

Let's Read Certified Services Initiative: A pilot with Goodstart

Final Report

Centre for Community Child Health

2014

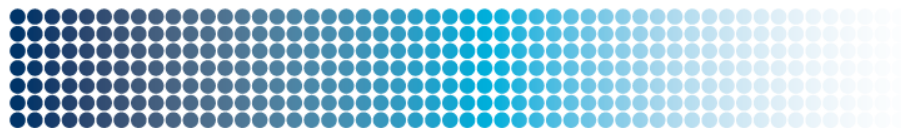
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- Christine Andell, Coordinator, Young Readers Program, State Library Victoria
- Eleanor Donovan, General Manager Strategy, Goodstart Early Learning
- Erica Gardner, Project Officer, MCRI
- Jenny Martin, A/Social Inclusion Coordinator, Goodstart Early Learning
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- Lisa Clinch, Director, Goodstart Early Learning
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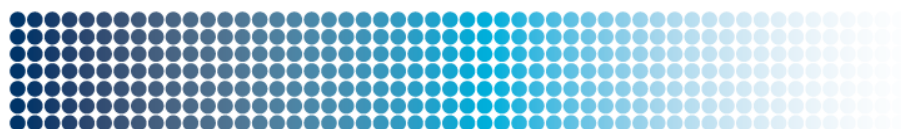
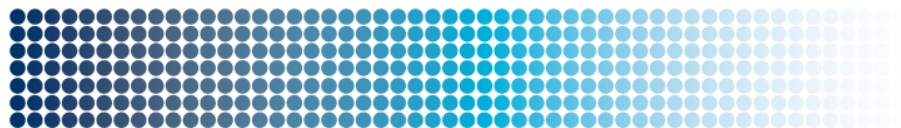


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1. Background

1.1 The importance of emergent literacy

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

Emergent literacy refers to the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing, and the environments that support this skill development.^{iv} The terms 'early literacy' and 'emergent literacy' are often used interchangeably.

1.2 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 circumstances.^v However, many families are not aware of the importance of emergent literacy or how to foster its development.^{vi}

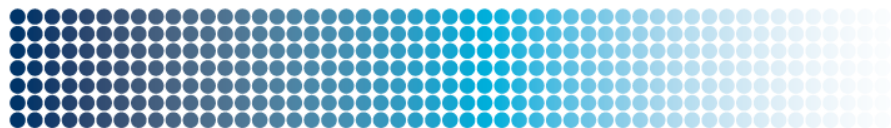
Improving the way Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services support emergent literacy development can have great benefits, particularly for children from low-income families.^{vii} However, ECEC services generally have low levels of instructional support for language and emergent literacy development.^{viii}

The building blocks for success in literacy are laid in early childhood^{ix}

The early experiences of young children occur within their homes, early childhood education and care services, schools and beyond. Reading with young children is part of offering a high quality early childhood program, but to be most effective reading needs to be promoted to families as a fun and integral part of a child's daily routine.

Early childhood education and care services play an important role in helping families with their child rearing and supporting children's development; they do this through the caring relationships and enriching experiences they share with children and through their relationships with the children's families.

Children's learning and wellbeing are enhanced when families and early childhood educators work together to promote the best outcomes for children. Partnerships are built when early childhood



educators know each child in the context of his or her family, culture and community; share power – including handing over some decision making to families about their child’s experiences while in care; and acknowledge and reflect upon their biases and stereotypes.

In high quality services, family partnerships reflect and impact on every aspect of the operation of the service – philosophies and policies, the physical environment, community activities, the curriculum or experiences offered to children, interactions and relationships with children, communication and routines.

1.3 Let’s Read

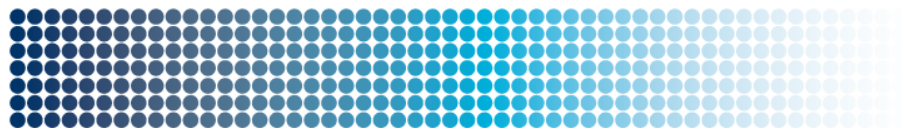
Let’s Read is a national, evidence-based early literacy initiative that promotes reading with children from birth to five years. Its vision is for all Australian children to share books, stories, songs and nursery rhymes every day from birth with the important people in their lives.

Let’s Read was developed by the Centre for Community Child Health at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne. The Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI) and The Smith Family have partnered to implement Let’s Read with communities across Australia.^x

Let’s Read supports the development of evidence-based skills, practices and environments that foster emergent literacy development. It is a multi-streamed initiative based on an ecological model of early literacy support. It is designed to increase home literacy resources and build the capacity of both families and professionals to foster children’s emergent literacy skills.

1.4 Goodstart Early Learning

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.^{xi}



2. About the Let's Read certified services pilot

In 2011, Let's Read partnered with Goodstart Early Learning (Goodstart) to pilot an emergent literacy professional development package with 15 Goodstart sites across Victoria. The pilot aimed to develop a low-intensity, low-cost intervention to increase the capacity of Educators, who can experience limited time and resources.

The Let's Read certified services initiative (the pilot) built on activity associated with designation of 2012 as the National Year of Reading and Goodstart's social inclusion and quality objectives. The pilot sought to engage and build stronger relationships with children and families. Emergent literacy was seen as an effective tool to achieve this, as well as to directly contribute to children's learning and development.

It was agreed that the pilot work with Educators to support their work fostering children's literacy and language development, and to ensure Educators have the skills and resources to engage with families about emergent literacy. Services would be supported with tailored professional development, resources, key messages and activities. Services would also be provided with assistance to develop programs to engage with children, families and their community about the importance of early literacy activities such as reading, singing and nursery rhymes. There would be a particular emphasis on relationships with families.

The aim of the pilot was to increase Educators' knowledge and skills to:

- offer high quality literacy experiences for children
- engage and empower families and caregivers to support their children's early literacy skills
- build the capacity of services to provide rich early literacy environments.

