

Rosewall Best Start Local Evaluation Report

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Rosewall Best Start - Local Evaluation

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Rosewall Best Start - Local Evaluation

Executive Summary

Introduction

Best Start is a Victorian Government initiative. It is a prevention and early intervention project that focuses on improving the health, development, learning and well-being of all children from pregnancy to eight years of age.

Best Start aims to produce:

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

This local evaluation report relies on document analysis, observation, and discussions held with 18 people involved in the Rosewall Best Start project. It aims to capture the flavour of Rosewall Best Start.

The Structure of Rosewall Best Start

The structure of Rosewall Best Start comprises the Partnership Group, and three Working Groups that report back to the Partnership Group:

- Parenting Working Group
- Child Development/Learning Working Group
- Community Living Working Group.

Specific Projects

There are six specific project areas, and many of these comprise more than one discrete project.

ROS01 Maternity and Maternal Child Health Project

- Maternity to Maternal Child Health Transition: This project's aim is to review and work collaboratively with Maternity and Maternal Child Health to support facilitation of change for a smooth transition from one service to another.
- Ages and Stages visits: Aims to increase the attendance rates at the 12 month and 3.5 year visits.

ROS02 Healthy Living Plan

- One of the initiatives in the Healthy Living Plan is the ‘Healthy Kids, Healthy Relationships’ Project.

ROS03 Dental Health Project

- Dental kit: The Rosewall Best Start Dental Health Project developed a Dental Kit which is being distributed in three stages.
- ‘Smiles 4 Miles’: The other dental health project is ‘Smiles 4 Miles’ which has been implemented in conjunction with Dental Health Services Victoria and Barwon Health. This project has two components to it - access to treatment and health promotion focusing on the child the year prior to school.

ROS04 Promotion of Child and Adult Literacy

- ‘Let’s Read’ is an early childhood literacy initiative of the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute’s Centre for Community Child Health and The Smith Family which aims to improve and measure literacy outcomes in Australia by encouraging parents to read to preschool aged children.
- Outreach Librarian: An Outreach Librarian project, in conjunction with the Geelong Regional Library Corporation, has also been initiated, which involves an outreach librarian visiting schools and arranging visits to the library.

ROS05 Absenteeism and Regular and Punctual Attendance

- This project has included the development of ‘School Be In It’ kits by Best Start in conjunction with the Geelong Northern Network.
- Absenteeism in kindergartens: A new program is currently being implemented which focuses on absenteeism in kindergartens.
- COPWAMI: The other component of this project is the Children of Parents With a Mental Illness Project (COPWAMI).

ROS06 Accessible and Affordable Childcare / Playgroups

- Playgroup facilitator: As part of this project, the Best Start partnership funds a paid playgroup facilitator who is involved with three playgroups.
- After School Activity Program: An additional project is the After School Activity Program, which targets children’s access and participation in sporting and recreational activities.

Links between projects

- It was noted that the individual projects are linked and inter-related in many ways.

Analysis of informal discussions and observations

Observed impact

- The impact of Best Start was described in terms of an effect on service delivery, on workers in the area, and on families.

What helped Rosewall Best Start to work?

Each of the following factors was seen to help Best Start to work, and were discussed in some detail.

- the community facilitator – both the role and the individual
- the partnership between different organisations
- linking services together
- the concrete things that were part of Best Start
- the meetings.

Shared goals

- The importance of all partners having shared goals was highlighted.

Spin-offs

- A number of things were mentioned as spin-offs of Best Start. Individuals felt that these things would not have happened without the coming together of various people that occurred with Best Start.

Not re-inventing the wheel

- There are indications of a tendency to utilise existing programs or resources for Rosewall Best Start, rather than re-inventing the wheel.

Bottom-up approach

- It is clear that the concerns and priorities of the community have informed the choice of and the implementation of the projects and activities that have been part of Best Start in Rosewall.

Problems with Rosewall Best Start

- A small number of problems with Best Start were identified; the main one being those three years was not long enough for this type of project.

Challenges for the future

- The issue of sustainability was the key challenge mentioned for the future. Most people were keen to maintain the network and a community facilitator.

Summary

Overall perceptions

- It was apparent from the discussions held with people involved with Rosewall Best Start that it is viewed extremely positively, and with great enthusiasm.

The people

- The two most consistent themes that emerged from discussions with people who are involved with Rosewall Best Start were firstly, the pivotal role played by the community facilitator, and secondly, that strong partnerships and linkages between services and organisations were perceived to be an extremely important and positive result of the Best Start project.

The projects

- The value and accomplishments of specific projects was seen to contribute to the success of Rosewall Best Start, and also to promote the continued involvement and support of the key players.

Achievements

- Rosewall Best Start provides an excellent example of a multi-sectoral partnership that is working well, and has done so over an extended period of time.
- The linkages between workers and services were identified by many people as an important achievement.
- One of the ways in which Best Start worked well was in its capacity to work with others.

The future

- Sustainability was identified as the key challenge for the future of Best Start. Many people were enthusiastic about maintaining an involvement with Best Start, and were particularly hopeful that the networking between various services and organisations would continue.
- It is to be hoped that the pilot work undertaken by Best Start in which innovative approaches have been trialled will be taken up more broadly in the future.

Rosewall Best Start -

Local Evaluation

Introduction

Aims / objectives of Best Start

Best Start is a Victorian Government initiative. It is a prevention and early intervention project that focuses on improving the health, development, learning and well-being of all children from pregnancy to eight years of age (Community Care Division, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2003). The program supports communities, parents and service providers to improve universal local early year's services to ensure that they are more responsive to local need.

It is anticipated that these improvements will result in:

- Better access to child and family support, health services and early education.
- An improvement in parents' capacity, confidence and enjoyment of family life.
- Communities that are more child and family friendly (Community Care Division, Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 2003).

Rosewall

Rosewall is located in the Northern suburbs of Geelong in Victoria. The borders of the Rosewall / Corio Best Start Project are: Princess Highway, Montview Road, Anakie Road and Cox Road. It includes four Primary Schools, three Preschools, one Child Care Centre, one Maternal and Child Health Centre, one Neighbourhood House as well as the Corio Bay Secondary College (a child care centre for 0-5 years operates here) and the Corio Village Shopping Centre.

This Local Evaluation Report

This local evaluation report does not attempt to describe in detail the myriad activities that are part of Rosewall Best Start, nor does it aim to evaluate the achievements of the project in relation to specific indicators. The Statewide Evaluation report provides that information. This report is an attempt to capture the flavour of the Rosewall Best Start project, to highlight the elements that have been most valuable, and to identify any areas where problems arose.

The methodology of this local evaluation was in part determined by time constraints. It relies on document analysis, observation, and discussions held with 18 people involved in the Rosewall Best Start project. This local evaluation presents the perspective of people involved as organisers and workers. The views of the families affected by Best Start are presented in the DVD that is part of the Rosewall local evaluation.

