

Fostering emergent literacy in the early years through partnerships with Early Childhood Education and Care services

Let's Read¹ and Goodstart Early Learning²



goodstart
early
learning

The importance of emergent literacy

An individual's literacy levels affect their opportunities in life for education, employment, income and wellbeing³, yet around half of Australians aged 15 to 74 do not have the literacy skills to meet the demands of everyday life and work⁴. The years from birth to five are critical for building the emergent literacy skills that precede learning to read and write⁵.

Emergent literacy refers to the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing, and the environments that support these developments⁶.

Why work with early childhood educators?

The early home learning environment makes a difference for children's later academic and literacy success, particularly for children in disadvantaged circumstances⁷. However, many families are not aware of the importance of emergent literacy or how to foster its development⁸.

Improving the way Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services support emergent literacy development can have great benefits, particularly for children from low-income families⁹. However, ECEC settings generally have low levels of instructional support for language and emergent literacy development.¹⁰

A Let's Read pilot with Goodstart Early Learning

From 2011 to 2013, Let's Read partnered with Goodstart Early Learning (Goodstart) to pilot an emergent literacy professional development package with 15 Goodstart pilot sites (long day care centres) across Victoria. The pilot aimed to develop a low-intensity, low-cost intervention to increase the capacity of educators who have limited time and resources.

Centres were supported with tailored professional development, resources and support to develop programs to foster emergent literacy and engage with children, families and their community about the importance of early literacy activities.