The work of each Centre would be acknowledged by a presentation of a certificate (a Working Together Agreement) to each Centre.

Figure 1 outlines the process and activities that took place between 2011 and 2013. This report outlines the findings of the evaluation of the pilot and the resulting recommendations.

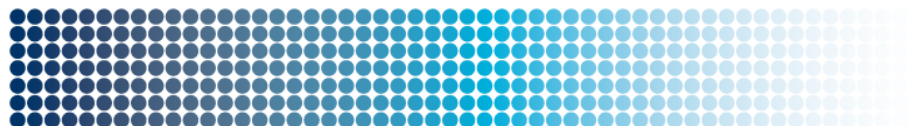


Figure 1: Certified services initiative process



3. Stage 1: Training needs analysis

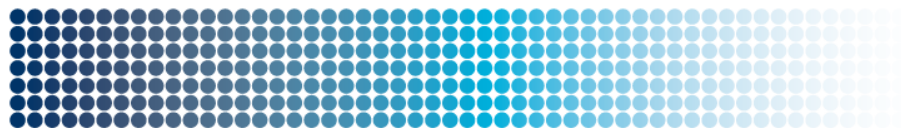
Following the development of a partnership with Goodstart, the Let's Read training needs analysis (training needs analysis) survey was piloted and then distributed to all Goodstart sites (long day care centres) in December 2011 for completion by all staff^{xii} working in the services. The survey aimed to provide a clearer picture of participant understanding of, and engagement with, emergent literacy in their daily practice. A total of 113 responses were received.^{xiii}

The survey was piloted with Directors from each site, or those second-in-charge, to ensure it was user-friendly, reader-friendly, and appropriate for all Educators, including those with a language background other than English.

The training needs analysis considered:

- the participation, education and specialist knowledge of Educators in the services
- Educator understanding regarding the building blocks of emergent literacy
- Educator confidence and skills to guide foundation skills for language and early literacy development through their programming practice and their relationships with parents
- enablers and barriers to building a sustainable approach to programming for early literacy.

The results of the survey were analysed by Let's Read, including cross-tabulation of results across the range of professional qualifications, reported skills, understandings and confidence.



3.1 Results

The findings of the survey demonstrated enthusiasm for the pilot and identified a solid skill base upon which to build.

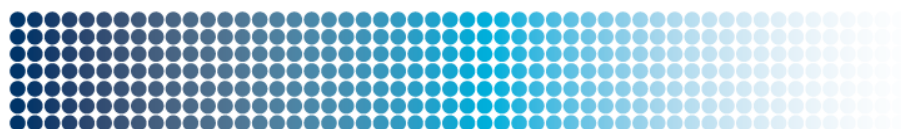
The results indicated that the Educators understood that the building blocks for success in literacy are laid in early childhood, and that these building blocks occur in children's homes, early childhood education and care settings, schools and beyond. In order to build on this, Educators identified a need for increased knowledge about child development, particularly brain development. The results also identified that training in the area of dialogic reading practices and encouraging one-on-one reading would assist with day-to-day practice. The results suggested that the training should emphasise how these practices impact on brain development and incorporate practical examples according to developmental stages.

Most respondents recognised that reading with young children is part of offering a high quality early childhood program and that, in order to be most effective, reading needs to be promoted to families as a fun and integral part of a child's daily routine.

Most educators identified that they needed skills and more confidence in engaging and forming partnerships with families to promote and support this understanding. The results identified that further training would need to focus on the important role that centres play in helping families with their child rearing and supporting children's development. Training would also need to emphasise relationships with the children's families, and both training and pilot would need to provide resources that help support collaboration with families and working with individual children in the context of their culture and community.

There were two issues that were raised as particularly challenging. These were access to skills and resources to support communication and programming for children and families with language backgrounds other than English, and a need for more books, games, props and puppets to support early literacy programming.^{xiv}

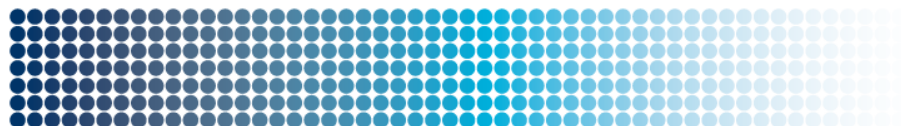
Several participating centres already had community partnerships in place to support their literacy programming.



3.2 Recommendations

Based on the results of the training needs analysis and subsequent conversations with Goodstart, the following changes were recommended to improve the Let's Read training program and suite of resources:

- Clearly articulate the key messages of the Let's Read program and explore and discuss common misconceptions. Simple language and straightforward conceptual frames, which draw on developmental theory, should be used in order to build on existing competencies.
- Embed approaches from the Family Partnership Model (FPM) approach to working with families in the Let's Read training program and provide opportunities to practice and reflect on this approach.^{xv} The elements within the FPM that are most relevant to Let's Read training relate to engaging families and developing respectful partnerships. Embedding these aspects in the Let's Read training program responds to needs identified in relation to Educators' skills and confidence in engaging families in early literacy and language development, and their ability to develop respectful partnerships with families.
- Include training on how to model early literacy with families as a method of engagement. This was an area that Educators found important and understood the significance of, but lacked confidence and skill.
- Adopt a train-the-trainer approach with the ability to 'cascade' learning to all Educators through the initial training of key 'champions'.
- Include information, support and development in working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and families with low literacy.



4. Stage 2: Face-to-face training program

Based on the findings and recommendations of the training needs analysis, and in consultation with the Goodstart Social Inclusion Coordinator for Victoria and Tasmania, a revised three-hour face-to-face Let's Read training program was developed for 15 Goodstart Early Learning pilot sites (centres).