The Essential Partners of Rosewall Best Start

The six Essential Partners of Rosewall Best Start are:

- City of Greater Geelong
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Employment, Education and Training
- Barwon Health
- Service Providers (Glastonbury Family Services and Bethany Community Support)
- Parents.

In addition, Diversitat and Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative are supportive partners

The Structure of Rosewall Best Start

The structure of Rosewall Best Start comprises the Partnership Group, and three Working Groups. The three Working Groups are the Parenting Working Group, the Child Development/Learning Working Group and the Community Living Working Group. The Rosewall Partnership reviews all the major initiatives through the recommendation of each Working Group and makes the final decision. The Working Groups plan for their specific initiatives but also consider the initiatives of the other Working Groups, not only to avoid duplication but to compliment and enhance all the initiatives through a collective and collaborative approach. Figure 1 provides a flow chart of the main relationships between the different Groups and Projects, and illustrates the extent to which the various Best Start activities are inter-related.

The minutes and reports from Rosewall Best Start indicate that each working group was actively pursuing new projects and ways of furthering the goals of Best Start, with the assistance of the community facilitator. These documents also indicate a remarkable consistency in the people attending Best Start meetings over the years. The description of specific projects included below represents the major activities of the groups, but is not a comprehensive list of all projects and activities undertaken.

Partnership Group

The Partnership Group includes representatives from all of the Rosewall Best Start partners, and from the community. It also brings together representatives from all of the Working Groups. The Partnership Group is chaired by the Manager of Family Services, City of Greater Geelong. Donna Mant-Smith, as Chair, initially set up the partnership so that the City of Greater Geelong has a lead role, but not a dominant role. This ensures that it is a true partnership. Each Working Group reports to the Partnership Group which ensures that all groups are aware of the activities of the other groups. One role of the Partnership Group is the approval of funding, based on recommendations for specific projects from the individual Working Groups.

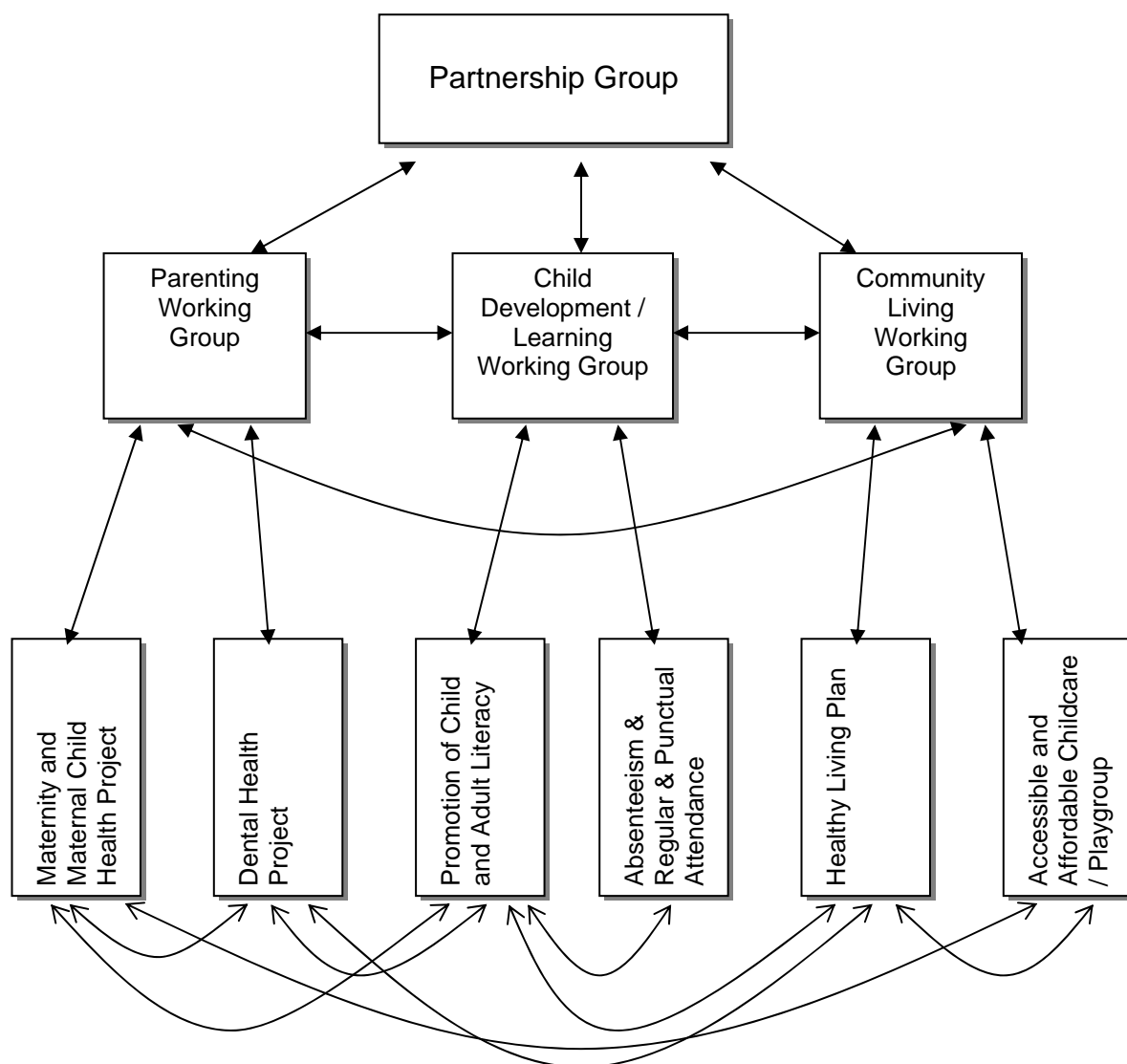


Figure 1: Flow chart showing relationships between Rosewall Best Start groups and projects

Parenting Working Group

The Parenting Working Group oversees the Maternity and Maternal Child Health Project and the Dental Health Project. In addition, this group implemented some QUIT training for health professionals in relation to women smoking during pregnancy. This Working Group also explored the issue of breast feeding in the initial stages of Rosewall Best Start, but determined that there were already very positive strategies in place, and information going out from the Maternal Child Health Centre.

Child Development / Learning Working Group

The Child Development / Learning Working Group oversee the Promotion of Child and Adult Literacy and the Absenteeism and Regular and Punctual Attendance projects.

Community Living Working Group

The Community Living working group oversees the Healthy Living Plan project and the Accessible and Affordable Childcare / Playgroup project. It has been noted that this Working Group has a somewhat different focus to the other working groups, as it has less concrete activities. It is nevertheless very active, and works with many other organisations in the area.

SPECIFIC PROJECTS

The following brief overview of the specific Rosewall Best Start projects has utilised information provided in Facilitator's Reports and the Evaluation profile. It also includes occasional quotes from people involved in Best Start projects (presented in quotation marks). The case studies have been provided by people involved with the projects.

