



# PROMISING PRACTICE IN //BESTSTART

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## How to increase participation in early years services

Participation in early years services supports children's healthy growth, development and wellbeing. Best Start partnerships use an improvement science approach to increase participation in universal early years services.

This involves exploring the root causes of low participation, identifying possible solutions and then testing these through multiple Plan-Do-Study-Act (PSDA) cycles. As part of the initiative's learning program, Best Start facilitators came together in February 2021 to reflect on what they are learning about what works to increase participation in kindergarten, Supported Playgroups and the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) service.

This document outlines ten promising practice or process changes that led to increased enrolments or increased attendance that were highlighted at the February 2021 learning session. For each change idea, the testing site(s) is noted and Best Start facilitators are encouraged to reach out to the relevant site's facilitator for more information about the change idea and how they went about testing and/or embedding it. A process is also provided at the end of this document that facilitators may like to use with their partnership and/or improvement teams to support them to use the learnings contained in this document.





## How to increase enrolments

The following change ideas were shared as strong examples of change ideas that improve enrolment numbers in kindergarten and/or Supported Playgroups or scheduling of MCH Key Age and Stage appointments.

### Enabling online enrolments

The development of an online kindergarten central enrolment form enabled referring organisations to complete kindergarten enrolment on behalf of their families. In instances where the child wasn't yet old enough for kindergarten, the online form allowed referrers to submit an 'expression of interest' form, so that the child's family could be contacted at the relevant time to enrol into kindergarten. This process change has not only increased kindergarten enrolments but has also supported early identification of children eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK).

**Service:** Kindergarten, ESK

**Best Start sites:** Latrobe, Hume



**Welcome to playgroup book,  
Best Start Wyndham**

### Developing resources to engage referrers

A 'welcome to playgroup' book was created by playgroup facilitators and then shared with referring services. Greater referrals and enrolments into supported playgroups (SPG) resulted. Facilitators also created a second version of this book aimed at sharing information about SPG with parents and carers, which gave families an idea of what to expect before attending.

**Service:** SPG

**Best Start site:** Wyndham





## Building referral of eligible children into practice and/or processes

### Collaborating to identify children in out-of-home care eligible for kindergarten or ESK

This change idea came about after the team at Ballarat decided to examine their existing processes for identifying children in out-of-home care (OOHC), eligible for ESK & kindergarten. This helped them identify gaps in their existing processes and gave birth to the idea to collaborate with LOOKOUT to boost identification and enrolment for ESK & kindergarten. Best Start Ballarat then approached LOOKOUT with the idea to cross-reference the list provided to them by child protective services (which includes details of new and changed care notifications) to ensure that they were comparable. The steps in their quarterly process are:

1. The Best Start facilitator goes over the list provided by child protection and identifies eligible children.

2. The facilitator then contacts central registration to check if the identified children are either registered or attending.
3. After going through the list with central registration, the facilitator then has a phone conversation with LOOKOUT to ensure that information regarding where the child is registered, or attending is comparable.
4. If this information is not comparable, or if LOOKOUT does not have this information, LOOKOUT contacts the child's caseworker (at child protection) to follow-up.

**Service:** Kindergarten, ESK

**Best Start sites:** Ballarat

### Using the MCH database to identify children eligible for kindergarten and ESK

The change idea supports a systematic approach to the effective identification of children who are: known to child protection, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, have refugee/asylum seeker status, eligible for kinder or ESK. The steps are as follows:

1. An agreement was established between the MCH service and Best Start for MCH to share quarterly data with Best Start, identifying all the children/families who attended any KAS visit and fell into any of the three specified categories.
2. The Best Start facilitator then cross-checks this list with central registration to see if these children are either registered or enrolled for ESK/kindergarten.

3. The families of those identified as eligible, but not enrolled or registered, are then contacted by the Best Start facilitator who discusses eligibility and offers support as required.

The Best Start facilitator found that due to factors such as staff changes and additional work pressures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, MCH was not always providing this list as agreed. To address this issue, the facilitator has recently provided the Central Registration Officer with key dates where MCH are expected to provide Best Start with data. If the data is not received on these dates, the Central Registration Officer contacts MCH to gently remind them and follow-up. The effectiveness of this adaptation is currently being assessed.

**Service:** Kindergarten, ESK

**Best Start sites:** Cardinia



## How to increase attendance

The following change ideas were shared as strong examples of change ideas that improve attendance at kindergarten, Supported Playgroups and/or MCH Key Age and Stage appointments.

### Delivering services online

Messaging apps such as WhatsApp have been used to deliver virtual playgroup sessions and provide one-to-one support to families during COVID-19 restrictions. In some cases, participation in playgroup when delivered virtually has exceeded face-to-face attendance rates.