The process and the results

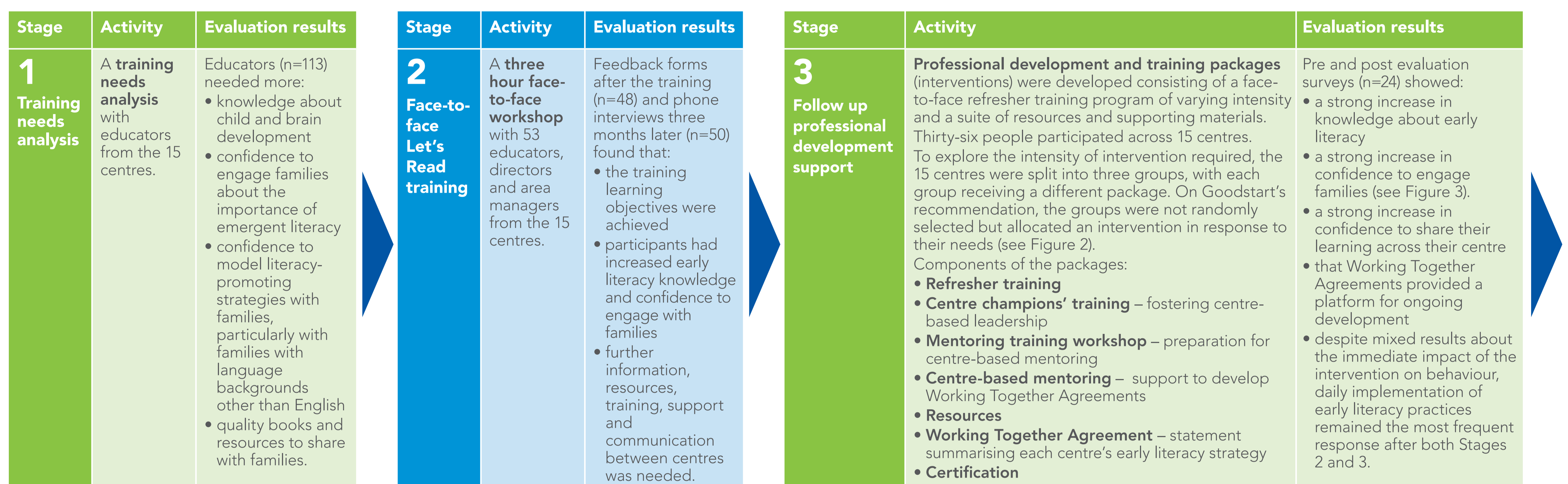
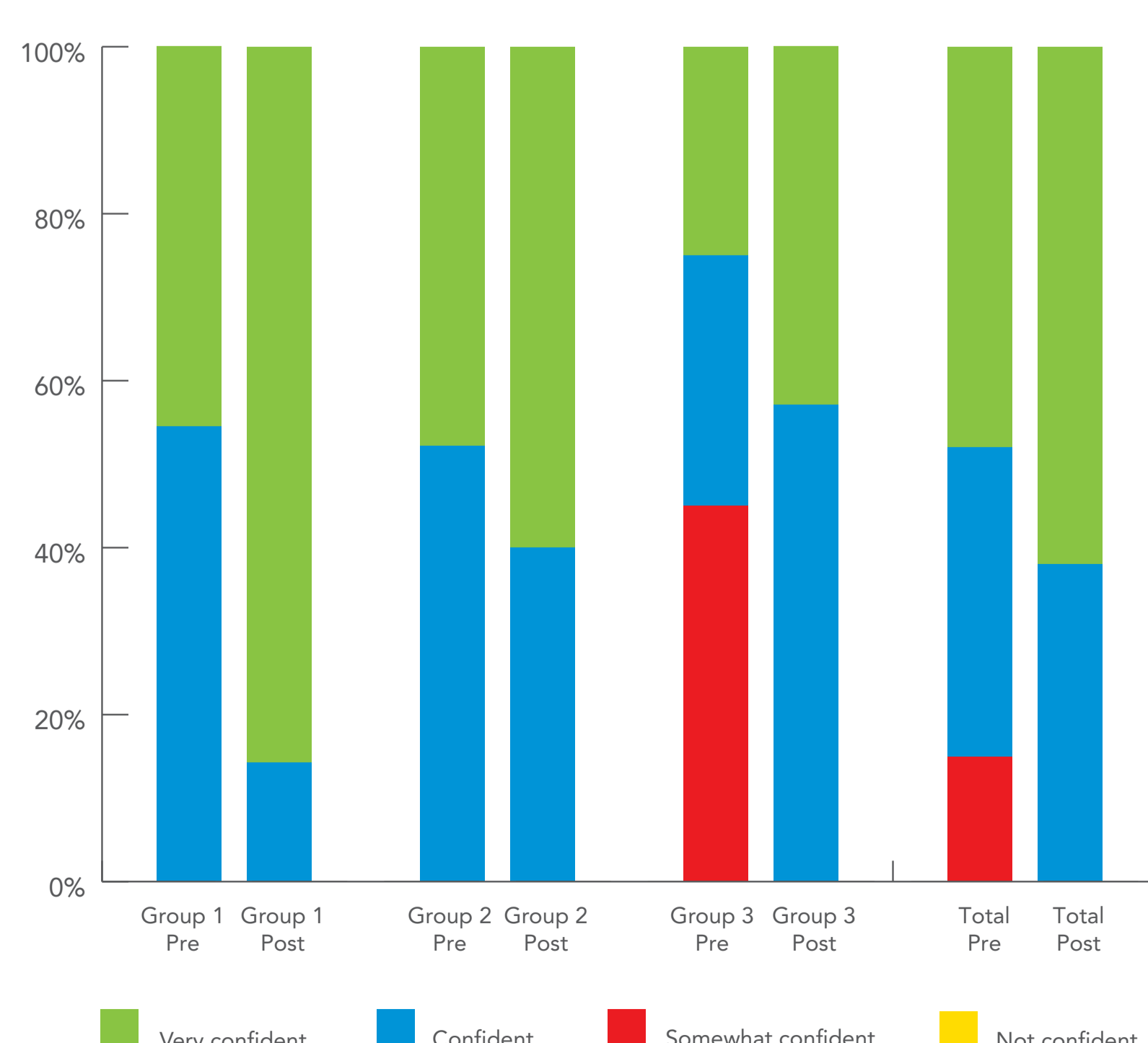


Figure 2: Stratified groups and intervention intensity



Figure 3: Confidence to engage and work in partnership with families



What did we learn?

The pilot achieved its intended outcomes for all pilot sites. It successfully laid the foundations for cross-centre collaboration to create and sustain high quality early literacy environments.