ROS01 *Maternity and Maternal Child Health Project*

Maternity to Maternal Child Health Transition

One part of this project is to review and work collaboratively with Maternity and Maternal Child Health to support facilitation of change for a smooth transition from one service to another. An important part of this project is the development and implementation of a Maternity & Maternal Child Health Parent Survey. This aims to review the opportunity for improved service capacity for parents, particularly in the transition from Maternity to Maternal Child Health. The focus is on the care and information parents receive antenatal, in hospital and at home. Parents from Corio Bay Senior College, the Rosewall Playgroups Network and NEWPIN, Bethany Community Support have participated in the survey. NEWPIN is part of the Supporting Vulnerable Families Innovations Project. It is interesting to note that completing the survey was seen as "a great opportunity to be heard" by the NEWPIN families.

CASE STUDY

I first met Tracey in October 2003, after the birth of her third child. Tracey started at the Corio play group in the middle of 2004. She wanted to get to know other women in the area. The coordinated play group was being discussed at that time. She was also pregnant with her fourth child. Unfortunately this baby was found to have a genetic abnormality not compatible with life, and she had to have a termination of the pregnancy. This was very difficult for the family. When Tracey came for her third child's two year assessment early in 2005, we discussed the new play group which was about to start. She indicated she would be keen to be the group leader because she thought having Karen (the playgroup facilitator) around for support and to help with planning activities would be of benefit to herself and to the group. I have caught up with Tracey on and off over the last year and she has told me how being involved with the play group has helped her. It encouraged her to get out and about, it gave her a purpose and a focus on her toddler, especially in the first few months, has helped with her grief process and has given her more confidence.



Ages and Stages visits

The other component of this project is the promotion of the Ages and Stages visits at Maternal Child Health Centres. The project is primarily focusing on the 4 month, 12 month, 18 month and the 3.5 years visits to increase the attendance rates at these visits. Early detection for any developmental or family issues will support a healthier transition for the children to preschool and primary school. Early detection provides the children with better opportunities for a healthy start for educational and social well-being. As part of this project, the Maternal and Child Health nurses have conducted the 3.5 year checks at the pre-school centres.

ROS02 *Healthy Living Plan*

This Project has a broad agenda to reflect the various and complex needs that are intertwined with the five other projects. All the Working Groups have components of work connected to this project. There are a number of initiatives under the Healthy Living Plan some of which are directly linked to Best Start and some of which are complementary.

One of the initiatives in the Healthy Living Plan is the ‘Healthy Kids, Healthy Relationships’ Project. The ‘Healthy Kids, Healthy Relationships’ program has been developed by Bethany Community Support and promotes positive self esteem, healthy eating, physical activity and body satisfaction for 0 – 12 year olds. The project has been implemented with parent groups and a family day care group and has received positive feedback. A parent from the Rosewall Primary School Breakfast Club completed the two-day training at Bethany and delivers the project to relevant parent groups. While there are formal training sessions, the parent who presents the training is constantly promoting healthy choices, so that families are “being educated – without them really knowing it”. The advantage of having a parent known in the community presenting the ‘Healthy Kids, Healthy Relationships’ sessions is that people are more likely to listen to a peer, rather than to someone seen as a ‘professional’ coming from outside of the community. The parent who presents the ‘Healthy Kids, Healthy Relationships’ sessions has strong links with the ‘Romp and Chomp’ and ‘Smiles 4 Miles’ projects, which ensures that all projects are consistently giving the same message.

Participation in a number of community projects and activities are listed as part of the Healthy Living Plan, including the Going Potty Garden and Arts Festival and the Community Garden in Connections Park.

ROS03 *Dental Health Project*

Dental health was not originally an indicator for Best Start, but was focused on in the Rosewall Best Start project as it had been identified as a priority by the community.

Dental kit

The Rosewall Best Start Dental Health Project developed a Dental Kit to be distributed in three stages:

1. Maternal Child Health centres 12 months and 3-4 years Ages & Stages visits over a 6-month period, Parenting Assessment and Skill Development Services (PASDS), Enhanced Home Visiting MCH Service (EHVS), Bethany Newpin Program, Corio Bay Senior College – Students Parent Group.
2. Preschools, Playgroups, Glastonbury Child & Family Services. H.I.P.P.Y (Home Instruction Program for Preschool youngsters) and P.E.A.C.H. (Parents Exploring Activities with Children at Home).
3. Prep, Grade 1 & Grade 2.

'Smiles 4 Miles'

The other dental health project is 'Smiles 4 Miles' which has been implemented in conjunction with Dental Health Services Victoria and Barwon Health. This project has two components to it - access to treatment and health promotion focusing on the child the year prior to school. Oral health was also linked to immunisation visits with the promotion of oral health there, and visits from dental health staff. The awareness of the importance of oral health amongst kindergarten and immunisation staff was raised as part of this project. This is reflected in referrals to Barwon Health Dental Service in 2005, with 11 coming from immunisation and 8 from kindergarten staff. Several people commented that one aspect of the dental health promotion, a demonstration with coke and sugar, was very effective.

Lunchbox surveys were conducted with eight kindergarten groups in May and November, 2005. A summary of the results is presented in Table 1. As the table shows, at the time of the surveys no children were bringing sweet drinks which indicate that the water policy implemented in kindergartens was very effective. Over three-quarters of children had fresh fruit or vegetables in their lunchbox at both times, which is also very encouraging. It was noted that at some of the kindergartens only about half of the children had been bringing fresh fruit or vegetables, indicating a substantial improvement.

The Smiles 4 Miles project won the Barwon Health Annual Quality Improvement and Risk Management Award in 2005 for the Community and Mental Health category.

In discussions with various people involved with Best Start, it was not clear that they differentiated between Smiles 4 Miles and the dental kits. Both were spoken of very favourably, and were seen to have a positive impact on families. The idea of linking health with immunisation was also viewed favourably.

Table 1: Percentage of children with specific foods or drinks in their lunch box
(averaged for 8 kindergarten groups, over 3 days)
Data provided by Sharon Sharp, Barwon Health

<i>Food / drink</i>	<i>May 2005</i>	<i>November 2005</i>
<i>Sweet drinks</i>	0%	0%
<i>Fresh fruit / vegetables</i>	74%	80%
<i>Packaged high fat / sugar food</i>	9%	22%
<i>Sandwiches with high sugar filling</i>	11%	26%
<i>Sandwiches with healthy filling</i>	43%	43%

ROS04 *Promotion of Child and Adult Literacy*

'Let's Read'

A key aspect of this project is the implementation of a pilot of the early childhood literacy project of 'Let's Read'. 'Let's Read' is an early childhood literacy initiative of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute's Centre for Community Child Health and The Smith Family. 'Let's Read' aims to improve and measure literacy outcomes in Australia by encouraging parents to read to preschool aged children. 'Let's Read' is designed to be a sustainable, community-based program that is delivered by early childhood professionals using research based literacy techniques and resources. The project was launched in Corio in August, 2005. The 'Let's Read' training was attended by 27 early childhood service providers in Corio. Distribution of the 'Let's Read' kits then followed. Individual services tailored the delivery of the 'Let's Read' program so that it was most effective for their service. Most set up the DVD and played it through with the parents.