**Service:** SPG

**Best Start site:** Whittlesea

### Sending e-reminders for appointments

Using messaging apps or sending text messages on the day of appointment has increased attendance rates at MCH Key Age and Stage visits.

**Service:** MCH

**Best Start site:** Latrobe

### Delivering services when and where suits families

Annually surveying families to understand their preferences around kindergarten locations and days/times, to inform kindergarten scheduling, has led to increased attendance.

**Service:** Kindergarten

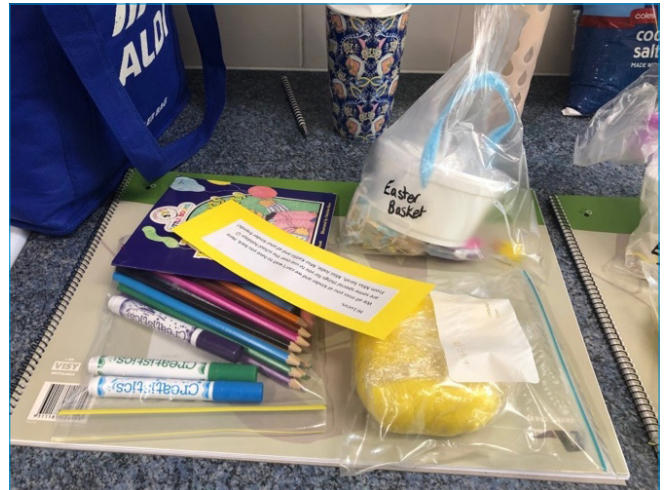
**Best Start site:** Cardinia

### Making personal contact with families

Hand-delivering or posting personalised letters and home learning materials to families who were not regularly attending kindergarten during COVID-19 restrictions was found to have a positive impact. Families often replied and continued to stay in contact with the service as a result.

**Service:** Kindergarten

**Best Start sites:** Casey, Latrobe



Kindergarten home learning pack, Best Start Latrobe

### Following up missed appointments

Developing a protocol on how to follow-up on missed appointments resulted in more consistent follow-up practice and a higher proportion of missed appointments being rescheduled and subsequently attended.

**Service:** MCH

**Best Start sites:** Maribyrnong, Latrobe

### Following up children with lower kindergarten attendance

Collating and analysing attendance data across multiple kindergartens was found to be an efficient way to identify and then follow up children missing multiple sessions, enabling supports to be provided to overcome each child's barriers to participation.

**Service:** Kindergarten

**Best Start site:** Latrobe



## Using the learnings from Best Start

Best Start facilitators are encouraged to consider which of these promising change ideas could be applied to their setting. It's important to note that although these ideas have shown promising results in their site of origin, each of them will require testing and possible adaptation through Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles in new and different contexts. The following process may be used by facilitators with their partnerships and/or improvement teams to identify which of these ten change ideas might be most appropriate to test in their own site.

1. Start by reviewing your stretch goals. For each determine:
  - a. Is it focused on increasing enrolments or attendance?
  - b. Is it focused on participation in kindergarten, ESK, SPG or MCH?
  - c. Is it focused on improving the participation of specific cohorts of children and/or families (e.g. Aboriginal, OOHC, refugee/asylum seeker)? (Change ideas focused on these cohorts will be relevant here.)
2. Using the responses to the above questions, you will be able to determine a shortlist of change ideas relevant to each of your stretch goals.
3. Review the shortlist for each stretch goal, asking the following questions of each change idea:
  - a. What is the appetite of stakeholders to test and/or adopt this idea?
  - b. What structural or resource barriers exist to testing this idea? How easily might they be overcome?
  - c. What is our hunch about the likelihood of this idea being successful in our context?
4. Using the responses to the above questions, you will have identified which ideas are most palatable to the partnership or improvement team and/or simplest to test. You could use this information to guide your decision as to which promising change ideas to test first.

### The Promising Practice series

The *Promising Practice in Best Start* series captures what is being learnt through Best Start about how to use quality improvement to increase participation in early years services. The series draws on insights from Best Start facilitators and is produced by the Centre for Community Child Health.

#### About Best Start

Best Start is a Victorian Department of Education and Training place-based early years initiative focused on increasing participation in key early years services, particularly for children experiencing vulnerability and Aboriginal children. There are 30 Best Start project sites across Victoria, six of which work specifically with local Aboriginal communities. The Centre for Community Child Health has been working alongside Best Start since 2016 to support the initiative's implementation of a quality improvement approach.

For more information visit: *Supporting Best Start*.

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*The Centre for Community Child Health acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging.*



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