

Greater Shepparton BEST START Demonstration Project

Information Bulletin Number 6
November 2004

REVISED BEST START ACTION PLAN & EVALUATION

The Greater Shepparton Best Start Partnership recently met to review the 3 year action plan and identify priority areas for the next 12 months. A great deal has been achieved since the action plan was submitted to the Department of Human Services in June 2003. Many strategies and activities have been completed and have now become core business of particular services, meaning sustainability of these activities. Evaluation reports have also been submitted for some of these completed activities. It was agreed that some strategies and actions were taken up by other agencies, either independently or in partnership. Some strategies were deemed unrealistic within Best Start timeframes and resources such as a home visitation program under the Getting Connected and Community Literacy action area. Other funding grants would need to be pursued if such a project was to be undertaken. Resources have been identified for current and future projects and activities for the next 18 months which is the end of the Best Start Demonstration Project funding.

Evaluation of Best Start activities has been a major area of interest, particularly given the project is now in its second year. The Best Start Partnership is particularly interested in local evaluation and ensuring that process evaluation is captured along with impact and outcome. Meetings have been held with Bridget Hsu-Hage and Bev Guest-Smith from Melbourne University School of Rural Health (who has the local evaluation contract) to ensure the evaluation tools and reports developed capture this. It will be extremely important to demonstrate exactly what has or has not been successful and why if we are to influence further funding for specific projects and programs and to share learnings with local and statewide early childhood service providers. If anyone would like a copy of this revised Action Plan please contact Belinda Whitelaw at Council on 5832 9790.

Breaking Cycles Building Futures

As we reach the completion of the first stage of this project, reflection on 'where to from here?' and 'what has been achieved?' has captured examples of the excitement and the challenges of what Best Start is all about.

The intent of this project is to look at ways of enhancing the usage of Maternal & Child Health Services by those families who have not fully utilised services in the past. It is becoming evident that families value a centre such as Patricia Smith offering a range of activities and through such activities opportunistic contact with the MCH Nurse creates a positive context for parents to take the next step of seeking individual consultations. A 9% increase in breastfeeding rates and 9% increase in attendance at MCH has been a fantastic outcome of the project.

The playgroup continues to attract new families, with an achievement being that families from indigenous, non indigenous and different cultural backgrounds feel comfortable to get together. Ten families attended the recent Monthly Lunch at Patricia Smith and approximately 50 people attended the cricket event on Tuesday 9th November. These events have proved to be effective in building relationships with families in a non clinical setting. Challenges include ensuring the sustainability of initiatives such as the playgroup. The Best Start Partnership has agreed to fund this for a further 12 months, and look at ways of ensuring the ongoing viability of the playgroup if it continues to be valued by parents.

Robyn Feldtmann and Chris Widdicombe have successfully completed their immunisation training and will participate in local immunisation sessions at Patricia Smith commencing early 2005. Stronger working relationships with other services operating from Patricia Smith Children's Centre have resulted in increased enrolments at the preschool for 2005.

'Welcoming to Parkside' is a new outreach initiative of the project – see next page.



EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH

Reshaping services - thinking about outreach models that link families into universal services

In looking at how we achieve better child development outcomes through parents and children having stronger connectivity to early childhood services, Best Start is all about asking these questions - What would make a difference? What does it take?

Two good examples of how universal services can be 'reshaped' to better meet the needs of families are the 'Welcome to Parkside Estate' initiative and the Koori Maternal & Child Health Project.

'Welcome to Parkside Estate'

From November 2004 all new families with young children moving into Parkside Estate will be welcomed through a joint visit by Liz Dalton, Parkside Community Liaison Officer, and a staff member from Patricia Smith Children's Centre. The aim of the joint visit is to encourage and support families to link in with local early childhood services and to start building that personal relationship which is such an important factor in helping families feel comfortable in accessing local services. Each family will receive a Best Start bag, similar to the Baby Book Bag, containing information about local services, colouring pencils and activity sheets for children, and a small gift for the parents donated by North Shepparton Community Learning Centre. Robyn Feldtmann will join Liz in visiting families who have a child under 12 months of age, and Jenny Wileman will visit if the family has children aged between 1 and 5 years. This initiative will be part of the customary 4 week visit undertaken by Liz to see how new families are settling in.

The Koori Maternal & Child Health Project

Great progress has been made by Maternal and Child Health Nurse Bernadette Brooks, in increasing the number of indigenous children receiving their 3.5 year checks. This has been achieved by Bernadette conducting the 3.5 year old checks at Lidje Child Care Centre, Batdja Child Care and Preschool Centre and Save the Children Fund Preschool. The data so far indicates this initiative is having an impact on families not previously accessing the MCH service.

Bernadette has also teamed up with Sharon Jones, preschool teacher at Save the Children Fund Preschool to run monthly parent get togethers. Various parenting and personal topics have been discussed over a cuppa and some food, with parents taking the lead role in identifying what they would like more information about.

Breastfeeding Initiative

Almost 70 people attended the breastfeeding conference 'Contemporary and Community Perspectives' with extremely positive feedback received from both attendees and presenters. The conference was the first of its kind in Greater Shepparton and attracted presenters of extremely high calibre and leaders in their field.