The 'Let's Read' kits included timetables for Preschool and After school Story times, library opening times, and a Best Start card to encourage people to ask about library membership when they visit the library. Shell has provided financial support for this project.

'Let's Read' survey

Tables 2 and 3 represent data compiled from "Let's Read" surveys that were completed by 29 parents and 9 workers from Family Day Care. It is particularly encouraging to note that 83% of the parents reported that their family is reading together more at home now, and that 78% of the Family Day Care workers are reading more often with the children. This suggests that 'Let's Read' is indeed successful in increasing adults reading with children. While library membership had not increased, that may occur over a longer period of time. The comments made by parents completing the survey were overwhelmingly positive about the program (see the box below). Several parents also commented on the activities organised around 'Let's Read', for example an animal party, and one asked "Any suggestions for older children who won't read?" Two parents gave reasons as to why they had not joined a library. Comments included on the survey form by Family Day Care workers were also largely positive, although one indicated that the buttons on the screen are hard to see. One also indicated that it would be "nice to have an age appropriate book to give to each child in support of this program also".

Table 2: Results from Let's Read Surveys – parents (N = 29)
Data provided by Leonie Dillon, Rosewall Best Start

	Yes	No	The same	No answer
	<i>Freq</i> %	<i>Freq</i> %	<i>Freq</i> %	<i>Freq</i> %
<i>Were you a member of a Library before you received your 'Let's Read' Kit?</i>	17 (59%)	12 (41%)	-	-
<i>Are you a member of a Library now?</i>	18 (62%)	11 (38%)	-	-
<i>Has the 'Let's Read' DVD been helpful for your family?</i>	23 (79%)	4 (14%)	-	2 (7%)
<i>Is your family reading together more at home now?</i>	24 (83%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	-

Table 3: Results from Let's Read Surveys – Family Day Care workers (N = 9)
Data provided by Leonie Dillon, Rosewall Best Start

	Yes	No	The same	No answer
	<i>Freq %</i>	<i>Freq %</i>	<i>Freq %</i>	<i>Freq %</i>
<i>Were you a member of a Library before you received your 'Let's Read' Kit?</i>	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	-	-
<i>Are you a member of a Library now?</i>	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	-	-
<i>Has the 'Let's Read' DVD been useful with the Family Day Care setting?</i>	7 (78%)	1 (11%)	-	1 (11%)
<i>Do you find you are reading more with the Family Day Care children?</i>	7 (78%)	2 (22%)	-	-
<i>Have you shared the 'Let's Read' information and books with parents?</i>	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	-	-

COMMENTS FROM PARENTS – 'Let's Read'

"The information was very helpful and has helped with the way I read to them. I have learnt to be more exciting."

"My husband is now reading with the kids more and using animation in his reading."

"Nice to have a new book. Have been reading it lots with all the family."

"Easier to read to my child now."

"Fantastic – lots more excitement in stories and reading now."

Outreach Librarian

An Outreach Librarian project, in conjunction with the Geelong Regional Library Corporation, has also been initiated and was about to commence as this report was being prepared. This project involves an outreach librarian visiting schools and arranging visits to the library. The Outreach Librarian will be based at Rosewall Primary School.

ROS05 *Absenteeism and Regular and Punctual Attendance*

The target group for this project is kindergarten children, preps, as well as Grades One and Two students. Various inclusive strategies were implemented to support parents in understanding the importance of school attendance. A strong collaborative approach is important as the reasons for late attendance and absenteeism are often complex and vary from family to family. This project has included the development of 'School Be In It' kits by Best Start in conjunction with the Geelong Northern Network (Department of Employment, Education and Training). These kits include an alarm clock (donated by the AFL), small laminated posters that can be attached to a fridge or wall on "Things to do on a school morning" which children can tick off as they do each activity, a star chart to keep record of days that the child arrived at school on time and a calendar with weekends and school holidays clearly marked. The contents of the kit are extremely user friendly and have been developed specifically for use by the parents and child.

Table 4 presents the attendance data for 14 children at three Best Start schools who were part of the Best Start absenteeism project. The absenteeism worker had contact with all of these families, and all received the 'School Be In It' kit. It was noted by the worker that all of the children showed initial improvement in their attendance after the initial contact and support from the worker. However, unless the school provided ongoing support and monitoring, the cycle of non-attendance began again for some children. It is also important to note that specific difficulties were present in the families of all three children whose attendance decreased in 2005.

The data for all prep and Grade 1 children from three Best Start schools are presented in Table 5, showing changes in attendance from 2004 to 2005. There are differences across the schools, with School A showing substantial improvement in attendances. For School B, there was an improvement for Grade 1 children, but a small decrease in attendance for the Preps. While the results for School C overall indicate little improvement in attendance rates, it was noted that there was an increase in explained absences, and a significant drop in the number of children with a 15% absentee rate. In relation to the Absenteeism project, it was noted that given the families and issues that are being addressed, "small successes are major achievements".

A separate part of this project involves a folder for teaching staff 'Your Children, Their Future', the development of a clear process for schools with a letter drafted to go home to parents, and a calendar for staff to track attendances, a script for telephone calls to parents, and a brochure to be sent home to parents.

Table 4: Attendance data for children involved in the Absenteeism project at 3 Best Start schools in 2005 (N = 14)
Data provided by Pam Plumridge, Geelong North Network

Attendance	Freq (%)
<i>Increase in attendance</i>	5 (36%)
<i>Steady attendance</i>	6 (43%)
<i>Decrease in attendance</i>	3 (21%)

Table 5: Changes in attendance at 3 Best Start schools, comparing overall attendance in 2005 with that of 2004
Data provided by Pam Plumridge

School	Child's Gender	Prep	Grade 1
<i>School A</i>	Males	Increased attendance	Increased attendance
	Females	Increased attendance	Increased attendance
<i>School B</i>	Males	Small decrease in attendance	Increased attendance
	Females	Small decrease in attendance	Increased attendance
<i>School C</i>	Males	Appreciable decrease in attendance	Appreciable decrease in attendance
	Females	Appreciable decrease in attendance	Increased attendance

CASE STUDY

A mother and her child (grade 1) have been involved in the Parent Liaison Program (attendance) for over 12 months. The child's attendance was chronically bad and learning was at risk. Initially the mother, who has a mental illness, was very hesitant and resistant to speaking with the worker, however this was gradually overcome. The family slowly began to work more positively with the worker and as a result were eventually comfortable in seeking additional support from an outside agency as well as attending a specific program to assist the mother with her mental health illness. Over time the child's attendance has slowly improved and, while still haphazard at times, the mother now is more likely to send a note or contact the school when the child is away. The family's use of the "SCHOOL BE IN IT!" kit has assisted with organisational skills morning and night.