Participating educators are now supporting their centres to develop activities, programs and policies that engage with children, families, caregivers and communities to promote emergent literacy development. However, further support might be needed to sustain educators' confidence and enthusiasm to implement practice changes.

Overall, the similarities between the intervention groups outweighed the differences, indicating that the intervention intensity was well matched to participant groups, and that a low-cost, low-intensity intervention can be effective if it responds to identified need.

In order to make a version of the low intensity intervention available beyond the pilot sites, a Let's Read eLearning course was developed. This course was a finalist in the 2013 Victorian eLearning Awards and a 2014 LearnX Gold Award winner. Let's Read and Goodstart are also investigating other ways to embed the learnings from this pilot into the Goodstart service system as well as further research opportunities.

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2 Rhiannon Williams, Social Inclusion Coordinator Victoria and Tasmania for Goodstart Early Learning
3 Prior, M., Smart, D., Sanson, A., & Oberklaid, F. (2001). Longitudinal predictors of behavioural adjustment in pre-adolescent children, *The Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry*, 06/2001, Volume 35, Issue 3.
4 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) PIAAC 2011-12 Preliminary Findings: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/lookup/4228.0main+features992011-2012>.
5 Neuman, S., & Dickinson, D. K. (2002) Handbook of early literacy research. New York: Guilford.
6 Whitehurst, G. T., & Lonigan, C. J. (1998). Child Development and Emergent Literacy. *Child Development*, 69(3), 848-872.
7 Dickinson, D. & Tabors, P. (Eds.). (2001). Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home at school. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing; Weitzman CC, Roy L, Walls T, Tomlin R. (2004) 'More evidence for reach out and read: a home-based study' in *Paediatrics* 2004 May; 113(5):1248-53. Department of Paediatrics, Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven, Connecticut.
8 Let's Read market research conducted in 2012 indicated that 51% of families don't realise reading books and sharing stories with children from birth gives them the best start in life and 34% of families do not understand the importance of reading and sharing stories with their children from birth.
9 Dickinson, D., McCabe, A., & Essex, M. (2006). A window of opportunity we must open to all: The case for preschool with high quality support for language and literacy. Chapter 1 in D. Dickinson & S. Neuman (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol 2). New York, NY: Guilford Publications; Raban, B., & Ure, C. (2000). Literacy in the preschool: An Australian case study. In J. Hayden (Ed.), *Landscapes in early childhood education: Cross cultural perspectives on empowerment. A guide for the new millennium*. New York: Peter Lang.
10 Cloney, D., Page, J., Taylor, C., & Church, A. (2013). Assessing the quality of early childhood education and care (Vol. 25). Centre for Community Child Health.

About us

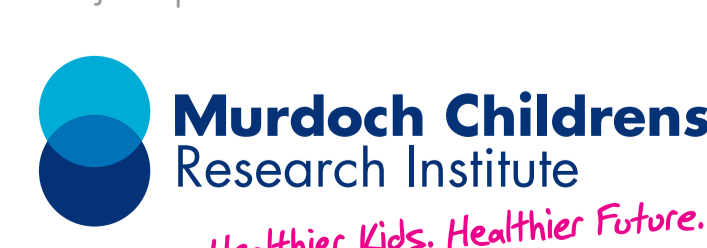
Let's Read is a national, evidence-based early literacy initiative that promotes reading with children from birth to five years. Let's Read was developed by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Royal Children's Hospital. The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Smith Family have partnered to implement Let's Read with communities across Australia. At the time of the project, the Australian Government was working in partnership with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Smith Family to deliver Let's Read.

www.letsread.com.au

Goodstart is Australia's largest early learning and care provider, caring for 73,000 children from 61,000 families across 641 centres in all states and territories of Australia. Goodstart was created by a partnership of four of Australia's leading charities who saw the potential of early learning to transform Australia. They wanted to address one of the key sources of many future problems—poor early childhood experiences. It made perfect sense for these groups to pool their energy and invest in early learning to give Australia's children the best possible start in life.

www.goodstart.org.au

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