The three-hour face-to-face training aimed to enable Educators to deliver early literacy messages to families and primary caregivers and increase their familiarity with the Let's Read framework. Consistent with the findings from the training needs analysis, the training aimed to build Educators' confidence and ability to engage families in the importance of early literacy and early literacy development. The training also developed a pre-reading resource to provide Educators with better information regarding child development and brain development in order to facilitate a greater understanding of the rationale for early literacy development.

"[The training included] plenty of examples, discussions on different ideas, bouncing off others' ideas and strategies."

Face-to-face training participant

In November 2012, 53 Goodstart Educators, Directors and Area Managers across 15 centres participated in a three-hour face-to-face training program, conducted by the Let's Read team (see Figure 2).^{xvi}

A total of five Let's Read training sessions were delivered between October and November 2013. Between two and four Educators from each pilot site were given time-release to attend a Let's Read training workshop. There was a high level of attendance by Area Managers and Educators at each centre, demonstrating a broad and strategic commitment to the pilot.



Image 1: Afrouz Shoghi facilitating a face-to-face training session

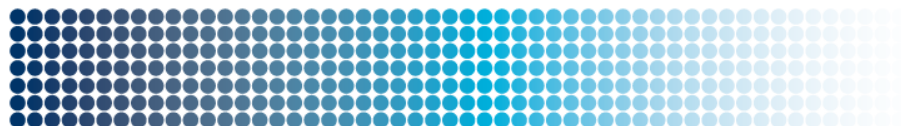
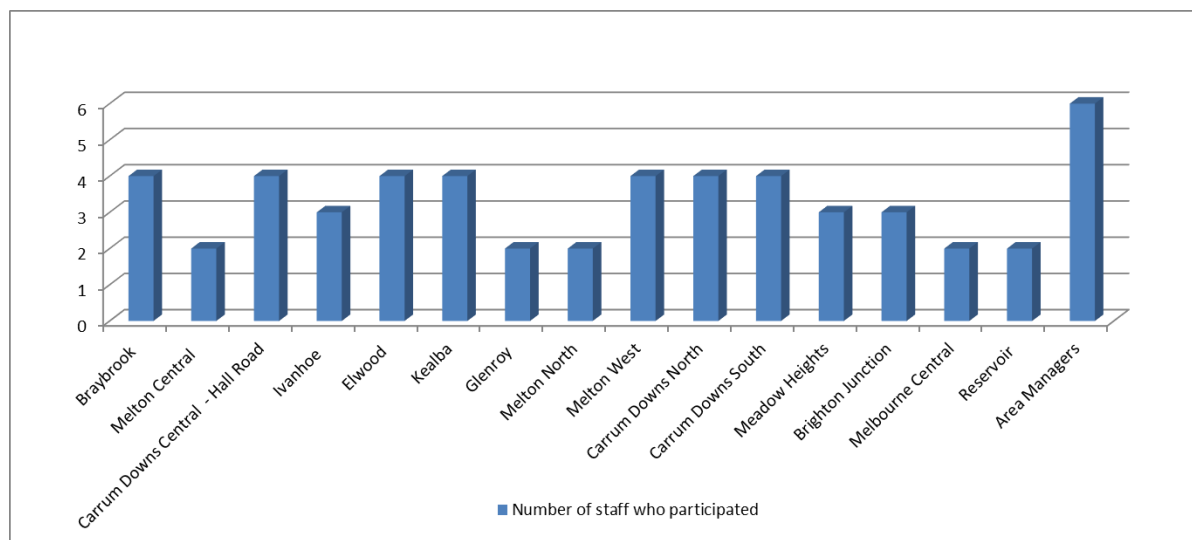


Figure 2: Goodstart pilot sites and participants



Evaluation

Training evaluations collected from all participants on completion of the workshop (n = 48) demonstrated that all participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the Let's Read face-to-face training helped them to:

- establish a shared understanding of early literacy and the rationale for supporting the development of early literacy skills
- increase their familiarity with the Let's Read framework, messages and resources
- increase their appreciation of the importance of working in partnership with families when delivering Let's Read
- increase their ability and confidence to facilitate conversations with families about early literacy
- increase their awareness of planning and strategies for implementing Let's Read in your community.

Following this, the face-to-face training was further evaluated three months after the training by conducting phone interviews with each training participant. Interviews were completed with 50 of the 53 participants.

"It taught me how important it is to read to children at a young age and how it can help them later in life."

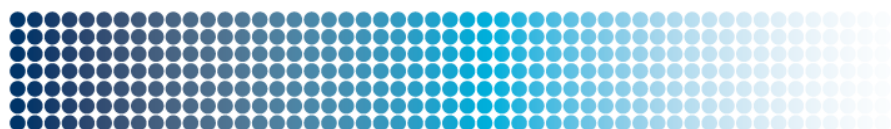
"Thought provoking with engagement of families."

Face-to-face training participants

"Usually when the parents come to pick up their children we will talk about their child's day and then what the child might be interested in with books."

"The group leaders have incorporated more literacy activities in their programs."

Phone survey respondents



The phone interviews consisted of four reflective questions. The questions aimed to evaluate if: the training had further developed the skills necessary to deliver early literacy key messages to parents and primary caregivers in Educators' centres and communities; and to identify what further support the participants required to implement early literacy activities within their centres. The interviews also set out to identify positive practice changes in the services, and to support and sustain these practice changes in relation to relationship building and emergent literacy. The core themes from the responses to each interview question were extracted and discussed.

Based on the key findings, it was recommended that a suite of supporting resources be provided to all centres. The resources should support Educators to build and sustain their capacity to engage and collaborate with families in a meaningful way. The resources should also support participants to incorporate early literacy activities into their work plans and provide advice to families on how they can develop their children's literacy skills at home.

That suite of resources were distributed as part of Stage 3 of the pilot. The suite included:

Resources for Educators

- Let's Read tip sheet for engaging parents
- information and links to service providers for:
 - CALD communities
 - Families with low-literacy
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
 - supporting children with disabilities and their families.