Absenteeism in kindergartens

A new program is currently being implemented by the Child Development / Learning Working Group, which focuses on absenteeism in kindergartens. The genesis of this program was discussions between a kindergarten teacher, the Best Start community facilitator and the Absenteeism project worker. This new project has commenced with a flyer being prepared for parents, reminding them how important it is for their child to attend kindergarten regularly. Other resources for parents will be developed, including a special calendar for families. The initiation of this new project reflects the success of the absenteeism project that is being implemented in primary schools, the links between workers from different settings, and also the enthusiasm of these workers.

COPWAMI

The second component of this project is the Children of Parents With a Mental Illness Project (COPWAMI). This situation was identified as one of the barriers in relation to why children were not attending school. This project was implemented in conjunction with Glastonbury Child and Family Services and Barwon Health.

While it was acknowledged that the concept for this project was valuable, it was decided late in 2005 not to continue funding for it, as the identification of families was too difficult.

ROS06 Accessible and Affordable Childcare / Playgroups

Playgroup facilitator

As part of this project, the Best Start partnership funds a paid playgroup facilitator. The target group is families with children in the 0-4 year age group, focusing on the 2-4 year age group, as there is a lack of service provision for this age in the area. The playgroup facilitator works across three sites, currently visiting the Peek-a-Boo playgroup every third week, the Little Elves playgroup every second week, and coordinates the Rosewall Playgroup.

As Table 6 shows, the Rosewall coordinated playgroup is clearly meeting a need, and is becoming increasingly popular. This arrangement is particularly valuable for parents who may lack the skills or resources to manage a playgroup themselves. The playgroup facilitator incorporates helping parents with parenting skills into the playgroups, and states that the parents also model for each other. One indication of the value of these playgroups is suggested by the facilitator’s comment: “You see the children more relaxed after one session, and the parents less stressed”. Parents have come from as far away as Newtown and Lara and are: “happy to come because it’s coordinated and that’s rare”. The number of families in the Peek-a-Boo playgroup is limited by the fact that the group meets in the waiting room of the centre, which is quite a small space.

Table 6: Average attendance each week at the Best Start Playgroups

Playgroup	Average Attendance per Week
<i>Little Elves Corio West Primary School</i>	5 families
<i>Peek-a- Boo Hendy Street Maternal & Child Health Centre</i>	4 families
<i>Rosewall Coordinated Playgroup Rosewall Kindergarten (Sharland Rd, Corio)</i>	Term 1, 2005 2 – 3 families Term 2, 2005 9 families Term 3, 2005 7 families Term 4, 2005 8 families Term 1, 2006 12 families Term 2, 2006 15 families

The role of the playgroup facilitator has been expanded in 2006 to include a community development component. This allows the playgroup facilitator to more actively network with the Maternal and Child Health Centre, the Kindergartens, the Neighbourhood House and the primary schools, extending connections and information sharing. The playgroup facilitator also liaises with the Regional Parenting Service, Glastonbury Child and Family Services, Bethany Community Support, and Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative.

CASE STUDY

Early in the year I received a call from a parent enquiring about Rosewall coordinated playgroup. The parent is visually impaired and has a 2-year-old son who has had numerous serious medical problems. She had been to other playgroups and had felt quite isolated and didn't feel welcome. I explained to the parent what the coordinated playgroup involved and that she was welcome to visit and see if it suited her needs. The following week the parent came along to playgroup, along with her mother-in-law and son. On many occasions this family has made comment that they feel very comfortable and welcome at playgroup. Throughout the past year I have noticed that friendships have formed with other parents and she is made feel welcome from other parents and part of the group. This parent now enjoys other activities with her child including swimming and he has also started attending day care one morning a week. This has been in part due to the child developing confidence being around other children and adults at playgroup.

After School Activity Program

An additional project is the After School Activity Program, which targets children's access and participation in sporting and recreational activities. Best Start is providing the majority of funding for this project, which is funded through, and managed by, Leisure Networks. The first four weeks of the program are delivered by a local sporting club at one of the primary school facilities, and is then transferred to the sporting club's base, to familiarise participants with the club environment.

Links between projects

While the individual projects have been described as separate entities in the above section, they are in fact frequently inter-related. Figure 1 represents the major inter-relationships between the various projects. For example, at the Ages and Stages visit to the Maternal and Child Health centre (Project ROS01), parents were given a Best Start bag which contained a dental kit (ROS03) and a book (ROS04). When parents attended a Best Start playgroup (ROS06), the importance of attending kindergarten was explained (ROS05). When enrolling their child at kindergarten, parents were encouraged to have the three and half year Maternal and Child Health check (ROS01).

ANALYSIS OF INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

As part of this local evaluation of Rosewall Best Start, informal discussions were held with 18 people involved with Rosewall Best Start in various ways. Discussions were held with the community facilitator, with people working in Best Start sites at various levels, with members from the community involved with Best Start, and with people from agencies who have been working with Best Start. The following section provides a thematic analysis of the key themes that emerged from these discussions, in addition to information obtained from an analysis of documents relating to Rosewall Best Start, and from observations made at Best Start sites. A number of quotes from individuals are included in the text. In order to maintain confidentiality, the source of the quote is not given.

Observed impact

"Few families have not been touched by Best Start – even if they don't know what Best Start is, or know much about it".

A frequent comment was that it is difficult to quantify the impact of Best Start. However it was generally felt that Best Start has had a positive impact: "You know it, you can feel it, but it won't show up in the data yet". The impact was described in terms of an effect on service delivery, on workers in the area, and on families.

It was argued that "the whole service system is enriched by being involved with Best Start". Various services were noted to be linking with each other more, and territorialism to have been reduced. When describing the impact of Best Start, one person commented: "some things are subtle – things feel more cohesive". Interestingly, it was observed that one impact of Best Start is that the parents understand now that the services in the area are all working together, that they are all linked, which was seen as a positive. Another aspect of service delivery that has been affected by Best Start is that more services now come out to the Rosewall area, rather than families having to visit them in a central location (usually Geelong). Similarly, an agency may now visit a family initially at the kindergarten, in an environment that is comfortable to the family. This was viewed most positively by people working with families in Rosewall.

Many people working at various Best Start sites discussed how useful it was to know the other people involved in Best Start. For most, the Best Start meetings were the first time that they had met many of the others attending the meetings. Their personal knowledge of many individuals, and of the work they do, has assisted them in knowing where they should refer families with specific issues, and being able to personally recommend the person to whom they are referring the family.

Projects like the playgroups, 'Let's Read' and 'Smiles 4 Miles' in particular were described as having a very positive impact on families in the Rosewall area. This impact was more far-reaching than had been anticipated: "the number of families touched – that exceeded our expectations". It was noted also that one of outcomes of Best Start was that it provided opportunities and choices for parents.

