent literacy difficulties .

Language development is a crucial component of early childhood development. Due to the interdependent nature of early child development, any problems that hinder the acquisition of language during these critical years can affect other areas. The relationship between language development in the early years and the resulting transition to literacy is viewed as crucial in ensuring self-esteem, academic success and improved life chances

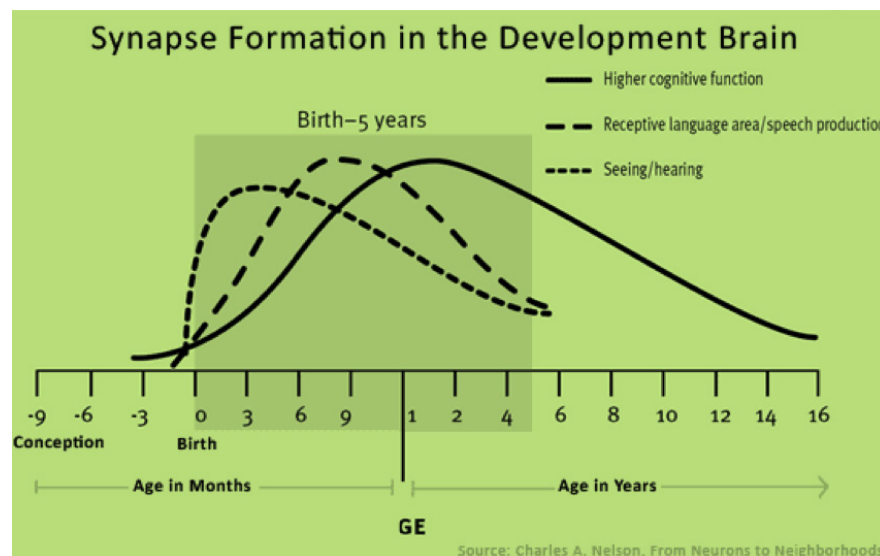
What we know about Early Literacy and Language Development

Early literacy and language development begins in the first three years of life and is closely linked to children's earliest experiences with books, stories, songs and games played.

Recent research suggests that the most effective way for young children to develop spoken and written language skills is for caregivers and early years educators to implement a positive, interactive and experiential process of learning, starting in early infancy. We know that children gain significant knowledge of language, reading and writing long before they enter school. Children learn to talk, read and write through social literacy experiences.

Research undertaken locally and internationally ^{vii} ^{ix} found that:

- Language, reading and writing skills develop at the same time and are intimately linked
- Early literacy development is a continuous developmental process that begins in the first years of life
- Early literacy skills develop in real life settings through positive interactions with people and literacy materials



It has long been acknowledged that both environmental factors and genetic predisposition impact significantly on the developing brain. In terms of environmental factors, scientists now know a major ingredient in the development of language is the “serve and return” relationship between children and their parents or other caregivers in the family or community. Young children naturally reach out for interaction through babbling, facial expressions, and gestures and adults respond with the same kind of vocalising and gesturing back to them. In the absence of such responses - or if the responses are unreliable or inappropriate- the brain’s architecture or development does not form as expected, which can lead to disparities in learning and behaviour.

Early literacy theorists at the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University emphasise the importance of allowing literacy skills to develop naturally by:

- creating nurturing environments where books can be enjoyed
- encouraging positive interactions between young children and adults
- the provision of literacy-rich experiences.

The benefits of acting early

As highlighted in The State of Bendigo's Children Report (2013) literacy and language development opportunities for the early years are imperative, not just for children and families but for our community as well:

'There are strong links between literacy, school performance, self-esteem and life chances. Poor literacy skills can have a detrimental effect on students' academic pathways and are associated with generally lower education attainment, earnings, health and social outcomes and are linked to higher rates of unemployment, welfare dependencies and teenage parenting. The central task of reading and writing provide the foundation for more advanced skills and knowledge that is essential for the development of human potential.'

Research shows that literacy skills do not just enable educational attainment, they underpin strong family relationships, better health choices and an individual's capacity (and confidence) to gain employment.

Socioeconomic background and many other factors may be outside the control of an individual. However, what research highlights is that addressing literacy skills is a key step in beginning to address and overcome other related factors that lock individuals into a cycle of disadvantage. Parents' understanding of the hugely important role they play in developing their children's educational and socio-economic outcomes are crucial in breaking the cycle of poverty. It is important, then, that we support parents to understand that literacy and language development skills need to be proactively developed from birth and that early literacy experiences are crucial to promoting successful outcomes later in life.

While literacy learning takes a lifetime, we continue to gather more pleasure and understanding as we encounter more texts, more conversations and more cultural and arts experiences. It is important, then, that children are provided with literacy-rich experiences from the very beginning so that they gain control and competence over language. This can be done if more informed and experienced learners - parents, carers, educators, service providers - inspire, encourage and extend the opportunities for the children with whom they engage.

Literacy, relationships and socio-economic disadvantage

The Implications of Poverty on Children's Readiness to Learn, a 2009 focusing paper prepared for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, sets out the links between socio-economic disadvantage and a child's readiness to learn.

Key findings are set out below:

- Children's interactions with people and objects in their social environment create connections in the developing brain, shaping their ability to learn long before they go to school.
- Growing up in poverty can compromise children's readiness to learn. Differences between children affected by poverty and others start appearing in their language and behavioural development at two years of age. This is not simply the result of low income, as families often cycle in and out of poverty over time.

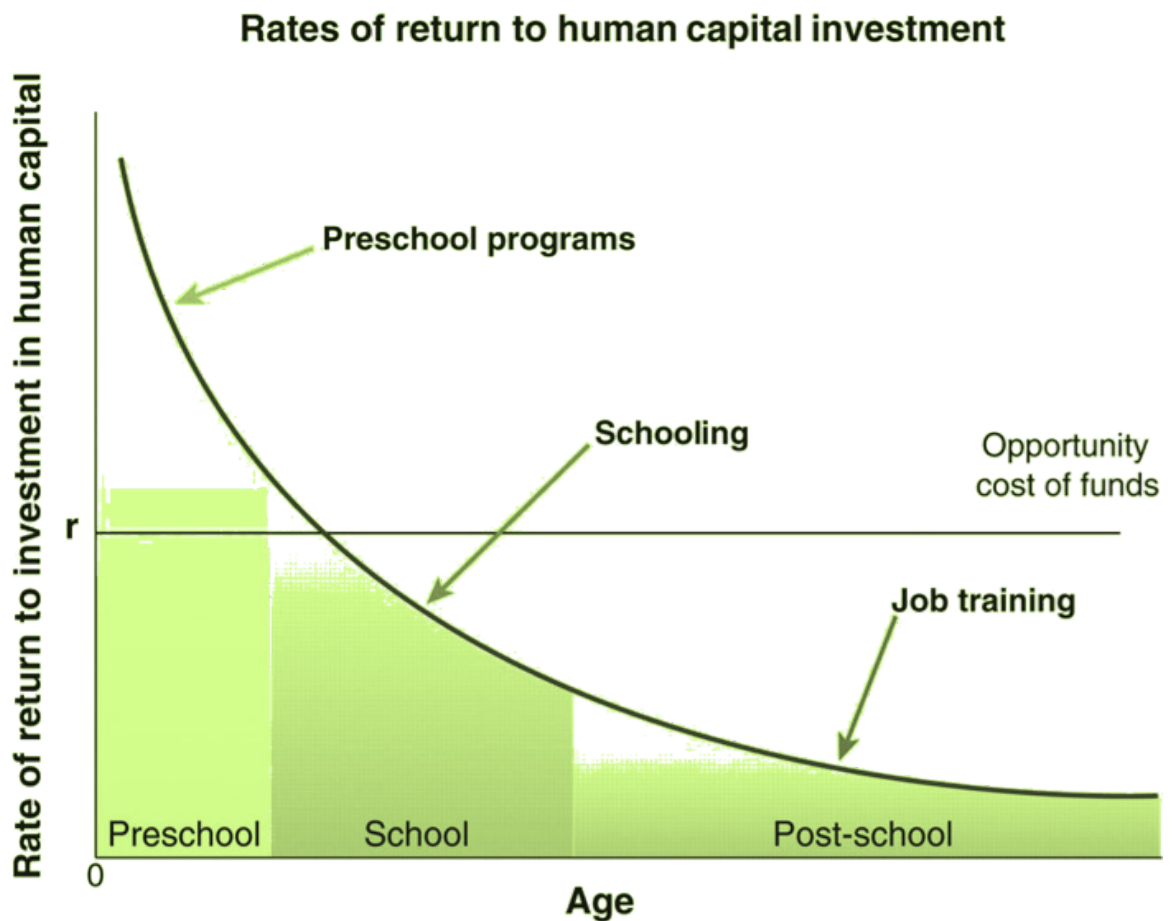
- There are a number of pathways through which disadvantage can affect children’s readiness to learn:
 - ~ the quality of the interaction between parents and the child
 - ~ the quality of the home environment
 - ~ the quality of early learning and care outside the home, and
 - ~ the physical and mental health of the parents
- How parents relate to a child is the pathway with the greatest influence on a child’s ability to learn: warm, supportive parenting can protect against the negative impact of poverty.
- There is strong evidence that preventive programs – put in place before problems start – can make a real difference when they are of high quality, intensive and easy to access, and offer services to children and parents simultaneously at home and at childcare or school.
- Research indicates that early intervention programs – including those that extend into primary school – and integrated programs that draw upon schools and childcare centers as a community base for the delivery of a wide range of services that impact across various contexts (home, school and community), can redirect children’s developmental pathways towards improved learning outcomes ^{xiv}.