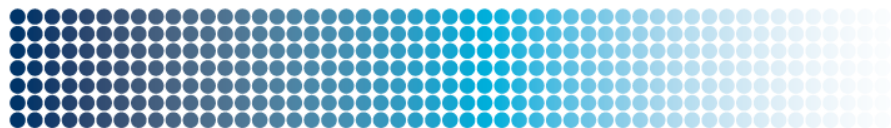
Resources for Educators and families

- Let's Read Campaign fact sheet
- Let's Read pilot fact sheet
- Let's Read program factsheet.

Other recommendations included further 'refresher' training, follow up support and tips, and communication between centres. These recommendations were also implemented in Stage 3 of the pilot.

4.1 eLearning course

Based on the learnings from the training needs analysis and the face-to-face training, and 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. It was not used in this pilot, but it may be used for future work in partnership.

Further online support mechanisms (i.e. user forums, webinars) are being explored that will provide professionals with a suite of learning opportunities and support. Online training communities and self-paced learning options will all form part of the online training implementation model.

4.2 Advisory Group

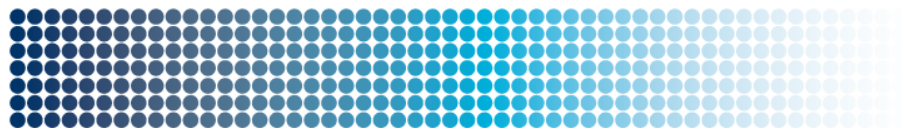
A Let's Read Goodstart Pilot Advisory Group was developed in December 2012 following the launch of the Goodstart Pilot with all Goodstart Early Learning Centres and completion of the Let's Read three-hour face-to-face training with all centres. The purpose of the Let's Read Pilot Advisory Group was to govern Stage 3 of the pilot.

The role of the Pilot Advisory Group included but was not limited to:

- providing advice on the policy and financial operating environment for the pilot
- providing technical advice on evidence-based strategies for meeting the pilot objectives
- reviewing local and international evidence that may impact on the pilot and its implementation and advising on emerging issues
- monitoring and reviewing performance and evaluation information against project plans
- overseeing communications about the pilot and its implementation
- supporting Goodstart and MCRI project staff
- providing advice on implementing and embedding pilot findings.

Membership of the Advisory Group was determined jointly by MCRI and Goodstart Early Learning and consisted of the following members:

- Afrouz Shoghi, Manager, Let's Read national early literacy campaign, MCRI
- Eleanor Donovan, General Manager Strategy, Goodstart Early Learning
- Rhiannon Williams, Social Inclusion Coordinator Vic/Tas, Goodstart Early Learning
- Lisa Clinch, Director, Goodstart Early Learning
- Sue West, Associate Director, Centre for Community Child Health, MCRI and The Royal Children's Hospital
- Julie Green, Director, Raising Children Network, MCRI and Parenting Research Centre
- Christine Andell, Coordinator, Young Readers Program, State Library Victoria
- Sabina Klepp, Early Childhood Consultant, Gowrie Victoria



5. Stage 3: Professional development and training packages

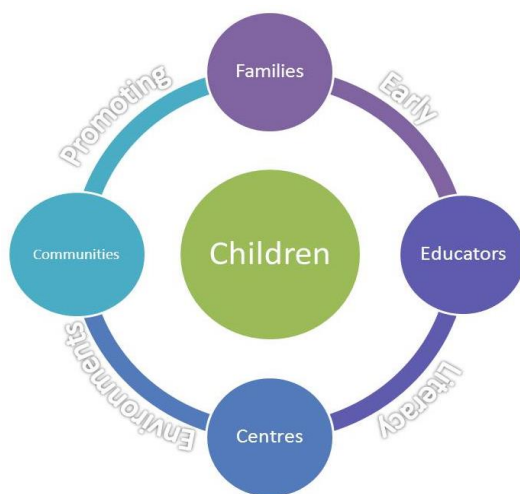
Based on the evaluation of the face-to-face training program and ongoing discussions with the Let's Read Goodstart Pilot Advisory Group, a professional development and training package was developed, consisting of a face-to-face refresher training program and a suite of resources and supporting materials.

In this stage, services would be supported with tailored professional development, resources, key messages and activities. In addition, they would be provided with assistance to develop programs to engage with children, families and their community about the importance of early literacy activities such as reading, singing and nursery rhymes. There would be a particular emphasis on relationships with families.

5.1 Stratified professional development packages

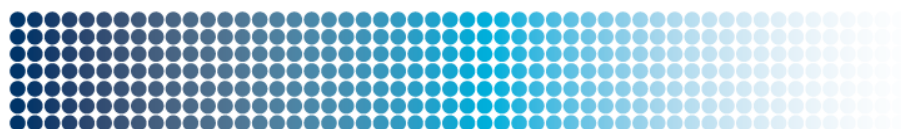
The outcomes depicted in Figure 3 were developed for the certified services initiative, based on the Let's Read multi-tiered model.

Figure 3: Certified Services Pilot outcomes model



- **Children:** All children are confident and involved learners and have rich and quality early literacy experiences.
- **Families:** All families are empowered and engaged to support their children's literacy skills and have positive literacy experiences with their children.
- **Services:** Services provide rich early literacy environments and have a shared vision for children's literacy embedded in their practice, networks and community.

In order to explore the intensity of additional professional development required, a stratified model of training delivery based on these outcomes was developed in consultation with the Let's Read Advisory Group. It was agreed that the 15 centres would



be split into three groups, with each group receiving a different intensity of training and professional development.

In consultation with the Goodstart Acting Social Inclusion Coordinator and relevant Area Managers at Goodstart, each centre was allocated to one of the three training and professional development groups, with a total of five centres per group.