A number of practical and also less tangible outcomes were mentioned by various people. These include:

- Increased sharing of resources, for example a kindergarten using some school facilities; a playgroup meeting in a room in a school.
- Parents enrolling for kindergarten earlier – not waiting until the beginning of the year, after attending a playgroup.
- Parents reading more to their children.
- Improved health and hygiene for children.
- Children drinking water at the kindergarten.
- More children visiting the dentist.
- Parents linking up with each other.
- Families being more connected to their community.
- Seeing an increase in community pride, in people volunteering and being involved.

A number of spin-offs that are described below were also seen as part of the impact of Best Start.

What helped Rosewall Best Start to work

When people were asked what they thought had helped to make Rosewall Best Start work, or helped to make it successful, the following things were most frequently mentioned: the community facilitator; the partnership between different organisations; linking services together; the concrete things that were part of Best Start; and the meetings. Each of these is discussed in some detail below.

- ***Importance of the community facilitator***

“The number one asset of Best Start”

The role of the Best Start community facilitator was viewed as of pivotal importance, and having the right person in that position was also seen as vital. Praise for Leonie Dillon, the community facilitator, was usually the first thing mentioned when people were asked what helped to make Rosewall Best Start work. A summary of the functions that were identified as key for the role, and of the characteristics of the community facilitator that people most valued is presented.

The functions of the community facilitator role that were seen as particularly important included:

- Someone to pull it all together, to guide and oversee it all
- Providing a structure for people to get together (e.g. meetings)
- Acting as a go-between, passing information between different organisations
- Someone to cross boundaries
- Someone to analyse the needs of the community, and get professionals together to see how to meet those needs.

The characteristics of the Rosewall Best Start community facilitator that were valued by people involved with the project, and seen to contribute to the success of the Rosewall Best Start project were:

- Networking very well between people
- Having considerable energy and drive
- Being highly organised
- Being passionately committed to Best Start
- Never letting people down; doing what she says she will do
- Keeping meetings on track and to time
- Visiting all sites regularly so that she is a familiar face, and is in touch with everyone
- Feeding information out to everyone
- Having a ‘can-do’ approach
- Being diligent and focussed
- Not taking over
- Listening to people – families and other workers.

The accolades for the community facilitator were a dominant theme in most discussions. The community facilitator was described as: “the best thing since sliced bread”, “like gold”, and “the number one asset of Best Start”. Some favourable comments were also made about the local Department of Human Service’s Project Officer.

Observations of the Rosewall Best Start Community Facilitator in action confirmed many of the comments made by people involved with the project. The facilitator was observed passing information on from site to site, actively problem solving with various individuals, and did appear to know about all of the details of the many projects and activities going on. She was warmly greeted by parents, workers and managers wherever she went, and appeared to know everyone, including many of the parents and children at various sites.

- ***Partnerships between organisations***

“This wouldn’t have been possible on our own”

Several people mentioned that the partnerships between various organisations were an important factor in the success of the Rosewall Best Start project. It was noted that while there had previously been some links at a more senior level, with Best Start these links were established at the worker level also. The community facilitator described Best Start as a “platform of connections” and it does appear to have functioned that way. As one person stated: “Projects like Best Start demonstrate that you don’t do things alone. The sum of the parts is greater than the whole”. An excellent example of the strength of these partnerships is the conference paper presented at the National Investment for Early Years conference entitled: “Pathways to early childhood development. A symposium exploring stronger pathways between the universal and secondary service system” by Leonie Dillon (Best Start), Kathryn

Howe (Bethany Family Support), Nola Ganly, Sue Cooper and Jacqui Beck (DHS). The content of this paper and the very fact that a joint presentation was possible exemplifies a strong and active partnership.

The strength of the commitment of all the agencies to work together was also commented on as something that contributed to the success of Best Start. It was noted that people were “not parochial, not precious” and were able to put competition between organisations aside. An indication of the commitment of individuals and organisations to Rosewall Best Start is the consistent attendance at Best Start meetings, most notably the Partnership Group meetings. It was noted from the minutes, and also during the discussion, that people have not lost interest over the years.

The story of how one playgroup was set up was provided as an example of the value of the partnerships created by Best Start. At one of the meetings a need to find a space for a playgroup was discussed, and one school principal indicated that they have a suitable space in the school, and that it could be done quite quickly, which it was. The person relating this story stated: “That’s what that table created – that opportunity”. It was noted that having a playgroup happening within the school served another purpose that “this makes the school a happy place for parents to come to”. For many parents school may not have been a happy place, thus attending the playgroup may break down negative associations in relation to schools.

It was suggested that the “network of schools and community groups is a new one” and very beneficial for the community. In particular some of the schools were seen as receptive to new ideas and to working with others, as well as to sharing resources. One person stated that they were “astounded at how accepting the schools are” of the various strategies put forward. The Rosewall Neighbourhood House was also commended as being very supportive of new initiatives and actively working with Best Start, for example in employing the Playgroup Facilitator.

- **Linking services together**

“I have the perception that the school, the kinder and neighbourhood house for example are linked more now”

This factor that was seen as contributing to the success of Rosewall Best Start is similar to the concept of partnerships between organisations, but is about how services on the ground operated, rather than how the organisations established partnerships. As one person commented: “We have closer relationships now due to Best Start” and another: “Linking services together is of most benefit”. The value of the new links was particularly acknowledged by people who are working directly with families.

There were many positive examples cited of how services are now linked together more strongly. Some specific instances were discussed in the section on the impact of Rosewall Best Start above. Another example is the fact that with the parent’s permission, information about a child is at times provided by a kindergarten teacher to the teachers at the school the child is moving on to. This smooths the transition to

school and is of benefit to the teachers and also to the parents, who are reassured that the next stage (school) knows about their child. The connection between services was illustrated when Bethany staff took the NEWPIN parents to visit the Rosewall playgroup and Neighbourhood House, which facilitates the involvement of these parents in the playgroup and other activities at the Neighbourhood House.

It was generally felt that the increased linking of services has resulted in improved access to services by families: “Makes it easier for families if services and professionals are linked together”. The fact that individuals met each other, and became more familiar with the services other agencies provided assisted them in referring parents appropriately, and with confidence: “I can recommend a parent to Maternal and Child Health personally now, because I know the nurses there now”.

The key role of the community facilitator was stressed when people spoke about links between services: “Leonie makes it easy for people to contact each other, so you can start new things easily” and “Leonie tells you who you can link with”.

It must be noted that it was not always clear during the discussions with various people, to what extent Best Start was responsible for some of the projects and events that were discussed. This was no doubt partly due to the many inter-relationships that have formed between organisations and workers in Rosewall. As one person commented: “Best Start had a role in the community kitchen, community garden, festivals and CAOS¹”.

Several people noted the value of the Play Day held in February 2005 as an opportunity for agencies to get to know each other and form informal partnerships. Over ten universal service provider groups attended to provide information about their service and to link with other professionals and community members.