The Economic Argument

Given that capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society, it is clear that child development is a critical foundation for strong community development. When we invest wisely in children and families, the next generation will pay that back through a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. When we fail to provide children with what they need to build a strong foundation for healthy and productive lives, we put our future prosperity and security at risk. A rapidly growing body of knowledge from neuroscience, molecular biology, genomics, and child development research can help to inform how we as a community can use our collective resources most effectively and efficiently to build that strong foundation.

Providing children with a healthy environment in which to learn and grow is not only good for the future health and well-being of a community, it also assists the strength of the economy. Economists have shown that high quality early childhood programs bring impressive returns on investment. Three of the most rigorous long term studies by Harvard University found a range of returns between \$4 and \$9 for every dollar invested in Early Childhood programs for children from low income backgrounds. Program participants followed into adulthood benefited from increased earnings while the public saw returns in the form of reduced special education, welfare, and crime costs and increased tax revenues from program participants later in life ^{xv}.

Rates of return to investment in human capital as function of age when the investment was initiated



(Data are from Cunha et al (2005).

Source: The Timing and Quality of Early Experiences Combine to Shape Brain Architecture)



About Early Literacy & Language Development

There has been significant research conducted both locally and internationally about the importance of improved early literacy and language development opportunities for children and their families.

Key findings from research highlight that:

- Multiple opportunities are needed for parents to engage with information on speech, language and general development leading up to and including children's school commencement.
- Messages about children's communication development need to be tailored in order for parents to hear a message that is about 'their child' as an individual versus 'the average child' or children in general.
- Early years professionals need skills in framing conversations with parents about their own family context.
- Skilled professionals influence parents' engagement and trust in services.
- Early language and literacy promotion should include a cross-generational approach and maximise the potential for input from extended family.
- Parents need accessible information that clearly defines roles and skills of community-based health and education professionals, the support by services and strategies to implement in regard to language and communication.
- Practical, up-to-date and locally relevant support and information is needed for both health and education contexts: what type of professionals and supports are available, what their expertise and roles are and how parent roles are complementary.
- Communication with parents needs to account for family literacy capability, parents' confidence levels and the possibility of past negative educational experiences.
- Waiting until professionals have established a relationship with parents before raising a concern can be at odds with early intervention principles.
- Continuous investment in relationship building and communication between parents and professionals is important.
- Successful strategies for engaging with all families are needed by early years' professionals.
- There is scope to strengthen professionals' general skills and abilities to forge relationships and foster authentic two-way communication with all families.
- Greater support for parents to understand how to engage and converse with professionals and express concerns to early years and school professionals would be beneficial.
- Building on strategies that link schools and early years services, and families and schools/early years services should be considered.

The work that we do to support children in our community to develop greater literacy and language development skills has significant and positive impacts for the individual, families and our community.

What we know about Early Literacy & Language Development in Bendigo

Local Situation and Indicators

Indicators of literacy and language levels for Bendigo Children aged 0-5 years suggest that these levels are lower than the Victorian average. There are certain suburbs, particularly those with a higher level of socioeconomic disadvantage) where children have literacy and language skills that are significantly lower than the Victorian or Greater Bendigo average.

In 2011, there were 6,744 children aged 0 – 4 years living in City of Greater Bendigo. This figure is forecast to increase to 7,527 by 2016.

In 2011, many suburbs in the City of Greater Bendigo had a very high level of socio-economic disadvantage compared to the municipal average and compared to the Regional Victoria and overall Victorian average. Eleven suburbs, located in the urban area of Greater Bendigo, had levels of socio-economic disadvantage lower than the state average.

In June 2011, almost a quarter of Greater Bendigo children aged up to 16 years were living in welfare dependent or other low income families. This figure was higher than the Regional Victoria and Victorian average.

In 2012, Greater Bendigo children in their first year of school were slightly more likely to have attended preschool than the Victorian average. However children from nine locations, such as California Gully and Eaglehawk, were significantly less likely to have attended preschool.

In 2012, Greater Bendigo children were more likely (17.0%) to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in the Language and Cognitive Skills domain than the Victorian state average (16.0%). Children living in the Long Gully and surrounding area - and many other areas - were significantly more likely to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain.

In 2010, Greater Bendigo children were more likely (24.8%) to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in the Communication Skills and General Knowledge domain than the Victorian state average (22.6%).

Children living in the North East Bendigo area were most likely to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain (37.3% of surveyed children). Children living in the Long Gully and surrounds and Quarry Hill areas – as well as many other areas – were significantly more likely to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain.

Population

In 2011, there were 6,744 children aged from zero to four years in City of Greater Bendigo. This figure represented 6.7% of the total population. Since 2006 there has been an increase of 964 children in this age range.

There has been a large increase in the number of 0-4 year olds resident in Victoria, from 305,940 in 2006 to 344,680 in 2011. This increase of 38,740 children in this age group represents an annual average growth rate of 2.4%, compared to 1.7% for the entire population.

Number and proportion of population aged 0 – 4 years (2011)

	Number	% of population
Gr. Bendigo (LGA)	6,744	6.7%
<i>Regional Victoria</i>	84,633	6.3%
Victoria	344,680	6.4%

Forecast number of children aged 0 – 4 years

By 2016, population forecasts indicate that there will be 7,527 children aged 0 – 4 years living in the City of Greater Bendigo. The Kangaroo Flat – Big Hill area will have the largest number of children in this age bracket, followed by Golden Square and then North Bendigo – California Gully.

As a proportion of the area's total population, the largest proportion of 0 – 4 year olds is forecast for the Strathfieldsaye area, followed by the Epsom - Ascot area.

Forecast population aged 0-4 years old – 2016

Location	Number	% of total area population
Kangaroo Flat - Big Hill	875	7.5
Golden Square	674	7
North Bendigo - California Gully	611	7
Flora Hill - Quarry Hill - Spring Gully	569	5.5
Strathfieldsaye	556	9.1
Eaglehawk - Eaglehawk North - Sailors Gully	477	7.2
Rural East	429	6
Epsom - Ascot	421	8.5
Maiden Gully	359	7.5
Strathdale	356	6
Bendigo	346	5.3
Long Gully - West Bendigo - Ironbark	335	6.6
Kennington	294	4.8
Whitehills - Jackass Flat	276	6.8
Marong - Rural West	248	5.7
Elmore - Rural North	206	5.9
Huntly	199	6.9
Heathcote & District	155	3.8
East Bendigo	141	5.4
City of Greater Bendigo	7,527	6.5

i.d. consulting City of Greater Bendigo Population Forecasts

Long Term Projections

Population & Age Structure - Persons Aged 0 to 4 years				
City of Greater Bendigo	2011		2031	
AREA	Number	%	Number	%
City of Greater Bendigo	6,842	6.5	9,188	6.3
Bendigo	343	5.4	480	5.5
Eaglehawk - Eaglehawk North - Sailors Gully	427	7.2	488	6.6
East Bendigo	121	5.2	155	5.1
Elmore - Rural North	193	5.7	236	5.8
Epsom - Ascot	387	8.8	381	6.9
Flora Hill - Quarry Hill - Spring Gully - Golden Gully	547	5.5	544	5.2
Golden Square	623	6.9	718	6.7
Heathcote & District	140	3.7	176	3.7
Huntly	142	6.2	539	7.1
Kangaroo Flat - Big Hill	767	7.3	922	7
Kennington	287	4.7	281	4.3
Long Gully - West Bendigo - Ironbark	338	6.7	336	6.3
Maiden Gully	355	8.1	722	7.5
Marong - Rural West	212	5.5	446	5.9
North Bendigo - California Gully	611	7.2	583	6.5
Rural East	356	5.8	475	5.3
Strathdale	342	5.9	336	5.6
Strathfieldsaye	443	9.2	931	8.5
Whitehills - Jackass Flat	209	6.4	440	6.6

Population and household forecasts, 2011 to 2031, prepared by .id The population experts, June 2011

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2011*. Compiled and presented in atlas.id by .id, the population experts.

Socio-economic Disadvantage

In 2011, the City of Greater Bendigo scored 983.1 on the SEIFA index of disadvantage, which was lower than the average for Regional Victoria (986)

In 2011 the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) score for City of Greater Bendigo was lower than the Victoria and Regional Victorian average, indicating a higher level of relative socio-economic disadvantage for the municipality. Within City of Greater Bendigo, Long Gully had the lowest SEIFA score, followed by California Gully, Heathcote, Bendigo West and Bendigo North.

Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) by location - 2011

Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage	
City of Greater Bendigo's small areas and benchmark areas	
Area	2011 index
Strathfieldsaye	1,090.2
Maiden Gully	1,084.8
Rural East	1,066.3
Epsom - Ascot	1,038.1
Marong - Rural West	1,038.0
Strathdale	1,025.4
Greater Melbourne	1,020.3
Huntly	1,014.4
Flora Hill - Quarry Hill - Spring Gully - Golden Gully	1,000.4
Kennington	933.0
East Bendigo	988.6
Bendigo SA4	985.3
White Hills - Jackass Flat	980.1
Elmore - Rural North	979.1
Bendigo	973.2
Golden Square	963.9
Kangaroo Flat - Big Hill	944.0
Heathcote & District	928.8
Eaglehawk - Eaglehawk North - Sailors Gully	921.7
North Bendigo - Galifornia Gully	899.2
Long Gully - West Bendigo - Ironbark	863.3
City of Greater Bendigo	983.1
Regional VIC	977.7
Victoria	1,009.6
Australia	1,002.0

www.abs.gov.au 2011 x = IRSD score lower than Regional Victoria average

Education Participation

Preschool

Figures from the 2012 Australian Early Development Index indicated that Greater Bendigo had a preschool participation rate slightly higher than the Victorian state average (95% compared to state average of 93.9%). However, rates varied considerable according to child's place of residence. California Gully had the lowest preschool participation rate (88.1% of surveyed children), followed by Long Gully (89.1 %) Eaglehawk/Sailors Gully (89.2 %) Bendigo (91.8 %).

Attended Preschool before first year of school (2012) (ranked)

Area	Total no. children	% of total
California Gully	59	88.1
Long Gully & surrounds	64	89.1
Eaglehawk/Sailors Gully #	65	89.2
Bendigo	73	91.8
Huntly and surrounds	65	92.3
Kennington *	60	93.3
Epsom/Ascot	63	93.7
Flora Hill #	33	93.9
Elmore/Goonong	17	94.1
Strathfieldsaye #	43	95.3
Sedgwick and surrounds/Eppalock #	47	95.7
Golden Square	125	96.0
North East Bendigo	111	96.4
Kangaroo Flat/Big Hill	151	96.7
Junortoun #	38	97.4
Spring Gully/Golden Gully	45	97.8
Maiden Gully and surrounds	96	97.9
Strathsale #	51	98.0
Heathcote and surrounds	34	100
Lockwood district	35	100
Marong/Shelbourne	21	100
Quarry Hill	28	100
Greater Bendigo	1,324	95.0
Victoria	63,733	93.9

*Australian Early Development Index Community Profile 2012, Greater Bendigo # AEDI data collection is 60-80% of the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population; interpret with caution. * AEDI data collection is < 60% of the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population. The AEDI sample may not accurately reflect the population of children; interpret with caution.*

Australian Early Development Index Domains - 2012

Children in Greater Bendigo ranked lower on several AEDI indicators compared to the Victorian or Regional Victorian average.

Language and cognitive skills (school - based)

(basic literacy, interest in literacy/numeracy and memory, advanced literacy, basic numeracy)

Children living in City of Greater Bendigo were more likely (17.0%) to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain than the Victorian state average (16.0%).

Children living in the Long Gully and surrounding area, Golden Square, Heathcote and surrounds were most likely to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain (25.8 % of surveyed children). Sedgewick/Eppalock and surrounds had the next highest rate (23.4%) followed by Kennington and California Gully (22.8%% and 20.4% respectively). Overall nine local communities had proportions higher than the City of Greater Bendigo average.

Children who are developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain have the following characteristics:

- Do not have most of the basic literacy skills; they have problems with identifying letters or attaching sounds to them, rhyming, may not know the writing directions and how to write their own name.
- May not show interest in books and reading, or maths and number games, or both, and may have difficulty remembering things.
- Have only up to one of the advanced literacy skills; cannot read or write simple words or sentences, and rarely write voluntarily.
- Have marked difficulty with numbers, cannot count, compare or recognise numbers, may not be able to name all the shapes and may have difficulty with time concepts.

Language and Cognitive Skills - 2012

Area	Number of children surveyed	% who are developmentally at risk or vulnerable (between the 0 percentile & 25th percentile)
Long Gully & surrounds	62	25.8
Golden Square	124	25.8
Heathcote and surrounds #	31	25.8
Sedgewick/Eppalock and surrounds #	47	23.4
Kennington	57	22.8
California Gully	54	20.4
Kangaroo Flat/Big Hill	153	19.6
North East Bendigo	110	18.2
Quarry Hill	28	17.8
Eaglehawk/Sailors Gully	67	16.5
Greater Bendigo	1,297	17.0
Victoria	64,195	16.0

Australian Early Development Index Community Profile, Greater Bendigo - March 2011

AEDI data collection is 60-80% of the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population; interpret with caution

Communication Skills and general knowledge

(storytelling ability, communication with adults and children)

Children living in City of Greater Bendigo were more likely (24.8%) to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain than the Victorian state average (22.6%).

Children living in the North east Bendigo area were most likely to be developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain (37.3% of surveyed children). The Quarry Hill and Long Gully and surrounds areas had the next highest rates (35.7% and 34.5% respectively). Eight other areas had proportions higher than the City of Greater Bendigo average (24.8%).

Children who are developmentally at risk or vulnerable in this domain:

- Range from being average to very poor in effective communication, may have difficulty in participating in games involving the use of language, may be difficult to understand and/or have difficulty in understanding others and may show little general knowledge.

Area	Number of children surveyed	% who are developmentally at risk or vulnerable (between the 0 percentile & 25th percentile)
North East Bendigo	110	37.3
Quarry Hill	28	35.7
Long Gully and surrounds	61	34.5
Flora Hill #	29	34.4
Sedgewick/Eppalock and surrounds #	47	34
Kennington *	57	33.3
Spring Gully/Golden Gully	45	31.1
Godlen Square	122	29.6
Bendigo	69	28.9
Strathdale #	51	25.4
California Gully	52	25
Greater Bendigo	1,291	24.8
Victoria	64,038	22.6

Australian Early Development Index Community Profile, Greater Bendigo - March 2011 # AEDI data collection is 60-80% of the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated resident population; interpret with caution

In 2010 the AEDI statistics showed that 25.1% of children in the City of Greater Bendigo were likely to be at risk or vulnerable in this domain. While this has decreased slightly to 24.8% in 2012, it highlights that one in four children are at risk of having average or poor effective communication, may have difficulty in participating in games involving the use of language, may be difficult to understand and/or have difficulty in understanding others and may show little general knowledge.

Additionally, statistics demonstrate that new geographical areas such as Spring Gully, Quarry Hill, Kennington, Golden Square, Flora Hill, Sedgewick/ Eppalock and surrounds and Strathdale have a higher representation in this domain than both the Greater Bendigo and Victorian State averages. Other geographical areas that were listed in 2010 as having a higher than average percentage of children at risk or vulnerable in this domain include Maiden Gully, Kangaroo Flat, Junortoun, Eaglehawk/Sailors Gully and Maiden Gully and surrounds and these are now below the state average.



Community Consultation: Key Priority areas for Action

During the consultation process, stakeholders from the community, services and business sectors were asked key questions about the things that are currently working well and the things we could be doing to improve the literacy and language development outcomes for children 0-5 (but particularly 0-3 years) years in Bendigo.

The information used to inform this strategy has been gathered through input at forums, interviews, focus groups and surveys. The feedback represents the thoughts and opinions of families and community members, as well as those working in education settings, services providers, local government and businesses. It's worth acknowledging that a significant amount of the feedback was overwhelmingly positive about the work that is being done in the area of early year's literacy and language development across Bendigo. The strategies and recommended actions to address the key priority areas have derived from the analysis of the qualitative data gathered and the reoccurring themes captured through consultation.

There are four key areas that will support literacy and language development:

1. The involvement of Community in Early Literacy and Language Development
2. The involvement of Family in Early literacy and Language Development
3. The involvement of Services and programs in Early Literacy and Language Development

The involvement of Education and schools in Early Literacy and Language Development

Game changers

Key responses to these areas include:

- Increased parent/carer confidence through access to services, programs and information
- Community campaign to raise awareness
- The provision of information through website/early years portal
- Coordination and support for services through dedicated Literacy Worker
- Training for professionals working in the Early Years

Key areas of focus



FAMILIES - are supported to build stronger attachments with children - through development of parenting, relationship and literacy skills.

COMMUNITY - the community is aware of and committed to improving literacy levels and works collaboratively to do this.

SERVICES - the right services and programs, and enough of them, are delivered to promote improved attachment and literacy outcomes.

EDUCATION - Education settings provide a tailored approach and have the resources they need to address individual literacy needs in their community.

KEY AREA 1:

The involvement of Community in Literacy and Language Development

Topic:

The community is aware of and committed to improving literacy levels and works collaboratively to do this.

The current situation:

At present there are many passionate professionals working to improve literacy and language development outcomes for children aged 0-3 years. While there are many excellent programs and services being delivered, there are also many opportunities for community collaboration and support.

What the literature told us:

Communities that prioritise initiatives that raise awareness and understanding of the importance of literacy and language development have better outcomes for families and children. Community capacity-building strategies that focus on fostering an inclusive approach strengthen families and communities. Research highlights the benefits of investing in child development, as it is a critical foundation for community and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society.

What our stakeholders told us:

Community Awareness

- Raise awareness and foster an understanding within the whole of community of the importance of early language development
- Access for all families to knowledge, information and resources to enhance early literacy opportunities and engagement
- Create greater understanding of the importance of meaningful and supportive interactions between children and carers
- Literacy focus days in the community & with businesses working together... to raise the profile
- Local visions & messages showing warm, nurturing interactions on the local TV station
- Continued support for a literacy festival
- Perhaps a message during the Prime Possum bedtime message about making sure you have snuggled up and read books before bed

Community Commitment

- Work together with a shared agenda
- Make building and supporting children's literacy and language skills the number one agenda item for Bendigo
- Ensure there is a non-deficit based approach – this is an approach that focuses on the strengths, rather than the deficits, that are present within a community – i.e. existing resources, social capital, etc.
- Celebrate literacy and make it fun for children and parents.
- To go about building capacity with early literacy promotion and support in a way that is not confrontational
- To establish and enhance partnerships by working collaboratively across early years services and organisations

Community Access to Information

- Better information dissemination through one 'shop front' providing information which can be accessed by anyone wanting to know about developing literacy and language development skills, be it community members, families or professionals working in the sector

Identified Actions

Outcome: The community is aware of and committed to improving language and literacy of children levels and works collaboratively to do this.

