

**QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006**



The purpose of this update is to provide Best Start, Supported Parent Groups and Playgroups partners and relevant stakeholders with information on the progress of statewide projects, relevant initiatives, resources, training opportunities and contacts across the state.

Best Start is a whole of government early years project jointly auspiced by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education and Training.

Best Start aims to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of all Victorian children from pregnancy through transition to school (0-8 years). These aims are being achieved by supporting communities, parents, and service providers to improve universal early years services so they are more responsive to local needs. The strong emphasis in the work of Best Start is on prevention and early intervention.

These improvements in services are expected to result in:

- Better access to child and family support, health services and early education
- Improvements in parents' capacity, confidence and enjoyment of family life
- Communities that are more child and family friendly

There are currently 28 Best Start sites operating across the state. The Best Start approach is to strengthen the local capacity of parents, families and communities and early years services to better provide for the needs of **all** young children and their families. This is achieved by:

- Listening to parent and family knowledge and expectations
- The inclusion of vulnerable children and families in early years services
- The inclusion of Aboriginal children and their families
- Ensuring services are inclusive of culturally diverse children and families
- Mobilising community interest, resources and infrastructure to create child-friendly communities
- Translating early childhood evidence into practice
- Co-ordinating and integrating existing services
- Introducing innovative changes to services, based on evidence
- Developing strong cross-sectoral local partnerships

[Details of each of the Best Start sites across the state can be found at www.beststart.vic.gov.au](http://www.beststart.vic.gov.au)

The policy and program responsibility of the Best Start and Supported Parent Groups and Playgroups is managed within the Universal Early Years Services and Partnerships Unit within the Early Years Services Branch. This Branch is part of the Office for Children, within the Department of Human Services (DHS). Within each regional office Program and Service Advisers have responsibility for the partnership, funding and monitoring of the 28 Best Start sites and also the Supported Parent Groups and Playgroups initiatives at a local level.

**QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006**



STATEWIDE PROJECTS UPDATE:

Best Start – Evaluation

Aim: To undertake an evaluation of the Best Start Demonstration Projects funded in Phase 1.

Details: The evaluation team at Melbourne University, lead by Professor David Dunt, has been undertaking the evaluation of the Best Start Demonstration Projects funded in Phase 1. A steering committee has been meeting on a regular basis with the Evaluation Team from the University of Melbourne. The committee is made up of representatives from a number of Branches across the Office for Children, including Program and Sector Support Branch, Statewide Outcomes Branch and Early Years Branch, together with the Aboriginal Best Start Project Officer, a representative from the Department of Education and Training and Best Start Facilitators (Frankston and Shepparton). A forum is planned on the 17 July 2006 with the Best Start sites funded in Phase 1 to discuss the findings of the evaluation.

Timelines: Final report is now due on 31 August 2006.

Contact: **John Prent, Manager Evaluation & Web Services, Program and Sector Support, Office for Children, Phone: 9096-7226, Email: john.prent@dhs.vic.gov.au**

Contact: **Anthony Raitman, Manager Universal Early Years Services & Partnerships, Early Years Branch, Office for Children, Phone: 9096 7452, Email: Anthony.raitman@dhs.vic.gov.au**

Playgroup Victoria

Aim: To undertake a range of activities for supported parent groups and playgroups funded by the Department of Human Services.

Details: Playgroup Victoria is working with the Department of Human Services to:

- expand existing playgroup agency and leaders networks to include those involved in the Best Start parents groups and playgroups initiative.
- provide resources materials such as the Playgroup Manual, A to Z playsheets and an equipment starter kit to all sites.
- facilitate an annual supported playgroup conference.
- continue to map existing playgroups and collect additional information on supported playgroups.
- lead the evaluation of supported parent group and playgroup initiative.

Contact: **Denise Carabott, State Supported Playgroup Coordinator
Playgroup Victoria, 346 Albert Street, Brunswick 3056,
Email: DeniseC@playgroup.org.au
Phone: Toll free 1800 171 882 ext 102 (within Victoria)
Or 03 9388 1599 ext 104 (interstate callers)
Website: www.playgroup.org.au, Subscribe free to ePlaygroup News via website**

Contact: **Wesley Powley-Baker, Program Policy Advisor
Phone: 03- 9096 7404, Email: Wesley.powley-baker@dhs.vic.gov.au**

**QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006**



Best Start – Partnership Training

Aim: To provide relevant training to the Phase 3 Best Start Partnerships to support the formation of the partnerships and ensure all partners are equipped with the knowledge and skills to lead and manage these projects. Supporting the partners to function effectively in meeting expectations of their roles and responsibilities to improve outcomes for young children and their families will be a primary objective of the training.