The importance of giving a consistent message across various programs is also stressed in the Minutes and Facilitator’s Reports. This was also echoed in the discussions held with various people involved with Rosewall Best Start. Services being linked and individuals aware of what others are doing clearly assists them in achieving consistency across programs.

- **Concrete projects**

“Actually doing things, things actually happen”.

A number of people suggested that the fact that Rosewall Best Start had implemented a number of very practical and visible projects helped to make it successful. Projects like ‘Let’s Read’, ‘Smiles 4 Miles’, the dental kits, the playgroup facilitator and the absenteeism project were particularly referred to in this context. They were viewed positively as it showed that Best Start was “doing practical things on the ground, not just on paper”. The impact and the value of individual projects was spoken of

¹ The Community Agents of Sustainability Network (CAOS) has as its overall aim “to support and enhance a high level of collaboration between Community Development workers initiating “on the ground” responses within the North” (The “CAOS” Connector, 2003, p. 1).

frequently. People also saw these projects as highly successful: “The programs, for example the playgroups, ‘Let’s Read’ and ‘Smiles 4 Miles’ have exceeded their goals”.

The very success of these projects had in turn enhanced the success of Best Start as “it makes you want to be involved when you see the things that are happening”. This type of comment was made by several people.

It was noted that Best Start projects and resources were able to become part of what was already happening, for example in schools and in agencies, and were consistent with, and complemented, their goals and work. A similar comment was that Best Start did not attempt to ‘take over’, but worked with others. Best Start projects were also seen at times to “act as a catalyst”. For example, ‘Let’s Read’ has led to a focus on story time in some settings.

The resources that were made available as part of Best Start projects were viewed as extremely useful and appropriate. They were appreciated by agencies with little money to spend. Many people reflected on the impact they had had. For example, the fact that children in kindergartens have water bottles, and drink water was commented on several times. Similarly, the significance of a child receiving a book was stated: “For many it’s a book-free zone at home. It was the first time some kids got a book – like Christmas – the kids were really appreciative”. The resources distributed by Best Start were in fact highly practical, but they were presented in an extremely popular and user-friendly way which made them popular with families: “Everything Leonie brings, parents like it – its good stuff”.

- **Meetings**

“The meetings were not a chore which is a good sign”.

It was surprising to find that the Best Start meetings, at the Partnership or Working Group level, were discussed in overwhelmingly positive terms. Many people noted that the community facilitator did an excellent job at keeping the meetings to time, and to the point. This ensured that group members were happy to attend, knowing that the time involved would be kept to a minimum.

The fact that the meetings were well organised, with agendas, minutes and reports circulated promptly, was also seen as encouraging attendance. Some people gratefully noted that the community facilitator ensured that the time of the meetings was suitable for all members of a particular group. This also helped to maintain regular attendance.

The meetings were also seen as an invaluable, and often a rare, opportunity to network with others. Being able to meet people and learning more about what they do was seen as particularly useful by many people, particularly those who felt somewhat isolated in their work. Thus for individuals whose position involved them working with few colleagues, or in a role that allowed little time to step outside of the work situation, Best Start meetings were most welcome. One description of the Best Start

meetings was: “a nice mix of networking and work – a good balance”. They were also seen as a “good opportunity to share practice – what’s happening” with other workers.

Shared goals

“So many people coming together from different areas – for one cause”.

One explanation for the continued support for Best Start was that all people involved shared the same goals, and were committed to achieving the best results they could. As one person commented: “we’re all working towards the same goal, even parents”. Another stated: “We all do this for the kids”.

It might appear to be self-evident that everyone involved in a project like Best Start would share similar goals. However, the fact that several people mentioned it as strength of this project suggests that the common cause of all players was unusually strong, or that individuals had not always experienced this unity in purpose.

Spin-offs

“A spin-off of Best Start”

During the discussions with people involved with Rosewall Best Start, a number of things were mentioned as spin-offs of Best Start. Individuals felt that these things would not have happened without the coming together of various people that occurred with Best Start. These ranged from one-off events, such as a Dad’s Night, to the major partnership and concentration of services that is currently being implemented in Whittington. Another more concrete spin-off is that people involved with the Absenteeism project have obtained funding from the School Focused Youth Service to adapt the School Be In It kit for use with aboriginal children, and to trial the new kit with 12 children.

Not re-inventing the wheel

[The community facilitator was] “Always scanning the environment – bringing back ideas”

Throughout the Minutes and Facilitator’s Reports there are indications of a tendency to utilise existing programs or resources for Rosewall Best Start, rather than re-inventing the wheel. This involved working with other organisations and frequently meant considerable time for meetings and liaising with relevant people. Examples include the ‘Let’s Read’ program from the Smith Family, the ‘Smiles 4 Miles’ project from Dental Health Services Victoria, and the ‘Healthy Kids, Healthy Relationships’ program from Bethany. Complementing the work of others rather than duplicating their work or competing with them was also the approach favoured by Rosewall Best

Start. Thus links were established with the 'Romp and Chomp' Healthy Eating and Active Play Under 5's Project. The fact that Best Start did "not want ownership" was described as a useful characteristic in working with other organisations.

Bottom-up approach

"Not built top-down, built bottom-up".

It is clear from the Minutes of the Partnership Group and of the three Working Groups, and from the Facilitator's Reports, that the concerns and priorities of the community have informed the choice of and the implementation of the projects and activities that have been part of Best Start in Rosewall.

Several people involved with Rosewall Best Start explicitly referred to its having a bottom-up approach as a strength of the project, while one viewed it as having a 'middle-out' approach, being informed from the top and from the bottom.

A small number of people questioned if the community could have been better represented on the Working Groups, but suggested that the simultaneous presence of many projects in the Northern suburbs, all wanting community representation, may have stretched the community's capacity. It is apparent from the documentation associated with the project that there was an intention to involve community members wherever possible. It seems that less formal mechanisms were being employed to ensure input into Best Start from community members over the course of the project. As one person involved with Best Start stated, we're "working with families – working with what they want". Similarly, it was commented that "Leonie did community consultation, she was always available, and made lots of effort to include people, for example people who don't speak English, and aboriginals". A further comment was made that the community facilitator ensured that Best Start resources were made available to groups such as aboriginal and migrant groups, even if they were not represented on the committees, as it is difficult to get representation.

Problems with Rosewall Best Start

"Three years is not enough"

A number of people were specifically asked about any negative aspects of Best Start, or anything that they think could have been done differently. Many were unable to say anything negative about Rosewall Best Start.

Of those who did make a response, many indicated that they felt that three years funding was not enough for this type of project, that they were "not sure it can achieve its best in that time". It was suggested that you need about 12 months lead time, and that you need longer than three years to be able to measure any impact.