ACTION: Develop a communication strategy and campaign to all community members on importance of literacy and language development for 0-5 year olds

This campaign will be designed to increase community awareness and literacy and language competency for children (0-5) within the Greater Bendigo area. Objectives aligned with this strategy include:

- Raising the community's ownership of literacy and language development across Bendigo.
- Developing a uniform understanding and approach to literacy and language development across early years' service providers.
- Developing parent's skills in fostering literacy and language development with their children.
- Support community stakeholders to work in partnership with community leaders, groups, and families, as well early childhood educators and service providers. These include antenatal services, child and maternal health services, local schools and pre-schools; also playgroups, child care services and libraries.
- Ensuring the long term sustainability of literacy and language development outcomes for children, using an evidence-based approach.
- Build key media messages so that families and children are hearing a consistent and positive message around children's literacy and language development
- Link with Bendigo Business Council who have identified developing Bendigo as an Education City as one of their key priorities.
- Build collaboration between government departments, the corporate sector, community organisations and community groups to provide greater access to information and resources thus building a strong foundation for the children in our community.
- Foster local literacy and language development champions/ambassadors.
- Continue to support events in Bendigo that promote literacy and language development (Children's Week, Literacy and Numeracy Week)
- Explore the development of an Early Years Literacy and Language Development Festival. This could incorporate singing/storytelling/activities to engage families and children in fun free activities to build knowledge and confidence in a non-threatening way.

ACTION: Develop community agreement to be signed by stakeholders committing to one action that they will undertake to build literacy and language development for children in our community.

The focus of this action is to raise the community's ownership of literacy and language development across Bendigo and to build a whole of community commitment to children's literacy and language development. This needs to involve a combination of strategic work and on the ground programs. Organisations and businesses will be encouraged to develop an over-arching strategy that focuses on supporting children's literacy and language development. This could include signing a commitment of intent document or a pledge that their organisation aims to contribute supporting children's language and literacy development over a particular timeframe (i.e. 5 years). A list of possible activities or actions that organisations or businesses could commit to will be developed. This commitment by organisations and businesses reinforces that literacy and language development is everyone's business and everyone's responsibility, as well as assisting the sustainability of early literacy promotion and support over the longer term.

ACTION: Development of an Early Years Literacy and Language Development Website

The purpose of the website is to ensure resources and information on children's literacy and language development is available for families, services, educators and the wider community. The website will also highlight actions and programs being undertaken within the community to support children's literacy and language development.

KEY AREA 2:

The involvement of Family in Literacy and Language Development

Topic:

Families are supported to build stronger attachments with children-through development of parenting confidence, relationship and literacy skills.

The current situation:

Bendigo-based organisations currently deliver excellent programs and services to families and children but their capacity is limited. There are limitations to what can be done due to the nature of funding constraints and resourcing challenges. While there are formal avenues for families to access information and families, there are further opportunities to broaden the provision of information to the whole of community.

Many parents currently receive excellent information through many services and programs, particularly through Maternal Child and Health Service visits.

What the literature told us:

Research repeatedly shows that families, particularly parents and carers involvement in their child's education, are key to ensuring strong educational outcomes. Parents need access to information that links the importance of early speech and language to their child's future outcomes in regard to behaviour, socialisation and learning.

Research shows that when adults create rich language and literacy environments and respond to their child's communication in positive ways, they can boost their child's emergent language and literacy development and increase the likelihood of future academic success. Adults with the greatest potential to help are the most important ones in that child's life i.e.: the child's parents and caregivers, including child care providers and early childhood educators.

The earlier parents and carers become involved in their children's literacy development, the more profound the results and the longer lasting the effects.

Parents are the first teachers and role models for their children, and therefore have a strong influence on their learning. Research¹ has repeatedly shown that one of the most accurate predictors of a child's achievement is not only parental income or social status but also the extent to which parents are able to create a home environment that encourages learning.

Increasing availability and provision of evidence-based, two-generation programs that begin immediately after birth (and preferably pre-natally) can enhance the experiences of young children in families, particularly those with limited education and low income. Key relationships with primary caregivers shape the architecture of young children's brains. Effective programs provide growth-promoting experiences for the children, as well as helping their parents to create a home environment that provides the kind of positive social interactions, rich language exposure, and early literacy experiences that increase the probability that their child will enter school with the social, emotional and cognitive skills needed to succeed. These supportive interventions can be made available through voluntary associations, community-based organisations, corporate/employer sponsored initiatives as well as government funded services².

What our stakeholders told us:

Consultation with our stakeholders identified many opportunities to support families across our community to build greater understanding and knowledge about the importance of early language and literacy development. Families can benefit from the following suggestions.

Provide resources to families

- Stakeholders identified the benefit of programs which give all children access to books & recommended that these should be continued & expanded where possible
- Where programs have the capacity to provide families with necessary materials i.e.: books, paper & pencils, this should be encouraged
- Providing books to children through initiatives such as Imagination Library or Books in Homes would make a significant difference to many families in our community. One stakeholder highlighted that often books made available through these programs may be the only quality books children own
- Ensure that we have books to suit Aboriginal families & those from other culturally & linguistically diverse cultures
- Waiting rooms in all organisations & businesses could have books for children to read
- For families where parent literacy levels are low or for families that do not have the capacity to read to their children, provide access to audio books

Education

- Provide programs/opportunities for training on how to read & discuss books with children
- Continue to provide informal opportunities for families to engage with & build understandings of ways to develop literacy & language development. This includes increasing the number of children attending playgroups & ensuring playgroups are supported to encourage literacy & language development through the provision of resources
- Conversation Companions Program in Kindergartens i.e: Maryborough example of trained staff visiting kindergartens to spend time in conversation with children
- Story Time sessions in libraries work extremely well
- Stakeholders from the services sector emphasized the crucial importance of providing opportunities for education of parents commencing at pre-birth on the importance of literacy & language skills This includes educating parents on the importance of conversations & interactions with their children through reading, singing, talking & playing with them in the early years
- Develop consistent, accessible & achievable messages for parents & carers
- Starting before babies are born & building relationships
- Educate parents to read to their children every night when they put their children to bed

Information

- Giving children opportunities to build their skills through conversations, singing, playing, talking, reading outside of home through linking volunteers with preschools i.e. Conversation Companions (See Appendix)
- Access to information & programs for fathers. A rights-based approach to working with children - rights based approach interprets children's situations & lives against the standards set in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also ensures project design is undertaken with children's rights in mind
- A worker based at Centrelink who may run activities/groups or give one-to-one information to parents about language development as they are able to capture a wide audience
- Roving library trucks (as has happened in the past) which go to various neighbourhoods on a regular basis - can do reading groups with the librarian there or give out books in that community. Again very tangible, present & immediately available

Identified Actions

Focus Area: Families are supported to build stronger attachments with children through development of parenting, relationship and literacy/language skills.

ACTION: Provision of information to families will be continued and improved

This will be achieved by providing information and resources for parents and through continuing to expand the provision of services and programs such as Lets Read, Imagination Library, Book Boxes-Free/Exchange libraries in community spaces, Pop up libraries, Mother Goose, early intervention services, free books at hospital when babies are born, MCHN visits, supported playgroups and HIPPIY.

Through the Community Agreement, organisations and businesses can identify ways to commit to developing literacy and language development and be part of the shared agenda.

Up to date information for parents can be made available through the Communities for Children Literacy and Language Worker and through the Early Years Literacy and Language Development Website.

ACTION: Greater awareness of and access to programs for parents

Services and programs can share information through the Early Years Literacy and Language Development website, ensuring families have access to a range of specialised services, local programs and community events.





KEY AREA 3:

The involvement of Services and Programs in Early Literacy and Language Development

Topic:

The right services and programs, and enough of them, are delivered to promote improved attachment and literacy outcomes.

The current situation:

Bendigo has a range of programs that promote literacy and language development in the early years. Many of these programs are delivering to families where there are identified vulnerabilities. The opportunity for cross referral from services and self-referral by families is limited by the lack of access to information about what is available.

While there is a need for a coordinated, focused response to improving children's literacy and language skills, many programs and organisations are linking well. There is a need for further, improved linkages and partnerships between services and programs.

Many programs delivered to the Aboriginal and CALD communities are not culturally relevant. It's crucial that we ensure specific needs of Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities, in relation to early language development, are clearly represented.

What the literature told us:

Within this broader vision for literacy, supporting children's early literacy learning is considered a task for the whole community, with responsibility no longer being passed solely to families and education professionals. In this model, the responsibility for providing dynamic and stimulating literate environments would be extended to the broader community.³

While we have focused on literacy and language development outcomes for children in Bendigo, aged 0-5 years, research clearly identifies that it is the exposure and experiences of multiple and varied opportunities for children and parents to build literacy skills that makes the difference.