Details: The project will provide a one-day training session for the 15 Best Start partnerships with a further half-day follow-up, twelve months from the initial training. These training sessions will be provided at each local site. It is expected that a training package is developed consisting of training materials that are culturally relevant to the needs of indigenous communities and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Timelines: A request for proposal has been sent to relevant providers. Anticipated timelines for when the training will commence is September 2006.

Contact: **Wesley Powley-Baker, Program Policy Advisor, Early Years Branch,
Phone: 9096 7074, Email: Wesley.powley-baker@dhs.vic.gov.au**

Best Start Indicator Data

Aim: To update the Best Start Indicator data on an annual basis.

Details: Data for the Best Start Indicators are updated annually. This involves sourcing the data, collating the data, mapping to population data where required, validating the data and data analysis. This updated data is distributed to the Best Start Sites. Previously this data was distributed from the Early Years Branch, however, commencing with the 2004-05 data, the Statewide Outcomes Branch will assume responsibility for this.

Timelines: Data for the 2004-05 Best Start Indicators will not available in its entirety until after the end of June 2006. This data will be collated, validated, analysed during July 2006 and will be released to the sites approximately end July 2006.

Points to note: This year, data for the 2004-05 Indicators has been collated early where possible for Melbourne University, as they require the most up to date indicator data to inform the Final Evaluation Report. This data was submitted to Melbourne Uni in mid April 2006.

Contact: **Joyce Cleary, Senior Program Analyst – Best Start
Phone: 9096 7658, Email: joyce.cleary@dhs.vic.gov.au**

QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006



Develop Web Profiles for Best Start Sites:

Aim: To provide a brief profile of the children and families in each Best Start Site to be included on the Best Start Website.

Details: A one-page profile is being developed on each of the Best Start sites. This will give a snapshot picture of the children and families in the area. These profiles contain population data, socio-economic data, information on the language and cultural background of people in the area, families and family type, immunisation, child health and teen pregnancy. These profiles follow the content of the information already on the website about the existing mainstream Best Start Sites but also include some indicator data.

Timelines: Profiles for the existing Aboriginal Sites (Morwell/Baw Baw and Horsham), the new Aboriginal Sites (Geelong, East Gippsland, Dandenong/Casey and Echuca) and for three of the new mainstream sites being implemented this year (Cardinia, Darebin and Hastings) were completed in March 2006. In early April these profiles were sent to the Regions for approval and have yet to be loaded onto the Best Start website. During May and June profiles for the existing mainstream sites that are already on the Best Start Website will be updated to match the format and content of the new profiles. Profiles will be created for additional new Best Start Sites as their projects are implemented. Web profiles will be updated as new data becomes available from the 2006 Census and from Indicators used.

Contact: **Joyce Cleary, Senior Program Analyst – Best Start**
Phone: 9096 7658, Email: joyce.cleary@dhs.vic.gov.au

Develop new Community Profiles:

Aim: To develop a new, user friendly format for presenting the Best Start Indicator Data to Best Start Sites.

Details: The format in which Best Start Sites receive their annual indicator data is being revised. The Statewide Outcomes Branch has developed a new and more user-friendly format to present this data. Each site will receive a "Community Profile". This document will report on all of the Best Start Indicators but just for their individual site. They will be provided with clear comparisons against Rural, Metropolitan and State averages and also a rank of how they have fared out of all 79 LGAs. Data will be backdated for each indicator to facilitate trend analysis. There will be accompanying text to set the context and aid analysis. These profiles will be supplemented with population data and socio-economic data indicating levels of disadvantage (as measured by the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage).

Timelines: The first issue of these new Community Profiles will be with the 2004-05 release of the Indicator Data. As mentioned above, this data will not be available in its entirety until after the end of June 2006. The new Community Profiles will be released to Best Start Sites approximately the end of July 2006. These profiles will be updated annually in this new format.

Contact: **Joyce Cleary, Senior Program Analyst – Best Start**
Phone: 9096 7658, Email: joyce.cleary@dhs.vic.gov.au

**QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006**



Kindergarten Attendance Project:

Aim: To examine the 'dose' of kindergarten that children are actually receiving, that cannot be captured by enrolment data.

