



PROMISING PRACTICE IN //BESTSTART

March 2023

Ideas for improving kindergarten participation

Participation in early years services supports children's healthy growth, development and wellbeing. Best Start partnerships across Victoria 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.

This document features three of the 30 Best Start sites – Casey, Ballarat and Delkaia – and their work to improve kindergarten participation in 2022. It outlines what they found worked to support children and families' participation in early years services, and the enablers of their improvement work.

Best Start facilitators are encouraged to reach out to the site facilitators for more information about their promising change ideas and how they went about testing and/or embedding them.



Practices: action taken to improve practice – e.g. developing and using a checklist.

Enablers: factors in the wider environment that support practice improvement – e.g. people working together.



Casey Best Start: Supporting families of a refugee and asylum seeker background to engage with kindergarten

“Using an interpreter is a skill to be taught and practiced yet it’s often not in anyone’s training”

– Phoebe Davey and Katherine Cooney, Foundation House.

What was the issue and how was it identified?

The Casey Best Start site partnered with Foundation House in late 2021, creating a Community of Practice (CoP) focused on improving inclusion of families from refugee backgrounds in universal early years services. Hampton Park is a suburb with a growing refugee and asylum seeker population, particularly from Afghanistan (5.2%). It was identified as the focus for the Community of Practice due to its increasing numbers of children eligible for Early Start Kindergarten (ESK) and the low numbers of ESK enrolments. An audit of kindergartens in the suburb identified a low use of interpreters (2%). It was also discovered that many of the kindergartens in Hampton Park had little knowledge of the interpreter service or acknowledged nervousness and low confidence about working with interpreters. It was hypothesised that a key driver of low ESK enrolments was a communication barrier with refugee and asylum seeker families.

What was tested and found to work?

In response to the hypothesised issue, a range of change ideas were developed and tested to overcome the communication barrier. Some ideas focused on increasing the confidence and capacity of kindergarten staff to use interpreting services:

- Preschool Field Officers emailed detailed step-by-step instructions on how to sign up and access Language Loop interpreters. They were available to support kindergartens through this process and role modelled using interpreters in their own interactions with families. Ongoing phone calls by members of the CoP targeted those kindergartens who had not yet subscribed to the interpreter service.

Some ideas involved building the capacity of library staff to actively engage families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and/or refugee backgrounds:

- The Central Enrolments team leader connected with the Hampton Park Library to upskill library staff in identifying and supporting families with kindergarten enrolment.
- This has also involved supporting and preparing library staff, especially new staff, to listen and hear the potentially disturbing stories that may result once someone has been asked if they are of refugee background.

Some of these ideas were about simplifying information about ESK and kindergarten for families from non-English speaking backgrounds:

- Modifying language on enrolment forms so it was clearer and easier to understand for those from non-English speaking backgrounds and/or with low literacy skills.
- Local playgroups adapting flyers to plain English with culturally inclusive images.
- Early years information in plain English presented on the community notice board at the library.



What was the impact?

The idea focused on increasing the use of interpreters in kindergartens led to:

- a 99% subscription rate to Language Loop by kindergartens by the end of 2022, up from 2%
- an increase in the proportion of kindergarten staff feeling very confident to use interpreters from 20% in March 2022 to 35% in September 2022.
- one kindergarten hosting a body safety session with parents where working with an interpreter enabled a mother (of a pre-schooler) with no English language skills to engage with the content and ask questions. It amplified a community voice that – without the service – would have remained unheard, and nurtured relationships between staff and parents.

What was learnt?



Promising practices to reduce communication barriers for families of a refugee and asylum seeker background

1. Step-by-step instructions for staff about how to access interpreter services.
2. Ongoing follow-up phone calls to support services to subscribe and use interpreter services.
3. CALD Outreach Officer providing outreach to refugee and asylum seeker families and to services targeting families eligible for ESK enrolment.
4. Training of library staff by central enrolments personnel to identify and engage families who may be eligible for ESK.

Enablers of this improvement work

1. Choosing a site that is 'ready' – a suburb or group of services who are ready and willing to participate, rather than simply focusing on an area with the largest refugee or migrant population.
2. The Foundation House Early Years Family Centred Practice Audit tool, adapted from Shepparton Best Start 'Ready Agencies' tool and further developed and piloted with Hume Best Start in 2019, helped to prioritise the focus of the CoP's work.
3. The support of Foundation House to co-facilitate and support the CoP.
4. A CALD outreach officer employed by City of Casey who could test and trial the outreach ideas generated by the CoP.



Ballarat Best Start: Making Early Start Kindergarten enrolment ‘everyone’s responsibility’

“I would rather children are registered multiple times instead of not registered at all.”

– Rebecca Eales, former City of Ballarat Best Start Facilitator

What was the issue and how was it identified?

The Best Start partnership identified low numbers of ESK enrolments in their municipality across all eligible groups i.e. children known to child protection (CKCP), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children of refugee and asylum seeker families. In determining a possible driver of this issue, the Best Start facilitator observed increasing workloads for early years services and family services, and the flow on effect of decreased collaboration between these services to identify ESK children.

What was tested and found to work?

One change idea that was identified and tested as a response to this issue was a simple early years checklist which prompted service providers to ask themselves *“What are you doing in the 0-5 years space?”* and consider a range of possible actions. This more suggestive, less prescriptive checklist was found to be easily adopted and spread.

STAFF CHECKLIST TO DISCUSS WITH PARENTS

1. Maternal Child Health and Immunisation

- Discuss value of child health visits with family –
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/maternal-and-child-health-services>
- Does the family currently attend MCH appointments?
- Are the child/rens immunisations up to date?