On Goodstart's recommendation, the groups were not randomly selected but allocated an intervention in response to their needs. Centres identified by Goodstart as having the highest need for support and with the highest number of families attending that were experiencing disadvantage were allocated to Group 3. Those with the lowest need for support and fewest families attending that were experiencing disadvantage were allocated to Group 1. Group 2 was a mix of those with high and low needs.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the stratified professional development package consisted of the following three methodologies:

- Group 1 (lowest intensity): Refresher training and resources provided.
- Group 2 (medium intensity): Refresher training, champions' training and resources provided.
- Group 3 (highest intensity): Refresher training, champions' training, centre-based mentoring and resources provided.

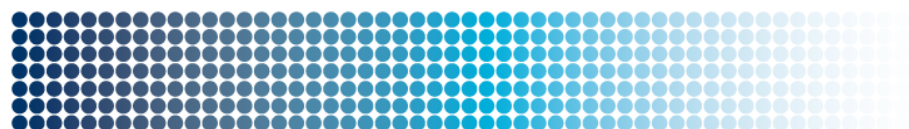
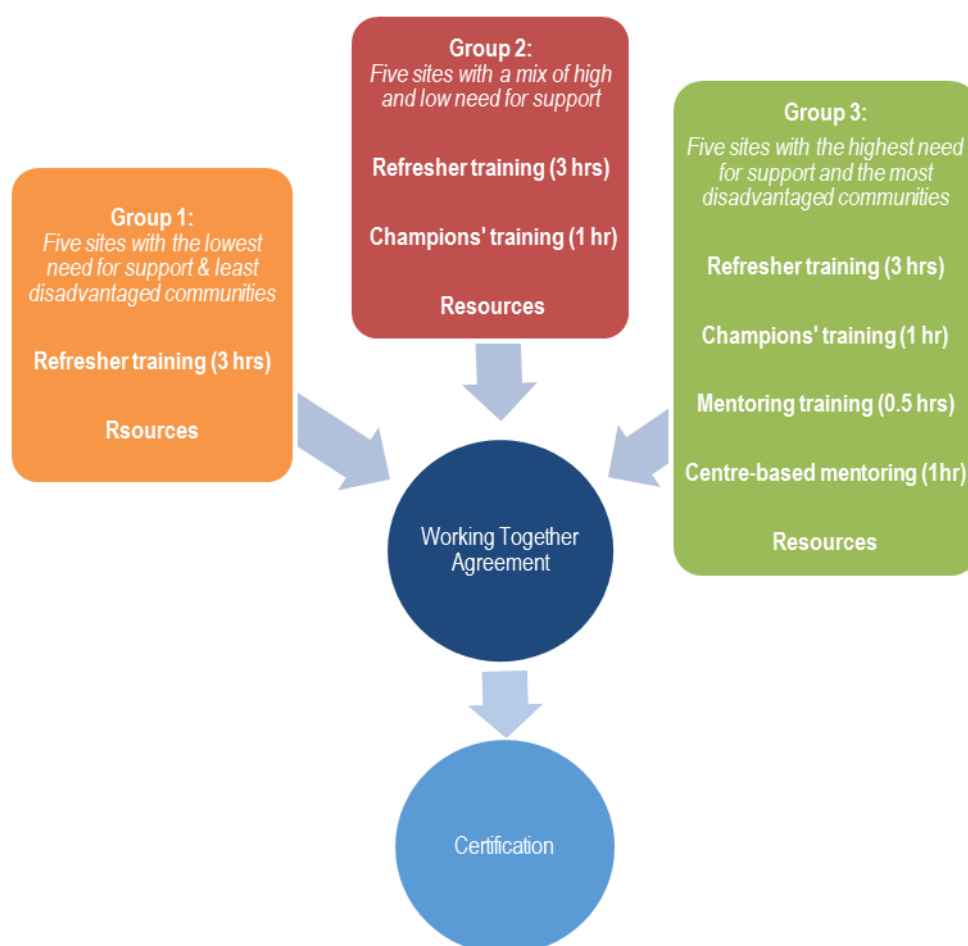
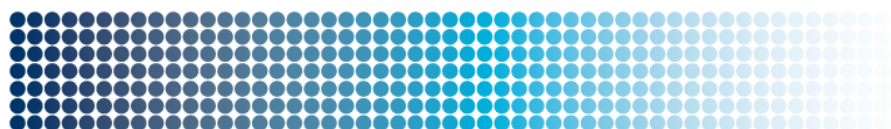


Figure 4: Stratified professional development packages



In July 2013 the following professional development workshops were provided to respective pilot groups.^{xvii}



Refresher training workshop

This three-hour face-to-face training workshop was delivered across all three groups. The following outcomes and learning objectives were developed for the refresher training workshop:

Outcome: Participants will be able to successfully deliver early literacy practices and key messages to parents and primary caregivers in their community within the Let's Read framework.

Learning objectives:

- to establish a shared understanding of early literacy and the rationale for supporting the development of early literacy skills
- to increase participants' familiarity with the use and implementation of the Let's Read framework, including key messages and resources
- to increase participants' understanding of early literacy activities and practices that support children's early literacy development and experiences
- to increase participants' confidence to engage families about early literacy, including families from CALD backgrounds or with low literacy (Groups 2 and 3 only)
- to increase participants' understanding of a Working Together Agreement (Group 1 only).

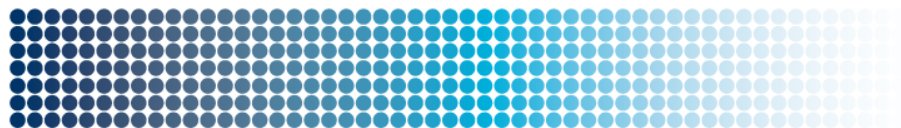
Champions' training workshop

This one-hour face-to-face training workshop was only delivered to Groups 2 and 3. Centres in these groups were asked to nominate at least two Educators from their pilot site to attend the training as 'champions' or leaders in the new certified services process. The following outcomes and learning objectives were developed for the champions' training workshop:

Outcome: Participants will be able to confidently support/lead Educators across the Centre to provide rich early literacy environments and share a common centre-wide vision for children's literacy that is embedded in the early learning centre's practice, networks and community.