Three people were concerned that there was not sufficient community involvement in the project, particularly at the Working Group level. Some reasons for this were

offered, relating to the many projects in the Northern suburbs of Geelong that were all seeking community involvement at the same time, and to the community lacking people able or willing to be involved at that level. It was nevertheless felt that Best Start was community-focused.

Some concerns were mentioned by various individuals about the level of support given to Best Start by other organisations. This ranged from a very small, local example to a larger more general concern.

Two people indicated that one project – the Children of Parents With a Mental Illness project, was not successful. They felt that this project had not really been appropriate for Best Start, as it was a secondary intervention project and relied on others to identify families rather than the families identifying themselves.

A suggestion that more money could have been put towards individual projects, and earlier on, was made by two people. They expressed an understanding that the Partnership Group was being very careful in how funds were spent, and that a great deal was expected for small amounts of funding.

A number of other issues were raised by single individuals. These ranged from a concern that Best Start had not tackled the larger issue of systemic change to a concern about the sustainability of specific projects.

Challenges for the future

Sustainability

The key challenge for the future mentioned by people who are involved with Rosewall Best Start was sustainability. In particular, how to sustain the networks that are now happening, beyond the lifetime of the Rosewall Best Start project. Interestingly, some people indicated that they believe the most important thing to maintain is a community facilitator. For some, the benefits of having someone able to organise and structure the type of networking that they had shared were seen to outweigh the benefits of additional funding for projects. It was indicated that small amounts of money could possibly be found for funding some projects, but that it was essential to have a person there to facilitate the network. Importantly, many indicated that they were keen to maintain their involvement in the network. Some suggested that the community facilitator should be employed full time, or perhaps also employ someone with a public relations background as well, to spend time obtaining support for Best Start, particularly funding. Another suggestion was to have a community facilitator for less time than currently, but to still have someone in that role. The issue of sustainability has also been a topic of discussion in meetings of some of the working groups.

Passing on the 'learning's'

Several people mentioned the new Best Start project that is being funded for the Wathaurong Aboriginal community in Geelong. They thought that it would be very helpful for the "learning's" from Rosewall Best Start to be shared with the new project, and also that it would be interesting to see if the Rosewall Best Start model could be adapted for the Aboriginal community.

Summary

Overall perceptions

It was apparent from the discussions held with people involved with Rosewall Best Start that it is viewed extremely positively, and with great enthusiasm. It is notable that this enthusiasm has been maintained over the years. Many of the people actively involved with it now have been involved from the very beginning. This enthusiastic response is representative of people involved with Rosewall Best Start, as some care was taken in preparing this report to speak with people from a range of organisations or services, and at various levels. The consistent attendance at Best Start meetings, particularly the Partnership meetings, provides further evidence for the popularity of Rosewall Best Start.

The people

The two most consistent themes that emerged from discussions with people who are involved with Rosewall Best Start were firstly, the pivotal role played by the community facilitator, and secondly, that strong partnerships and linkages between services and organisations were perceived to be an extremely important and positive result of the Best Start project. These two points are in fact related, as a key role of the community facilitator was nurturing and maintaining the partnerships and linkages. Rosewall Best Start is fortunate in having a particularly skilful and dedicated community facilitator, who has been able to engender considerable support and cooperation from key players in the area. At the same time, the community facilitator has been fortunate in having such responsive and committed people to work with in Rosewall.

The projects

The specific projects that are described in this report are characterised by their relevance to the community, the care with which they have been implemented, and the constant striving to present a consistent message to families, across the different projects. While the data available on any one project is limited, it is clear that projects such as 'Let's Read', 'Smiles for Miles', the playgroup facilitator project and the Absenteeism project are having a positive impact in the Rosewall community. There is some evidence that parents are reading to their children more, that children are drinking more water rather than sweet drinks in kindergartens, that more parents are attending a playgroup, and that chronic absenteeism is being addressed. The value and accomplishments of these projects was seen to contribute to the success of Rosewall Best Start, and also to promote the continued involvement and support of the key players.

Achievements

The impact of Best Start is described in terms of its effect on service delivery, on workers in the area, and on families themselves. Many instances were provided of Best Start making a difference, at various levels. The importance of giving parents a choice and offering them opportunities was also stressed.

Rosewall Best Start provides an excellent example of a multi-sectoral partnership that is working well, and has done so over an extended period of time. Clearly the enthusiasm of all partners and the strength of their shared goals contribute to the success of this project. In addition, continued support for Rosewall Best Start has been fostered by the community facilitator's attention to very practical matters, such as keeping everyone well informed, following up on matters when requested, circulating minutes and reports promptly, and keeping meetings on track and to time.

The linkages between workers and services were identified by many people as an important achievement of Rosewall Best Start. To some extent the lack of linkages between services operating in such close proximity prior to Best Start is surprising. Many people spoke of services as fragmented, and stated that they had little or no contact with staff from other services working with families in the area, prior to Best Start. Workers in direct contact with families were particularly appreciative of the new links between services created by Best Start and felt that they, and the families they work with, benefited from them. The extent to which different sites have been prepared to work with others, beyond their usual role, is commendable. The Best Start schools and the Rosewall Neighbourhood House were particularly noted in discussions as being supportive of Best Start, and flexible in their approach.

The linkages that have been achieved, the use of facilities such as schools and the neighbourhood house for activities, and the improvements in access to services that have been achieved are all consistent with the findings of a study conducted with service providers in Corio and Norlane some years ago (Savage, Bailey & Wellman, 2004). Service providers interviewed in that study highlighted the problem of fragmented services, problems for residents in accessing services that are some distance away, problems in residents not knowing what services are available, and argued that schools and neighbourhood houses could be utilised for service delivery and activities, as residents viewed these as non-threatening environments.

It is important to acknowledge that Rosewall Best Start was being implemented in the context of many other projects that were active in the Northern suburbs of Geelong, such as Neighbourhood Renewal and Communities in Action. Best Start contributed to many activities that were organised by the coming together of various agencies, and at times it is difficult to identify a single agency or project as being responsible. One of the ways in which Best Start worked well was in its capacity to work with others. It is interesting also the extent to which people felt that Best Start was a key player in many activities which were outside of the specific Best Start projects.

The future

Sustainability was identified as the key challenge for the future of Best Start. Many people were enthusiastic about maintaining an involvement with Best Start, and were

particularly hopeful that the networking between various services and organisations would continue.

Many Best Start projects that have been successful do require ongoing funding. This funding could appropriately be provided by the organisation within which the projects sit, rather than from a source such as Best Start. It is to be hoped that the pilot work undertaken by Best Start in which innovative approaches have been trialled will be taken up more broadly in the future.

Conclusion

It is clear from the information provided in this local evaluation report that Rosewall Best Start is rated as being highly successful in achieving its aims. In the words of one of the people involved with the project: “It’s nice to see the early years recognised – and it’s working”. The combination of many partners who are willing to work collectively and who share a passion to bring about change through working with people in the community, a participatory action approach that has been fluid and adaptable, and a skilled facilitator to guide the process has proven most successful.

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