Details: A small research project to measure actual attendance, in terms of days and hours, is currently being conducted. The project involves collecting attendance information directly from "attendance sheets" for approximately 700 children throughout Victoria in 2005. Aboriginal children's attendance has been "over-sampled" so that meaningful data can be reported and simple comparisons made. Approximately 22 kindergartens in Victoria were randomly selected to participate in this project and a further 6 were selected based on the fact that they had high numbers of Indigenous children enrolled. This project will give an estimation of attendance, but because of sampling limitations caution should be exercised regarding generalizing results to the entire population.

Timelines: Attendance records have been collated for all of the 22 randomly selected kindergartens. Data entry for this information is approximately 50% complete. Data collection for the 6 Indigenous kindergartens has begun in the 1st week of May. Data entry will continue throughout May and June and preliminary results may be available approximately end June 2006.

Contact: **Pam Muth, Manager; Outcomes, Research and Policy**
Phone: 9096 6166, Email: pamela.muth@dhs.vic.gov.au

Contact: **Amanda Rothwell, Manager; Early Learning and Development Services**
Phone: 9096 8371, Email: amanda.rothwell@dhs.vic.gov.au

Contact: **Joyce Cleary, Senior Program Analyst – Best Start**
Phone: 9096 7658, Email: joyce.cleary@dhs.vic.gov.au

Refugee Health and Wellbeing Status Report

Aim: To establish the status of the Health and Wellbeing of Refugee children aged 0-18 in Victoria.

Details: Office for Children are commissioning a Status Report to inform government and the Victorian community on the health, wellbeing, safety, learning and development of newly arrived refugee children and young people, up to the age of 18. The report will incorporate a systematic review of this population and identify gaps in available data and in our knowledge and understanding of need and settlement success. The report will include a review of services and support systems for this population, an inventory of data sources, literature and evidence based research and will also make recommendations for action. Staff from the Statewide Outcomes Branch will provide a data advisory role on the reference group for this project.

Timelines: A Request for Tender is being prepared and will be released shortly.

Contact: **Cathie Nolan, Senior Program/Policy Advisor**
Phone: 9096 8417, Email: cathie.nolan@dhs.vic.gov.au

**QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006**



FORUMS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

This section provides a brief update of key dates relating to conferences, seminars, professional opportunities that will be of interest to Best Start partners, Supported Parent Groups and Playgroups partners and the broader universal early years services sector across the state.

Department of Human Services Sponsored Forums:

17 July 2006

Best Start Evaluation Forum

This forum will include the statewide evaluation and a number of local evaluations. Videoconference will be available at Robinvale, Sale & Horsham.

10:00am – 1:00pm

Department of Human Services, Level 1 Conference Room, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

Target audience: Phase 1: Existing Best Start sites.

17 July 2006

Best Start Facilitators Network Meeting

1:00pm – 2:30pm

Department of Human Services, Level 1 Conference Room, 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. Videoconference will be available at Robinvale, Sale & Horsham.

Target audience: All Best Start Facilitators

25 July 2006

MAV/DHS Early Years Forum

9:30am – 4:30pm

Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre

The focus will be on the implications of the new legislation and showcasing early years innovation around addressing disadvantage and cultural diversity.

Target audience: local government and early years services sector.

9 August 2006

Supported Playgroup Conference

9:30am – 4:30pm

Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre

Target audience: Playgroup stakeholders and early years services sector.

11 August 2006

Maternal and Child Health Quarterly conference

Sponsored by Wyeth

9:00am – 3:30pm

Venue: To be advised

Target audience: Maternal and Child Health sector

10 November 2006 **Maternal and Child Health Quarterly conference**

9:00am – 3:30pm

Venue: To be advised

Target audience: Maternal and Child Health sector

QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006



[A call for articles!](#) Early Years Facts Newsletter

The Early Years Facts newsletter is produced by the Early Years Services Branch of the Office for Children. It is distributed to in excess of 4000 contacts across the early years sector on a quarterly basis.

If you are interested in submitting an article to the **Early Years Facts Newsletter** please send an electronic copy of your document to Mirek Grabacki, Project Leader on Phone: 9096-7989 or mirek.grabacki@dhs.vic.gov.au.

Please use the following prompts as a guide in writing your article, as appropriate.