2. Kindergarten Registration and Early Start Kinder

- Discussed with family
 - Postcard given to family
- Hardcopies can be obtained from Parent Place 5302 5165



Other change ideas tested included:

- postcards with a QR code that was linked to the City of Ballarat’s Central Enrolments registration page
- facilitating presentations to child protection personnel
- facilitating Enrolment Week where Best Start staff focused on assisting families to navigate the enrolment process.

Family & Children's Services

City of Ballarat Family and Children's Services

- Maternal and Child Health
- Supported Playgroups
- Central Kindergarten Registrations
- Child Care (including Family Day Care and Occasional Child Care)
- Parent Place
- Childhood Immunisation services

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CITY OF BALLARAT

What was the impact?

Between January and June 2022, there was an overall trend of increasing monthly ESK enrolments across the City of Ballarat. Thirty-two enrolments were received in the first quarter and 68 in the second (Figure 1).

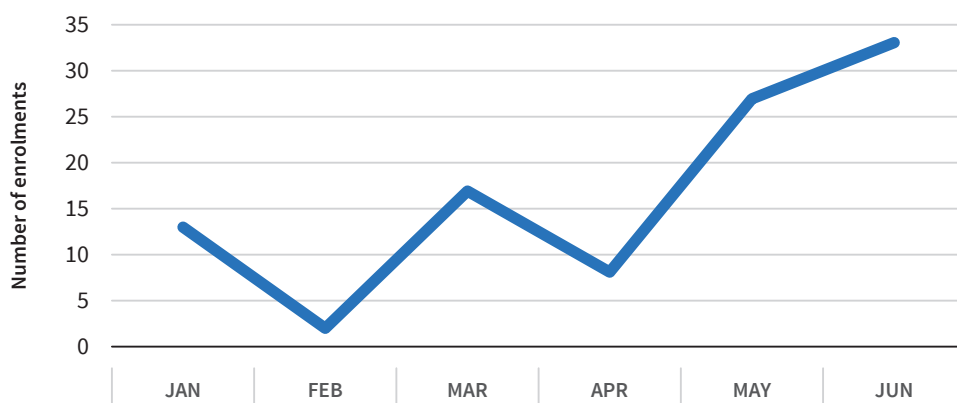


Figure 1: ESK enrolments January-June 2022



What was learnt?



Promising practices to support services to identify and refer eligible families to ESK

1. A simple early years checklist for 'touch point' services (any service that connects directly with families).
2. Postcards with a QR code directed to the Central Enrolments website distributed by touch point services.

Enablers of this improvement work

- Focusing on rebuilding relationships with partners that had lapsed during COVID
- Targeting the touch point services for children experiencing vulnerability to test these change ideas, such as:
 - Child Protection and Family Services at the City of Ballarat
 - Maternal and Child Health, and Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health services
 - Services targeting families who have experienced family violence, such as The Orange Door
 - The Salvation Army
 - Supported Playgroup
 - Central Enrolments.
- Regular quarterly learning and reflection sessions that allowed partners to share their Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles
- Linking PDSA cycles to stretch goals and logic models, and providing visually digestible data contributed to a culture of learning and collaboration. Visit [Supporting Best Start](#) for more information on stretch goals and logic models.





Delkaia Best Start: Embedding and linking early years education curriculum to the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan

What was the issue and how was it identified?

Kindergartens in the Northern Grampians Shire (NGS) were not linking their kindergarten curriculum to the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan as confidently as those services in Horsham. This issue was identified by the Delkaia Best Start partnership through regular data collected from services across the Shire about their cultural safety practice for Aboriginal families. This was an important issue to address as linking curriculum to the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan was identified as a key driver to improving cultural safety for Aboriginal children and therefore their engagement in kindergarten.



What was tested and found to work?

The Delkaia Best Start partnership set a stretch goal of 100% of NGS kindergartens embedding and linking to the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan within their curriculum. To begin, the partnership focused on a strong performing 3 and 4-year-old kindergarten service which had already demonstrated cultural competency, successfully linking their kindergarten curriculum to the Possum Skin Pedagogy. The partnership then posed the question: 'How can we find easier ways to link Marrung to kindergarten curriculum to make it as easy as linking to Possum Skin Pedagogy?'

Two change ideas were identified and tested:

- The sharing and reviewing of resources from other kindergarten services in the Shire who had already successfully linked their curriculum to Marrung.
- Working with the Koorie Pre-School Assistant who shared a 'cheat sheet' she had developed that showed clear links between the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) and Marrung.

What was the impact?

As a result of actioning these change ideas, Aboriginal culture is now embedded in the curriculum of the focus service. One example of this is the increase in cultural experiences provided to the children. The kindergarten teacher in the focus service has increased her confidence and capacity to track their kindergarten curriculum against the Marrung Education Plan. She intends to share the 'cheat sheet' with the co-located childcare centre educators to ensure the whole precinct is working together to create a positive learning and development environment for Koorie and non-Aboriginal children.



What was learnt?

Promising practices to link kindergarten curriculum to the Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan

1. A 'cheat sheet' making it easier for services to link the Marrung Education Plan with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.
2. One-to-one coaching on the Marrung Principles and leveraging Koorie education support networks.
3. Sharing learning experiences and reflecting with other champion services.

Enablers of this improvement work

1. Selecting a committed and willing service provider to work with who has already demonstrated cultural competence.
2. Leveraging Koorie-specific support networks to share resources.
3. Developing and leveraging strong relationships with partner services that share similar goals.

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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