Learning objectives:

- to increase participants' understanding of their role and responsibilities as a champion
- to increase participants' ability to conduct a SWOT analysis for improving the early learning centre's ability to successfully deliver messages about early literacy to parents and primary caregivers in their community within the Let's Read framework.



Mentoring training workshop

This additional 30-minute training session was only delivered to Group 3, as part of their champions' workshop. The following outcomes and learning objectives were developed for the mentoring training workshop:

Outcome: Participants will be able to successfully lead the Centre through the Let's Read and Goodstart initiative.

Learning objectives:

- to increase participants' ability to support the early learning centre in the planning and implementation of strategies for embedding early literacy practices across the early learning centre
- to increase participants' understanding of a Working Together Agreement.

Centre-based mentoring

Following completion of their training and professional development package, all Group 3 centres were provided with a one-hour centre-based mentoring session. This mentoring session was conducted approximately two weeks after completion of the training workshops, and conducted by either a nominated Area Manager or a Goodstart Social Inclusion Coordinator.

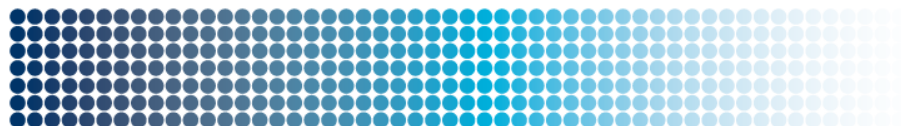
The one-hour mentoring session was aimed at achieving the following tasks:

- discuss the progress of the Working Together Agreement
- consider next steps for the development and finalisation of the Working Together Agreement, including process, responsibilities and timeframes
- discuss the identified strategies from the coaching session, as well as identified SWOT analysis (including weaknesses and threats)
- consider next steps for the implementation of the identified strategies, including process, responsibilities and timeframes
- draft an action plan outlining the proposed next steps of the identified strategies.

Resources

All groups were provided with a suite of resources as part of their training and professional development package. These resources included:

- Let's Read resource directory
- Let's Read poster series
- Let's Read parent tip sheets
- Let's Read book suggestion sheets
- Let's Read engaging families fact sheet
- fact sheet on bilingual children and families (Berry Street)
- engaging CALD families resources (Berry Street)
- Let's Read Working Together Agreement example.



All professional development and training packages were delivered to each of the three groups in August 2013. A total of 36 Educators from all three groups attended the training and professional development packages including Assistants, Group Leaders, second in charge, Centre Directors, Kindergarten Teachers and Area Managers.

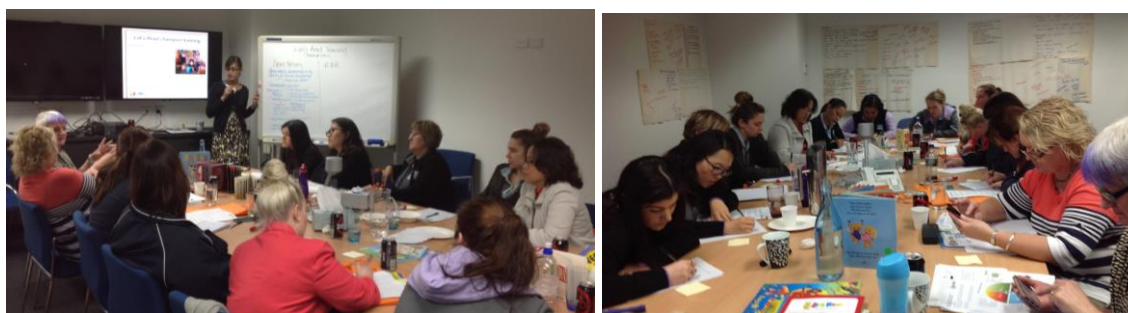


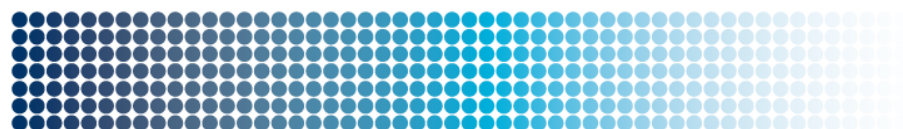
Image 2: Certified services workshops

Working Together Agreement

Each of the 15 centres were asked to develop a Working Together Agreement as part of their completion of the certified process. See Appendix A for a sample Working Together Agreement.

A Working Together Agreement is a statement summarising each centre's early literacy strategy. Each Working Together Agreement aimed to ensure that centres had a broad and collective agreement to promote early literacy from birth. The Working Together Agreement was seen as an opportunity for all Educators and staff to develop an agreed plan for working together on promoting early literacy from birth across the centre, as well as to ensure they all felt a sense of responsibility, accountability and ownership in relation to embedding the promotion of early literacy in everyday practices.

Each Working Together Agreement was sent to the Let's Read team, who then reviewed them in line with the intended pilot outcomes and provided feedback. Once finished, the Let's Read team formatted the content from each Working Together Agreement into a poster. This poster allows centres to display their current and continued efforts and agreements in promoting early literacy and should be utilised to engage Educators and families within their community.