- ⇒ ***Title of the article***
- ⇒ ***Background: Why was this undertaken? What were the issues that lead to this initiative being developed? What research was undertaken? What was the underpinning evidence?***
- ⇒ ***Objectives: What were the objectives? What outcomes were being sought?***
- ⇒ ***Who: Who was involved? Who were the stakeholders/partners in the process (i.e. role of early years providers, specialist providers, engagement of families etc.)***
- ⇒ ***How: – How was it implemented? What was the planning process? What interventions were identified? What were the specific strategies? How were stakeholders engaged?***
- ⇒ ***Outcomes: What was the actual impact/benefits on the child/family and broader community? What outcomes were achieved?***
- ⇒ ***Evaluation: Was there any evaluation? What were the key learnings? (the positives and the pitfalls)***
- ⇒ ***Contact for further information: Please include name, organization (if application) address, email, phone number.***

**QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006**



KEY CONTACTS:

Aboriginal Best Start Project Officer – Statewide Contact:

Janice Muir, Project Officer
Aboriginal Best Start Project
VACSAL
171 Smith Street
FITZROY 3065
Phone: 94164266, Fax: 94164147, Mobile: 0438555593
Email: jan.muir@onthe.net.au

**Department of Human Services: Regional Program and Services
Advisers with portfolio responsibility for Best Start and
Supported Parent Groups and Playgroups**

Barwon South Western Region

Contact: Annie O'Loughlin
Phone: 03-5226-4933, Email: Annie.OLoughlin@dhs.vic.gov.au

Contact: Meghan Kelly
Phone: 03-5226-4754, Email: Meghan.kelly@dhs.vic.gov.au

Loddon/Mallee Region

Contact: Chereil Rust
Phone: 5434-5707 Email: chereil.rust@dhs.vic.gov.au

Contact: Michele Forbes
Phone: 54345705, Email: Michele.forbes@dhs.vic.gov.au

North & West Metropolitan Region

Contact: Anne Thompson
Phone: 9412-5415, Email: anne.thompson@dhs.vic.gov.au

Contact: Fiona Alexander
Phone: 9275 7207 Email: Fiona.alexander@dhs.vic.gov.au (Mon - Wed)

Gippsland Region

Contact: Bronwyn Saffron
Phone: 5177-2565, Email: bronwyn.saffron@dhs.vic.gov.au

Contact: Natalie Collings
Phone: 5177 2654 Email: natalie.collings@dhs.vic.gov.au

**QUARTERLY UPDATE NO. 1
BEST START AND SUPPORTED PARENT GROUPS AND PLAYGROUPS
JUNE 2006**



Hume Region

Contact: Jill Guerra
Phone: 5832-1590, Email: jill.guerra@dhs.vic.gov.au

Grampians Region

Contact: Sharelle Knight
Phone: 5333-6938, Email: sharelle.knight@dhs.vic.gov.au

Contact: Louise Buckle-Smith (Playgroups)
Phone: 5333-6259 Mobile: 0419-556-031 Email: Louise.Buckle-Smith@dhs.vic.gov.au

Eastern Metropolitan Region

Contact: Ana Tsaganos
Phone: 9843-6178, Email: ana.tsaganos@dhs.vic.gov.au

Southern Metropolitan Region

Contact: Dianne Mossenton-Brown
Phone: 9213-2139, Email: Dianne.mossenton-brown@dhs.vic.gov.au

Central Office contacts with responsibility for Best Start and Supported Parent Groups and Playgroups:

Early Years Services Branch:

Anthony Raitman
Manager Universal Early Years Services and Partnerships
Phone: 03- 9096 7452 or 0408-993-842, Email: anthony.raitman@dhs.vic.gov.au

Louise Keramaris, Program Policy Advisor
Phone: 03- 9096 6920, Email: louise.keramaris@dhs.vic.gov.au

Wesley Powley-Baker, Program Policy Advisor
Phone: 03- 9096 7404, Email: Wesley.powley-baker@dhs.vic.gov.au

Statewide Outcomes for Children Branch: Key contacts working on Best Start projects

Pamela Muth
Manager Outcomes Research And Policy
Phone: 03-9096-6166, Email: Pamela.Muth@dhs.vic.gov.au

Joyce Cleary, Senior Program Analyst – Best Start
Phone: 03- 9096 7658, Email: joyce.cleary@dhs.vic.gov.au

Linda Hayes, Project Leader
Phone: 03-9096-5734, Email: Linda.Hayes@dhs.vic.gov.au