The next activity for the workgroup is the development of a Greater Shepparton breastfeeding friendly map, which will list all businesses, organisations, restaurants, childhood services and community venues that display the breastfeeding friendly sticker and support and welcome breastfeeding mothers. The map will be distributed in early 2005. The refurbishment of the tower facility in the mall has been completed and is ready for use.

Eastbank is also refurbishing a lounge area within the facility to make it more family friendly and comfortable for breastfeeding mothers.

Finally congratulations to Ann Hall for being elected to the National Australian Breastfeeding Association Board. Well done Ann!



GETTING CONNECTED



Ready for Preschool Initiative

Building on the Transition to School initiative, three 'Ready for Preschool' information sessions were held in September for parents of children eligible for preschool next year. Overall the sessions were well attended and received positive feedback from parents. Tip sheets and a brochure on preparing your child for preschool were provided to parents to take home and refer to. The workgroup, made up of representatives from Department of Human Services, Scope (Vic) and Greater Shepparton City Council, will meet this month to discuss the 2004 sessions, review the evaluation report and feedback and make any recommendations for next year.

Both the 'Transition to School' and 'Ready for Preschool' sessions will now become core business of Council's Family and Children's Services department.

PLAYGROUPS

Another 2 playgroups have been established since the last Best Start Information Bulletin and supported by Best Start funds and resources. Mooroopna Primary School now has a playgroup running every Thursday morning (school terms only) which builds on from the Pram Walk that was operating from the school.

Gowrie Street Primary School, in partnership with Burri Family Preservation and Extended Care and Department of Human Services, will run a Koorie playgroup from the school in the 'Manega' complex. The playgroup will run every Monday morning (school terms only) and a bus will be available to transport families to and from the playgroup.

An evaluation is currently being conducted with playgroups operating from Wilmot Rd, St Georges Rd and Mooroopna Park Primary School as well as the Patricia Smith and South Shepparton playgroup to establish the value of the service and benefits for children and parents.

SPORT FOR EVERYONE

A number of parents interviewed as part of the Best Start Community Consultation commented on how difficult it can be to find the money for their children to be involved in organised support such as AusKick and netball. Lack of recreational activities and the frustration at not being able to participate like their peers was seen to contribute to behavioural issues.

Best Start and Mooroopna Park Primary School have provided financial sponsorship this year for 10 children to become involved with local football activities with very positive results for the children and their families. This project will be continued next year with the emphasis being on finding local sponsorship. Donation of second hand soccer boots appreciated!!

Leslie Gribble Children's Centre

The Leslie Gribble Children's Centre, located in Westmorland Crescent Shepparton, will offer a 4 year old kindergarten program in 2005. The centre has not operated a program since 1998 but an increase in demand for kindergarten places, particularly in the south end of Shepparton, and the number of families residing in the area, has resulted in the centre again opening its' door to the public. Already the centre operates a playgroup every Wednesday and is utilised by outside groups such as The Bridge Young Mums Group and Monnington Early Intervention Service.

Anyone requiring more information about the kindergarten program or with clients residing in the area with children eligible for kindergarten next year can contact Sally Rose at Council on 58 329 709.

COMMUNITY LITERACY

Baby Book Bags

The Best Start Baby Book Bag initiative has been launched and bags are now being distributed across Greater Shepparton to parents attending the 4 month ages and stages visit with their baby. The 12 month project is being supported by Greater Shepparton City Council, Goulburn Valley Regional Library and Dorling Kindersley Publishers. Parents will be randomly selected next year for a telephone survey to establish the value and benefit of the Baby Book Bag and Maternal and Child Health nurses will also be recording data on how regularly parents are reading to their children. This data will be collected at the 12 month ages and stages visit.



PARENT EDUCATION

ADOLESCENT ANTENATAL CARE AND EDUCATION PROJECT

This exciting and innovative project has moved into the implementation phase with the actual program commencing at the start of October. To date 5 young women have been referred to the program and are participating in weekly sessions at The Bridge. Both Peta Crosier and Jenny Cook coordinate the program, with assistance from a midwife visiting on a fortnightly basis to conduct health checks and provide antenatal clinic care.

The program, which fits under the broader 'Young, Pregnant and Parenting' program at The Bridge aims to provide antenatal care and childbirth education to people aged nineteen and under. Participants meet in a group setting with other young people, allowing them to develop friendships and broaden their support network. Lunch and transport are provided at no cost to the participants. The group will have a rolling membership, which will allow young people to join at any stage of their pregnancy.

A number of guest speakers will be invited to address the group on a range of topics including breastfeeding (lactation consultants), sleep and settling (GVFC), child development (Maternal and Child Health service) and dietary needs during pregnancy (GVCHS dietitian). Information provision and referral will also be a major component of the program, and will cover what things are needed for the mother and baby to prepare for the birth and bringing the baby home, information about local medical and health services, financial entitlements – Centrelink information and other needs such as housing, specialized services i.e. drug and alcohol support services and family violence services. A common referral form has been developed for the program and is available from The Bridge. If anyone has any questions about the program or would like to refer a client please contact either Peta or Jenny at The Bridge on 5831 2390.

For further information on the Greater Shepparton Best Start Demonstration Project please contact either Jacque Phillips or Belinda Whitelaw on 58 329 790 or Sally Wright on 0407 542 253.