5.2 Evaluation

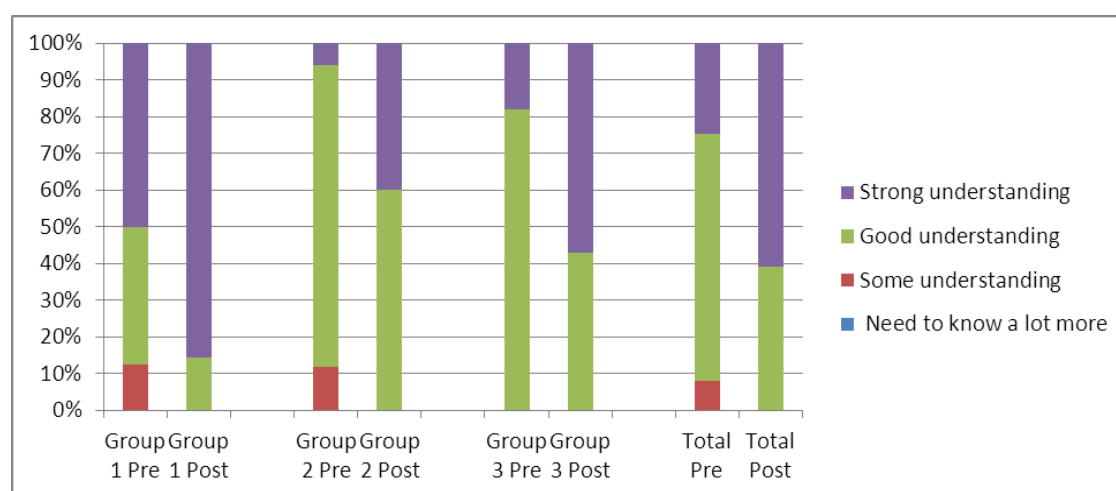
A pre and post evaluation was conducted with all pilot participants as part of the Stage 3 training and professional development package process and was analysed in partnership with Goodstart. Of the 36 participants, 24 completed both the pre and post evaluation surveys; these were analysed by group, as well as overall.

The evaluation results demonstrated that participants in all groups gained knowledge, and to a slightly lesser extent, confidence and skills. Some evidence of behaviour change was also found. Key findings are outlined below.

Knowledge of early literacy

All participants showed a strong increase in knowledge about early literacy and why it is important (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Levels of understanding of early literacy



Engaging with families

Belief in the importance of engaging with families increased, and importantly, the confidence to do so increased strongly (see Figure 6). The frequency with which participants reported engaging with families remained steady.

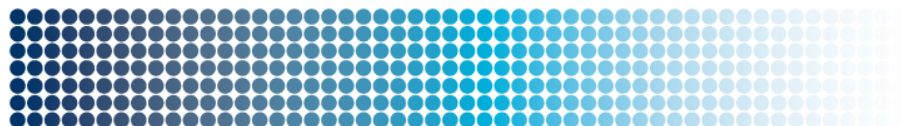
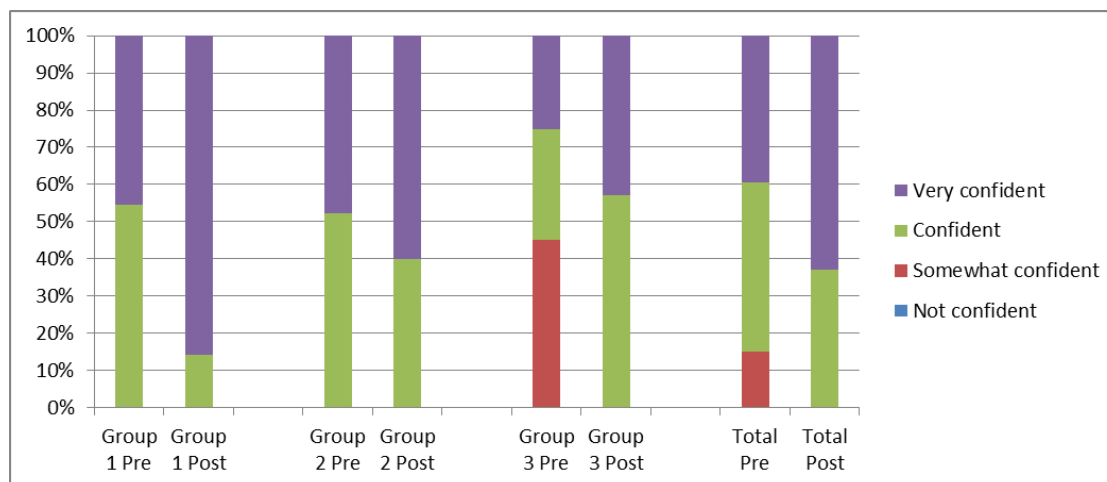


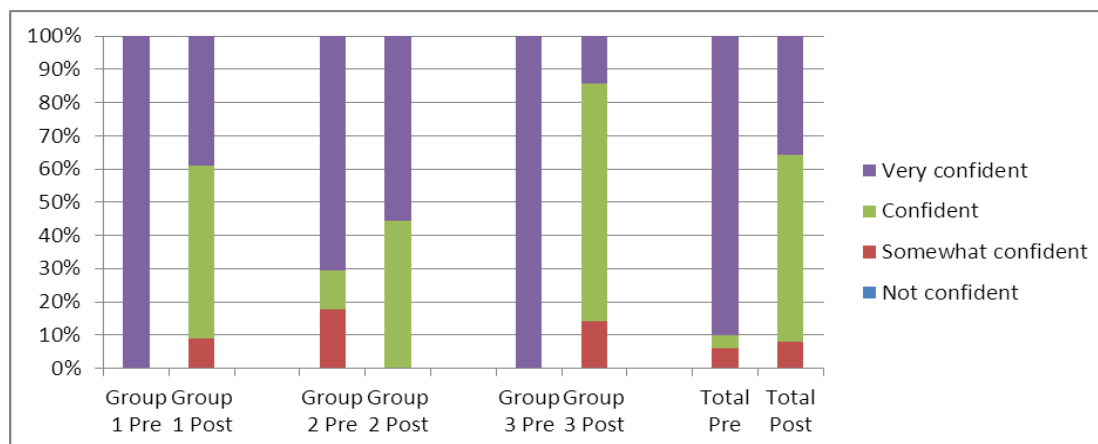
Figure 6: Confidence to engage and work in partnership with families



Implementing early literacy activities

Interestingly, while confidence to implement early literacy activities remained high, it decreased from mostly 'very confident' to more often 'confident' among all groups (see Figure 7). This may be due to the increase in participants' knowledge about the extent of practice change required to support literacy-rich environments as a result of the training.