In light of research highlighting the importance of developing literacy skills in children from birth to five years and the link between language development and literacy skills, it is vital that all professionals who have direct contact with families should be versed in the importance and development of emergent literacy and language development skills.⁴

Playgroups, early years care and education centres and community health specialists have a vital role at this stage in identifying children and families that may be 'at risk' of educational disadvantage. They also have a unique opportunity to engage with families in supporting them to assist their child in the acquisition of fundamental skills and processes.

Experimental evidence from research consistently shows that exposure to high-quality early childhood education has a positive effect on young children's learning, language and cognitive development, and that this correlation is strongest for children whose home and family situation demonstrates least access to child development resources, both emotional and material.⁵

³Flewitt, Dr Rosie (2013) Occasional Paper 3: Early Literacy: A Broader Vision

⁴Policy Brief No 13 2008 Literacy in Early Childhood- Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital.

⁵Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. (2000). From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

What the stakeholders told us:

- Through the consultation process stakeholders identified that while there are many excellent programs and services addressing early year's literacy and language skill development, it's difficult to find out what services are around. Families interviewed said they would seek information from Maternal Child and Health if that wanted to know what was available but most were unsure of other avenues
- Those working in the service sector highlighted the need for better coordination of existing services. Many indicated that while they knew of programs through networks, these mechanisms were informal and they did not always have the most up to date program and service information
- Multiple and varied opportunities for children and carers to build language skills, from pre-natal education through to preschool programs
- Supported playgroups with qualified child education and development workers
- From ante-natal classes to post delivery to Maternal Child & Health visits and mothers groups, professionals talk about the parents as the "first teachers" and promote the idea of "serve and return"⁶ to highlight the importance of quality talking and interactions between parents and their newborns. One suggestion was to show a well-presented DVD on screens in waiting areas to engage families and show the warm interactions and early literacy resources.
- Playgroups modelling reading from books (Mother Goose is fantastic but it is non-book based, more imagination based). Actual physical demonstrations of 'reading' a book (like library sessions but integrated within the playgroup setting)
- Small and supportive cultural groups to assist individual needs
- Classes to support young parents. Activities around reading could include cooking, gardening, etc.
- A greater focus on language and meaningful interactions, and opportunities within the community that these can be facilitated through.
- Drop-in clinics for families to ask professionals or other families' advice on general childhood development or more specific health and wellbeing questions.
- Playgroups, playgroups, playgroups!!!
- Literacy worker going in to homes and working closely with families to help them with their child's learning, engaging with families pre-birth, establishing relationships with families at this early stage, so if an issue arises there is already a relationship established which can be built upon and issues are addressed early
- Support is needed for children that have a different dialect than English. This could be through ESL strategies.
- Create opportunities to encourage oral language and have oral stories told in a wide range of situations i.e.: 'Yarning circles' and providing children with a chance to hear and tell Aboriginal stories
- Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BDAC) has installed a small corner in the medical waiting room and in another location, with around 100 books in each, as well as cultural games, maths activities and iPads with literacy and numeracy apps. This has been really well received by the community
- Aboriginal language needs to be included through cultural education, dance, stories and art
- Using a developmental tool which provides small steps with children learning a new language i.e.: an ESL/ESD tool for Aboriginal children. This would provide opportunities for children to hear and be read stories that have positive role models from their culture
- A group to support families raising bilingual children.

⁶ http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/multimedia/videos/three_core_concepts/serve_and_return/

Identified Actions

Focus Area: The right services and programs, and enough of them, are delivered to promote parent/child attachment and literacy/language outcomes

ACTION: Development of dedicated children's literacy and language worker positions in the City of Greater Bendigo

The role of the children's literacy and language workers will be to:

- Support coordination and collaboration between services and programs
- Coordinate the dissemination of information to families, community and education settings and services
- Provide education and information for families
- Promote the importance of early reading and the benefits to children and their relationship with parents
- Promote the inclusion of fathers. This relates to recognising the critical role of fathers, to valuing and supporting men in their role as fathers, actively encouraging their participation in programs, and ensuring they are appropriately and equally considered in all aspects of service delivery

ACTION: Professional Development Training

This will include:

- Training for workers across child and family services including child protection workers and for workers who work with parents through their day to day work including housing workers, drug & alcohol workers and mental health workers. The focus of the training will centre on children's literacy and language development and how workers can support children's literacy and language development in their day to day work with parents
- Further training and development for Early Childhood professionals to further support their work with families

ACTION: Provision of services to families will be supported and new initiatives will be encouraged

A range of services and initiatives are currently delivered that promote children's literacy and language development. These include the HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents & Youngsters) program, Mother Goose and Talking Matters. These programs require ongoing support and recurrent funding. There is also a need for a HIPPY program specifically for Aboriginal children and families to compliment the current HIPPY work.

In addition there is a clear need for additional home-based outreach programs for socially isolated or vulnerable families to assist parents/carers build their children's literacy and language skills. Planning for additional home based outreach programs needs to occur in conjunction with the 1st Quarter Leadership Group and Early Years Co-ordination Group.

ACTION: Supporting cultural inclusion and safety

Programs and projects aimed at broader community need to ensure that delivery is culturally inclusive and safe for Aboriginal families and children. In addition the specific needs (cultural and other) of CALD families/communities, in relation to early language development must be clearly represented.

KEY AREA 4:

The involvement of Education in Early Literacy & Language Development

Topic:

Education settings provide a tailored approach and have the resources they need to address the individual literacy needs in their community.

The current situation:

Education settings, including day care facilities, kindergartens, pre-schools and primary schools all play a pivotal role in developing and strengthening literacy and language skills. Many of these education settings across Bendigo have been working with early years services and programs to build better linkages and relationships, providing greater opportunities for children and families. These education settings also recognise the importance of new technologies and their evolving role in assisting students to learn.

What the literature told us:

Linkages between education settings and services

Echoing the findings from greater community linkages, families and children benefit greatly from enhanced relationships and linkages between early years education settings (child care, kindergartens, primary schools) and early years services. There is recognition of the expertise and commitment education settings bring to our community in our pursuits to increase opportunities for children and families.

Education and technology

Literacy practices change over time and new practices emerge. In today's world, most young families' daily lives are characterised by the presence of multiple digital devices which are woven into the fabric of children's everyday experiences of literacy. From a very early age, young children endeavour to read meanings from different signs, symbols and images in printed and digital texts across diverse media. Studies of children's contemporary literacy development have challenged conventional print-based conceptualisations of literacy, and have proposed ways in which practitioners can support early literacy development across multiple media^{7,8}.

Research has demonstrated that access and opportunities to use technology in educational settings where pre-schoolers were supported to use digital media in well planned activities increased children's motivation and concentration, and offered rich opportunities for early literacy, including collaborative interaction, independent learning, communication and creative work. Furthermore, staff welcomed the opportunities the iPad afforded to make links between children's home and school lives and to prepare children for a future where they would need high levels of technological competence and skills⁹.

Technology surrounds us and affects almost all aspects of our daily lives, including the types of books we read to young children.

Nowadays, there are two types of books to read:

- Traditional paper books
- Electronic books ("e-books"), which can be viewed on a computer or via apps on tablets. A narrator reads the story, and children can enjoy interactive features such as animated pictures, music, sound effects and links on the screen that connect to games or an elaboration of the pictures or story.

Concern has been raised about how much time children are spending in front of screens, and whether they learn as much from e-books as they do from traditional print books. There have been several studies about e-books over the past decade, and they have revealed both advantages and disadvantages to e-books. This needs to be explored further through current research.

⁷ Flewitt, R.S. (2013) Multimodal Perspectives on Early Childhood Literacies. In J. Larson and J. Marsh (Eds) THE SAGE HANDBOOK OF EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY (2ND EDITION). 295 – 309.

⁸ Plowman L., Stephen, C. and McPake, J. (2010) Supporting young children's learning with technology at home and in preschool RESEARCH PAPERS IN EDUCATION Vol. 25 (1), 93–113

⁹ Flewitt, R. (2013). Early literacy: a broader vision. TACTYC OCCASIONAL PAPER 3

What our stakeholders told us:

Building better linkages

Draw on existing community linkages between early years education settings (child care, kindergartens, primary schools) and early years services through information sharing, transitions with introductory and familiar technologies between education settings and collaborative discussion of what is working well with integrating educational technologies. There is recognition of the expertise and commitment education settings bring to our community in our pursuits to increase digital learning opportunities for children and families, as well as the need to be responsive to the increased availability and changing technology in children's daily lives.

Education and technology

- A positive and proactive IT strategy related to children's language development - currently technology is being consumed by children indiscriminately. A program that positively utilises technology whilst also building attachment and social skills would be great
- There are a number of Apps and computer games that are fantastic learning tools. Given the exponential growth in technology and the fact that schools are increasingly using technology in everyday learning, technology needs to be a key part of the strategy
- Families need access to computers and iPads

Promotion of research that highlights that early exposure to television can be detrimental to a child's attentional development, a key skill for literacy development in early childhood. While not directly linked to literacy promotion, more awareness about any potential effects may be beneficial.



Identified Actions

Focus Area: Education settings provide a tailored approach and have the resources they need to address the individual literacy and language needs in their community.

ACTION: Increased access to literacy and language resources for families through the schools

Schools provide a critical contact point for parents and can be a vehicle for the dissemination of information on children's literacy and language development.

ACTION: Increased access to school resources

Further work needs to be done to enable access to resources and libraries in schools by children and families.

ACTION: Build the sponsorship of supported playgroups within schools

The success of the supported playgroup at Lightning Reef highlights the value of supported playgroups within a school setting. Further work is required to explore the feasibility of expanding this model.

ACTION: Continue to build better linkages between schools and early years programs for 0-5 year olds particularly OATES, Maternal Child & Health programs, HIPPIY, Let's Read kits and Talking Matters.

There is a need to enhance the linkages between early years programs and schools. Whilst there is work being done in this area there is a need for renewed focus and effort.

ACTION: Explore the development of a children's festival with a focus on children's literacy and language development.

Hearing the voice of children is critical if the community is to better support children's literacy and language development. A children's festival run by children and supported by schools can be an opportunity for children's voices to be heard.

ACTION: Further research the need for the inclusion of technology based literacy programs and resources.

It has been identified by stakeholders that a more positive and proactive IT strategy related to children's language development is required and that there is a need to explore the development of a program that positively utilises technology whilst also building attachment and social skills.

ACTION: Explore the development of the Imagination Library program.

The Imagination Library has been developed through the Dolly Parton Foundation and in Australia is auspiced by United Way Australia. The aim of the Imagination Library is to supply every child in a community, every month, an age appropriate book especially chosen for their age and developmental stage, for the first five years of their life so that when they get to school, books are already a part of their life. The cost is \$72 per child per year.



**Rhyme & read with
your baby today**



**Share books & stories
with me**



**Read, sing,
talk & play
with your child
every day**



Let's yarn & play

Early Years Literacy and Language Development Action Plan

Action Plan Summary

1. COMMUNITY	2. FAMILIES	3. SERVICES	4. EDUCATION
<p>OUTCOME: The community is aware of and committed to improving language and literacy levels of children and works collaboratively to do this.</p> <p>1.1 Community Awareness Campaign</p> <p>1.2 Community Agreement developed to be signed by community partners committing to one action to increase literacy and language development</p> <p>1.3 Development of an Early Years Literacy and Language Development Website will be created to harness information for families, services, educators</p>	<p>OUTCOME: Families are supported to build stronger attachments with children through development of parenting, relationship and literacy/language skills.</p> <p>2.1 Provision of information to families will be continued and improved</p> <p>2.2 Greater awareness of, and access to programs</p>	<p>OUTCOME: The right services and programs, and enough of them, are delivered to promote parent/child attachment and literacy/language outcomes</p> <p>3.1 Families and services will be supported by dedicated literacy/language workers who can support families and service collaboration</p> <p>3.2 Training for professionals and services</p> <p>3.3 Provision of services to families will be supported and new initiatives will be encouraged</p> <p>3.4 Support cultural inclusion and safety</p>	<p>OUTCOME: Education settings provide a tailored approach and have the resources they need to address individual literacy needs in their community</p> <p>4.1 Increased access to literacy and language resources for families</p> <p>4.2 Increase access to school resources</p> <p>4.3 Build the sponsorship of supported playgroups within schools</p> <p>4.4 Continue to build better linkages between education settings and 0-5 programs</p> <p>4.5 A children's festival with a focus on children's literacy and language development</p> <p>4.6 Utilisation of IT to support children's literacy and language development</p> <p>4.7 Development of Imagination Library</p>

ACTION PLAN		FOCUS AREA	ACTIONS	RESOURCES REQUIRED	RESOURCES AVAILABLE
1.0 Community	1.1	Building community awareness of children's literacy and language development needs	<p>Develop a communication strategy and campaign to all community members on importance of literacy and language development for 0-3 year olds</p> <p>Continue to support events in Bendigo that promote literacy and language development (Children Week, Literacy and Numeracy Week)</p> <p>Develop a group of local champions/ ambassadors to advocate and raise awareness</p> <p>Explore the development of an Early Years Literacy and Language Development Festival</p> <p>Support community stakeholders to work in partnership with community leaders, business sector and families, as well as early childhood educators and service providers</p>	<p>\$20,000 for leaflets, posters and media campaign</p> <p>In kind support to be sought and co-ordinated through C4C Bendigo</p> <p>In kind support to be sought and co-ordinated through C4C Bendigo</p> <p>\$15,000 and in kind support co-ordinated through C4C Bendigo</p> <p>In kind support co-ordinated through C4C Bendigo</p>	<p>Funding to be secured</p> <p>C4C Bendigo</p> <p>C4C Bendigo</p> <p>Funding to be secured and in kind support co-ordinated through C4C Bendigo</p> <p>C4C Bendigo</p>
	1.2	Building community commitment to children's literacy and language development	<p>Develop and implement a Community Agreement to be signed by community partners committing to actions to increase children's literacy and language development</p>	<p>In kind support co-ordinated through C4C Bendigo</p>	<p>C4C Bendigo</p>
	1.3	Build resources to support language and literacy development	<p>Development of Early Years Literacy and Language Development Website</p>	<p>\$4000</p>	<p>\$4000 available through Communities for Children</p>

ACTION PLAN		FOCUS AREA	ACTIONS	RESOURCES REQUIRED	RESOURCES AVAILABLE
2.0 Children and Families	2.1	Provision of information to families will be continued and improved	<p>Develop key messages document on importance of talking/reading/rhyming/playing to children from birth</p> <p>Delivery of information sessions for parents</p> <p>Development of Imagination Library</p> <p>Maintaining the Lets Read Program</p>	<p>In kind support co-ordinated through C4C Bendigo</p> <p>In kind support co-ordinated through C4C Bendigo</p> <p>\$72 per annum newborn child. \$100,800 in first year based on number of births in Bendigo per annum.</p> <p>\$10,000 per annum</p>	<p>C4C Bendigo and Children's Literacy and Language Worker</p> <p>C4C Bendigo and Children's Literacy and Language Worker</p> <p>Funding to be secured</p> <p>Funding to be secured</p>
	2.2	<p>Building community commitment to children's literacy and language development</p> <p>Build resources to support language and literacy development</p>	<p>Develop book exchange/drop boxes and pop up libraries</p> <p>Development of Early Years Literacy and Language Development Website</p> <p>Information sessions for workers supporting families</p>	<p>Costs as previously detailed</p> <p>\$5,000 per annum and in kind support</p>	<p>Funding to be secured and C4C Bendigo</p> <p>C4C Bendigo and Children's Literacy and Language Worker</p>

ACTION PLAN		FOCUS AREA	ACTIONS	RESOURCES REQUIRED	RESOURCES AVAILABLE
3.0 Services	3.1	Develop dedicated literacy and language workers	Support coordination and collaboration between services and programs Coordinate the dissemination of information to families, community and education settings and services. Provide education and information for families including fathers	Two EFT required for COGB \$250,000	\$60,000 allocated from C4C for worker based at Bendigo Health
	3.2	Training for professionals and services commit to supporting professional development opportunities	Training for child & family services workers including child protection workers and for workers who work with parents through their day to day work including housing workers, drug & alcohol workers and mental health workers Further training and development for Early Childhood professionals	\$15,000 per annum	Funding to be secured
	3.3	Provision of services to families will be supported and new initiatives will be encouraged	Maintain and expand current Mother Goose program Maintain the current HIPPY program Develop Aboriginal HIPPY program within BDAC. Provide support to original application by BDAC. Maintain and support Talking Matters initiative Develop a home based outreach program focusing on children's language and literacy needs	\$15,000 per annum \$115,000 per annum \$170,000 per annum \$170,000 per annum In kind support Three EFT required \$360,000	Funding to be secured \$40,000 funding available to June 2015. Funding to be secured \$170,000 recurrent funding available Funding to be secured In kind support provided by Bendigo Health and Bendigo Community Health Services Funding to be secured
	3.4	Supporting cultural inclusion and safety	Ensure that delivery is culturally inclusive and safe for Aboriginal families and children through the use of the C4C Cultural Safety tool and process within the early years sector	In kind support coordinated through C4C Bendigo	C4C Bendigo

ACTION PLAN		FOCUS AREA	ACTIONS	RESOURCES REQUIRED	RESOURCES AVAILABLE
4.0 Education	4.1	Increased access to literacy and language resources for families	Dissemination of information on children's literacy and language development through the schools	In kind support	C4C Bendigo Schools
	4.2	Increase access to school resources	Explore with schools access to resources and libraries in schools by children and families.	In kind support	C4C Bendigo Schools
	4.3	Build the sponsorship of supported playgroups within schools	Explore with schools the feasibility of expanding the Lightning Reef Supported Play Group model.	In kind support	C4C Bendigo Schools Bendigo Community Health Service
	4.4	Continue to build better linkages between education settings and 0-5 programs	Promote collaboration and cooperation between community organisations and schools	In kind support	C4C Bendigo and partners Schools
	4.5	A children's festival with a focus on children's literacy and language development	Develop plan for a Children's Festival with Lightning Reef PS as host for the festival	\$10,000 and in kind support	Funding to be sought
	4.6	Utilisation of IT to support children's literacy and language development	Further research addressing the need for inclusion of technology based literacy programs resources	In kind support	C4C Bendigo
	4.7	Development of the Imagination Library program	Explore the development of the Imagination Library program for Bendigo	\$42,000 for the first year and in kind support	C4C Bendigo

Appendices

Please Note:

This Appendix is not an exhaustive list. Examples of early intervention programs, early literacy and language development initiatives and integrated programs are included with the intention of providing a resource of early literacy promotion, services and program support that are, or could be, implemented and adapted to the Bendigo community context to support early language and literacy development in alignment with the Early Years Literacy and Language Development Strategy 2015.

Let's Read

Let's Read is a program to promote reading with children from birth to five years.

Let's Read is an initiative of the Centre for Community Child Health, working with The Smith Family. In Greater Bendigo, it is delivered through Maternal and Children's Health Centres in Eaglehawk, Long Gully and Kangaroo Flat (8 localities in total).

Parents/carers receive reading books to take home and support to encourage them to have fun reading with their young children, and to help their children develop a love of books and the ability to name letters and play with the sounds of words. It is intended to be delivered at four key points in the child's development: from 4 months, 12 months, 18 months and 3.5 years.

In Bendigo it has been previously introduced at the 4 month and 12 months key stage visits (not 18 month or 3.5yrs). Additional problems with delivery of this program are: MCH nurses are already pressed for time in what must happen at each key stage visit. Introducing the Let's Read program and talking about it is only one of the tasks they must deliver. Some MCH nurses are not aware of the Let's Read program and there is a need to revisit training for the nurses and for regular training that is easy for them to attend/complete. The Young Readers Program runs concurrently and this is also introduced at the 4 month key stage visit.

Mother Goose

Mother Goose is a group experience for parents and children aged 0 – 3 years that focuses on the pleasure and power of using oral rhymes, songs, and stories together. The parents gain skills and confidence, which can enable them to create positive family patterns during their children's crucial early years and give their children healthy early experiences with language and communication.

HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters) - (4 to 6 years)

Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), a home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program (Brotherhood of St Laurence).

HIPPY is a program that targets vulnerable families and is focused on children aged between 4 and 6. It is focused on: empowering parents/carers to be their children's first teacher, promoting school readiness and maximising the chances of a successful early school experience, fostering parent/carer involvement in school and community life, and being fun.

The parents become the tutors (paid) and they work in homes with families. There are currently 6 parent tutors in the Bendigo HIPPY program. The program involves fortnightly home visits mixed with parent gatherings on alternate weeks at the Hub and Long Gully Neighbourhood Centre. There are currently 55 families participating.

The program is funded until the end of 2016. Parents are self-referred to HIPPY or through support services.

Talking Matters Bendigo

(Free Speech Pathology Drop-in Clinic for children under school age)

A speech pathology drop-in clinic is a place where families can come to discuss their child's speech and language concerns without having a referral or an arranged appointment. The service is available for children aged birth to school entry. No appointment is necessary and a 30 minute timeslot will be allocated on arrival. A brief check of the presenting child's speech and language will occur with some suggestions to assist the child's communication.

This is a collaboration of Speech Pathology services from Bendigo Health, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the City of Greater Bendigo's Maternal and Child Health Service and speech pathology academic staff and students from the La Trobe Rural Health School. The clinic helps families to easily access speech and language advice early and supports better literacy and academic outcomes for Bendigo children.

Partnering with agencies and other local services has enabled the sharing of ideas and resources resulting in a positive project for families in the Bendigo community.

Small Talk

Smalltalk is a set of evidence-based parenting strategies that parents can use to enhance their young children's learning. These strategies include the way parents can talk, listen and play with their children, read together and how they can engage them in interesting activities.

The *Smalltalk* strategies have been specially designed for children of families who are experiencing some disadvantage. The strategies offer parents ideas on how to use everyday opportunities to create a strong foundation for their learning and development in later years. *Smalltalk* is delivered by early childhood service providers through their supported playgroups which are led by trained professionals.

Smalltalk includes a range of materials to help parents build on their everyday interactions with their child, improve their child's learning and development, and enhance parent confidence.

These materials include:

- conversation cards illustrating the five core elements
- opportunity sheets with examples of activities or situations
- *My Action Plan* booklets to help parents set goals for using strategies
- video demonstrations for professionals and for parents
- tip sheets on child development and parent self-care.

Off to an Early Start - OATES

The Off to an Early Start Program is a program offered by the City of Greater Bendigo and funded through the Communities for Children Strategy.

The program offers support to local families who may require assistance in getting organised to take their children to preschool.

This innovative program is free and available to families living within the areas of Eaglehawk, Long Gully, California Gully, Ironbark, North Bendigo, White Hills and Kangaroo Flat.

The program does not provide transport but provides assistance to families in establishing a routine to enable them to attend pre-school on a regular basis.

The program can also assist families in connecting into local playgroups.

By establishing these links to early childhood services it then makes it easier for young children and families to make the transition to the routine of school.

Baptcare Supported Playgroup

The Baptcare Supported Playgroup is facilitated through the Baptcare Home-Start program and supports parents and children involved in the Home-Start Program.

Home-Start is a voluntary home visiting service that offers practical support and friendship to families with children under the age of five.

All Home-Start volunteers offer their time on a voluntary basis; most are parents or grandparents themselves. Volunteers are linked to families on a one-to-one basis to provide support.

Home-Start volunteers can also assist by giving low key support and friendship on a short or long term basis.

Mother Goose

Mother Goose is a group experience for parents and children aged 0 – 3 years that focuses on the pleasure and power of using oral rhymes, songs, and stories together. The parents gain skills and confidence, which can enable them to create positive family patterns during their children's crucial early years and give their children healthy early experiences with language and communication.

La Trobe University (0 – 4 years and 5 years to 12 years)

La Trobe has about 300 education students who have to do 20 hours of community service as part of their community development subject.

This would appear to be a significant opportunity to connect La Trobe students to Children's Literacy programs and aid the resourcing of these programs.

Some Children's Literacy Programs that the Education students are involved in, include:

1. A Smith Family and La Trobe partnership commenced early in 2011. Education students work at the Kangaroo Flat library with visiting playgroups, where different children's literacy activities are provided.
2. Another Smith Family and La Trobe partnership is an after school club held in Eaglehawk for Eaglehawk Primary School students. It's a learning club with lots of activities around literacy. It is held all year.

The Smith Family: Learning Clubs

As implemented in association with La Trobe University, Learning Clubs are an initiative of the The Smith Family to provide a safe and supportive out-of-school learning environment where primary or secondary students can participate in activities that develop their academic and social skills. The learning is supported by volunteer tutors at no cost to the student.

This program builds on research understandings that learning opportunities outside of school hours is one way to improve the learning success of students and positively influence educational and personal outcomes. This program focuses on literacy and numeracy learning activities and increasing student engagement and confidence.

The Smith Family: student2student program

The student2student program assists students that need help with reading. Students are teamed with a phone buddy who is at least two years older.

The buddy is trained to help others improve their reading skills. Over an 18-21 week school year period, the buddy rings the student two to three times a week and listens to them read a book for at least 20 minutes.

Confidentiality of the student is maintained through being based at different schools and only using a first name and phone number to make contact- either through a landline or mobile phone program. The program is provided at no cost to the student with borrowed book resources. Recent evaluations of the program indicate that the majority of students who took part in the program improved their reading age/level. This, in turn, improves their confidence and self-esteem. Reimbursement for phone calls, provision of a mobile phone subject to availability/funding and training is provided to the buddy and they must be in Years 6-10 to participate in the program.

Young Readers Program (children aged 4 months and 2 years)

The Young Readers Program encourages Victorian families and caregivers to read to their children. It does this by providing professional development to maternal and child health nurses, early childhood workers and public librarians specialising in children's literature and providing literacy resources to families with young children.

The Young Readers Program aims to:

- promote the importance of reading to young children
- provide professional development for Victorian maternal and child health nurses, children's librarians, early childhood professionals and childcare staff
- promote family involvement in young children's literacy development through reading together
- promote the involvement of community support in helping families and caregivers value literacy and reading for pleasure
- increase access to books for families and caregivers with young children
- improve literacy outcomes in Victorian children
- support Australian children's literature

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is an international parent education family support and school readiness program supporting families from birth until their child enters kindergarten.

'Parents as Teachers' is built on the concept that all families have strengths; and that parents, being experts on their child, are in the best position to influence their child's readiness to learn. Research demonstrates that parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement.

This research-based program provides information, support and encouragement to help parents engage with their children in ways that provide a strong foundation for children's development and family well-being.

'Parents as Teachers' is one of thirteen that have been awarded evidence-based status for home visiting programs by the US federal government. It is also on the list of evidence-based programs eligible for funding under the Brighter Futures program in NSW and has been supported by the ACT government as the home visiting program of choice for its children and family centres.

Conversation Companions

Conversation Companions is a program delivered in the Central Goldfields. This program links retired school teachers with kindergartens, with these volunteers visit weekly to improve youngsters' conversation skills using games, activities and conversations. Aimed at enhancing children's literacy and speech skills at a critical life stage, Conversation Companions is a great example of a local community working together to find a creative and effective way to help children improve their language skills, and to help those with language delays.

Educational Programs

Integrated programs that offer support within a community setting such as a school or childcare centre can also make early intervention in the home more effective.

Two such programs from the US showed positive results for the children:

- the Abecedarian K-2 Educational Support Program, designed to improve the child's home learning support
- the Schools of the 21st Century program, which provides universal access to quality childcare, before and after-school care, and extensive family support services within the school environment.

Bath Kids Literature Festival

This is the largest dedicated children's book festival in the UK, and presents over 80 public, ticketed events and an extensive program of events in schools.

The Festival regularly attracts some of the biggest children's authors and illustrators from the UK and internationally. The ethos of the festival is simple: to entertain children, and to enthuse them about reading. They aim to create a friendly, family atmosphere in which young book fans can come along to Festival events and meet their favourite authors and book characters.

Paint the Town REaD

Paint the Town REaD is an early literacy community scheme that encourages the whole community to read, talk, sing and rhyme with children from birth, so that they will be ready for reading and writing at school.

First developed in the New South Wales town of Parkes in the 1990s, Paint the Town REaD now takes its message, 'Read, talk, sing and rhyme with your child from birth' across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and beyond.

There are two key features of Paint the Town REaD:

1. an annual Reading Day engaging the whole community where young children are read to in their local shops by shop staff, celebrities, High School students and volunteers, and
2. year-round activities encouraging everyone to think smarter about how to include early literacy in all aspects of their life and work — from having a reading tent at the local markets to 'Have you read with your child today?' coasters in a local pub.

The Meeting Place

The Meeting Place initiative brings together Aboriginal children and families for special activities aimed at teaching and celebrating their culture.

The Meeting Place is a partnership of Mount Alexander LGA agencies who work to support and initiate activities for Aboriginal children and families. The partners include: Castlemaine District Community Health, Castlemaine Secondary College, Mount Alexander Shire Council, Loddon Mallee Murray Medicare Local and Castlemaine Health. The Central Victorian Health Alliance funded the group to provide a fortnightly program for Aboriginal children.

The Perry Preschool Project

The Perry Preschool Project, carried out from 1962 to 1967, provided high-quality preschool education to three- and four-year-old African-American children living in poverty and assessed to be at high risk of school failure. About 75 percent of the children participated for two school years (at ages 3 and 4); the remainder participated for one year (at age 4). The preschool was provided each weekday morning in 2.5-hour sessions taught by certified public school teachers with at least a bachelor's degree. The average child-teacher ratio was 6:1. The curriculum emphasized active learning, in which the children engaged in activities that (i) involved decision making and problem solving, and (ii) were planned, carried out, and reviewed by the children themselves, with support from adults. The teachers also provided a weekly 1.5-hour home visit to each mother and child, designed to involve the mother in the educational process and help implement the preschool curriculum at home. The program's cost was approximately \$11,300 per child per school year (in 2007 dollars).

Go Goldfields

Go Goldfields (GG) is an innovative alliance of organisations, created to deliver locally relevant responses to social issues that are too complex and too long-term for previous solutions. Funded by the Victorian Government Go Goldfields has developed a series of shire wide, community-driven approaches to improve social, education and health outcomes for children, youth and families.

Underpinned by a focus on prevention and early intervention, Go Goldfields involves families to deliver improved literacy for children aged 0 – 8 years; building speech and language skills to provide a great start to learning.

It is developing supportive learning environments for youth to extend their future career options.

Go Goldfields is engaging professional artists to strengthen the arts and build an aspirational community. The arts have been adopted into all aspects of the action plan to foster learning; build confidence; motivate; and connect.

A whole-of-community response is planned to deliver safe spaces for women and their children.

The strategic, "place-based" approach targets the whole community and gives the community ownership of the plan, so ensuring the plan's sustainability.

Go Goldfields has implemented a children's literacy plan that involves a range of creative initiatives to further children language and literacy development.

Pop-up Storytelling (Guerilla Libraries)

Pop up Story Telling is a local Bendigo initiative delivered by professional story teller, Narelle Stone of Quirky Tales. The aim of Pop up Story telling is to promote the importance of reading, laughing, talking and playing with your child every day. The sessions involve a range of interactive storytelling and singing activities. The sessions are run for children aged 0-5 years old in community settings.

In 2014 a number of sessions were delivered by Narelle in various community settings through Communities for Children Bendigo with additional C4C provision of a give-away quality children's book to children attending.

The Castlemaine Children's Literature Festival

The Castlemaine Children's Literature Festival is an annual one of a kind event which was established in 2011. A perfect fit for the region – with a strong community of writers, illustrators, performers, art makers and literary enthusiasts. The festival also provides some well-needed, accessible and affordable activities in the school holidays and ensures that children are creative producers – not just passive consumers.

The festival aims are:

- To be child and young people centred, interactive and collaborative
- To involve local artists and partner with community organisations
- For activities/events to be literacy or literature related

The festival has expanded over the years to include the communities of Newstead, Fryerstown, Taradale and Maldon. Many other community organisations have been involved also; the Castlemaine Library, the local Girl Guides, Connecting Country, Castlemaine Secondary College and Buda Historic Homestead and Garden to name just a few. Whilst uniquely not a schools' based festival, Winters Flat Primary School hosted the wonderful 'Cooking the Books' in 2012 and local author Mark Penzac ran a series of workshops for a senior class at Castlemaine North Primary School in 2013.

The Castlemaine Children's Festival brings the community of Mount Alexander Shire together and the Festival is created with the children and young adults of our community central to planning and programming. Connections are made between community groups and parents that may otherwise not have occurred – and cultural links are also established.

The Festival's reputation is such, that it now welcomes audiences from across the state!

The Itty Bitty Book Van

The Itty Bitty Book Van is a travelling children's bookshop. Kids adore 'Enid' the vintage caravan which is stocked with a carefully curated inventory of childhood classics, favourites, picture books, early reader and milestone theme titles. We also take pride in stocking many beautifully written titles from smaller, independent publishers. The Itty Bitty Book Van chooses to dedicate its limited shelf space to high quality children's titles. Current releases, classics and a high percentage of Australian authored titles fill the shelves.

Free story time sessions are always popular and Itty Bitty Book Van staff are always on hand to offer expert advice and trusted recommendations. Even online, the Itty Bitty Book Van details children's books via the bookshop blog giving online customers an in-depth look at selected titles.

The Itty Bitty Bookshop is about offering children a memorable, positive bookshop experience. We invite children into the enchanting space, encourage them to browse the selections and offer the opportunity for them to independently select a book (or two!) that they'd love to take home and treasure. It is hoped that these great experiences with books will help to foster a love for books and reading.

Goldfields Library Corporation (GLC)

Goldfields Libraries present a range of fun and educational programs which introduce children to the wonderful world of books in a fun and social atmosphere, with the belief that early enjoyment of stories, books and reading can make a positive difference to young children.

Programs include:

- **Children's Programs**

Early enjoyment of stories, books and reading can make a positive difference to young children.

Storytime is a fabulous way of introducing children (0-5 year olds) to the wonderful world of books in a fun and social atmosphere. Storytime runs during school term.

- **Baby Rhyme Time**

Encourages an early love of language, books and reading. These half hour sessions focus on interactive songs, rhymes and very simple stories for children 0-1.

- **Toddler Time**

Enjoy a great outing for toddlers 1-2 years of age. A fun half hour of rhymes, songs and stories that will shake your sillies out!

- **Storytime**

For preschool children aged 3-5 years. These fun filled and lively 45 minute sessions include stories, songs, rhymes and a simple craft activity.

- **Storytime Specials**

Great Storytime Specials for young families held at key times throughout the year. We celebrate National Simultaneous Storytime in May, Children's Book Week in August, Children's Week in October, Christmas in December, and Bedtime Storytime in winter.

- **School Holiday Programs**

Encourages a love of recreational reading. Each term break GLC run a program of literature based activities throughout our larger libraries suited to the primary school aged child. Activities include performers, workshops, craft and good old fashioned fun.

- **Summer Reading Club**

Each summer GLC run the Summer Reading Club which is all about reading for pleasure.

- **Baby's First Library Card**

Goldfields Library loves little library members! All new babies in the Goldfields Library region receive at the 4 month Maternal and Child Health check a special invitation to become a library member. Baby members receive a customised library card, Rhyme Time booklet, DVD and a board book suited to baby's early months.

- **Baby Book Bags**

Babies born in Mt Alexander Shire receive at the 4 month Maternal and Child Health check their very first library bag complete with Rhyme Time booklet and DVD, board book and library information. The Baby Book Bags are kindly provided by Friends of the Castlemaine Library.

- **Loddon Little Readers**

Babies born in the Shire of Loddon are encouraged to become Loddon Little Readers receiving at the 4 month Maternal and Child Health check a library bag, Rhyme Time booklet, DVD and board book.

- **Educational Programs**

GLC welcome visits from childcare centres, kindergartens and primary school to tour, borrow or participate in our author and Children's Book Week programs.

Hanen

The Hanen approach was developed in Canada in the mid 1970's as an innovative way to support children with language delays. It focuses on putting the parent at the forefront and in the primary role of helping their children improve their language and communication skills. The Hanen approach has developed into a range of programs and training for parents and workers.

Further information about Hanen and an outline of the Hanen approach can be viewed on the Hanen Centre website: www.hanen.org

Training

Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation provide training for early years' service providers in a shared literacy and pre-literacy framework.

The Early Language & Literacy Program provides literacy instruction to preschool teachers, early years teachers, special needs teachers, teachers' aides, parents and community members.

It consists of a 5-day course and ongoing assistance to ensure the inclusion of Phonemic awareness activities and early language skill builders into the curriculums of pre and primary schools. These pre-literacy games and activities provide children with the basics of English language development that are essential building blocks for learning to read, spell, write and comprehend English.

The Early Language & Literacy program also works with communities in Indigenous First Languages on request. Making connections between Indigenous Australian First Language and English is vital for the development of personal and community health, welfare and education.



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SECTION 1:

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