Figure 7: Confidence to implement early literacy activities and practices



There was mixed reporting about the impact of the intervention on implementing early literacy activities. However, daily implementation of early literacy practices remained the most frequent response. Some groups reported a decrease in implementation of daily early literacy activities *in their room*, while all but one group reported an increase in implementation of early literacy daily activities *across the centre* (see Figures 8 and 9). However, there was also an increase in implementing activities 'less than monthly' reported.

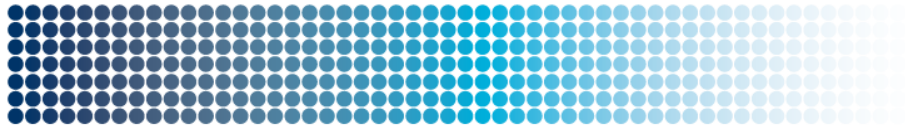


Figure 8: How often do you implement early literacy practices in the room?

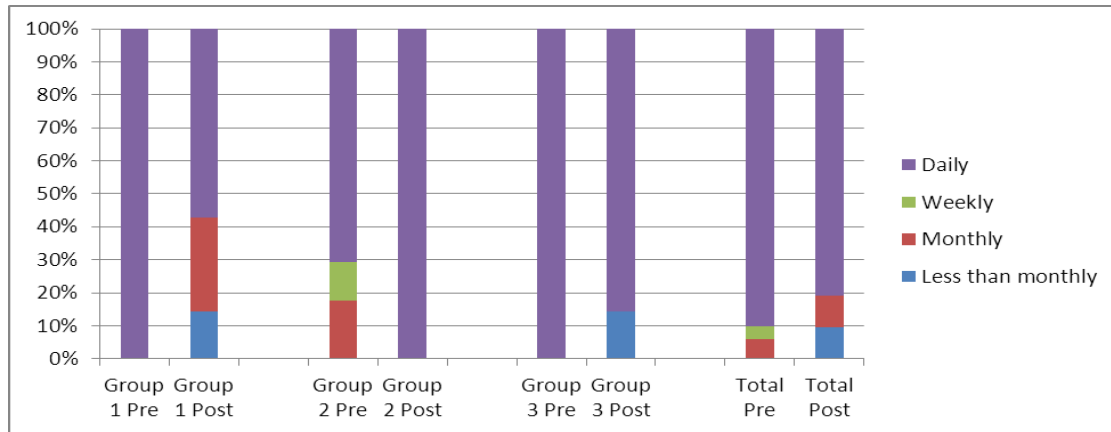
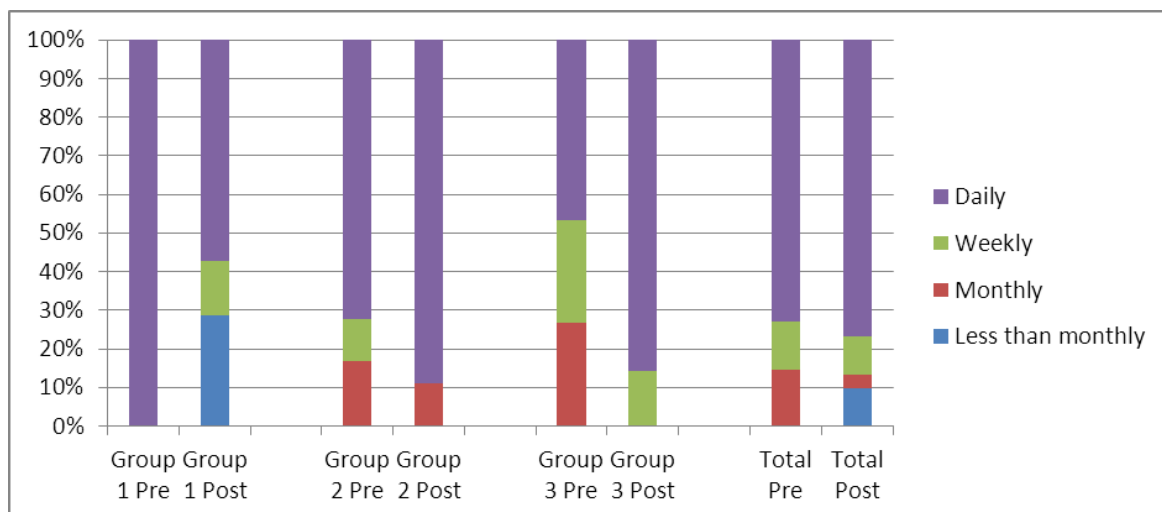


Figure 9: How often do you implement early literacy practices across the centre?



Consolidating their learning

All groups showed a strong increase in confidence to share what they learned with other Educators (see Figure 10), and that their centre was more likely to have a plan in place or in progress after the intervention (see Figure 11).

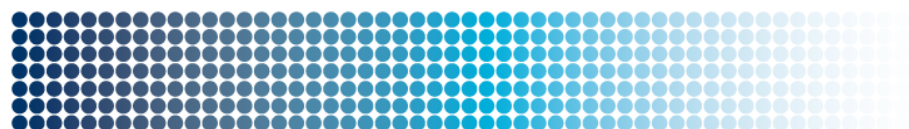


Figure 10: Confidence to share early literacy activities, practices and knowledge with other Educators across the centre

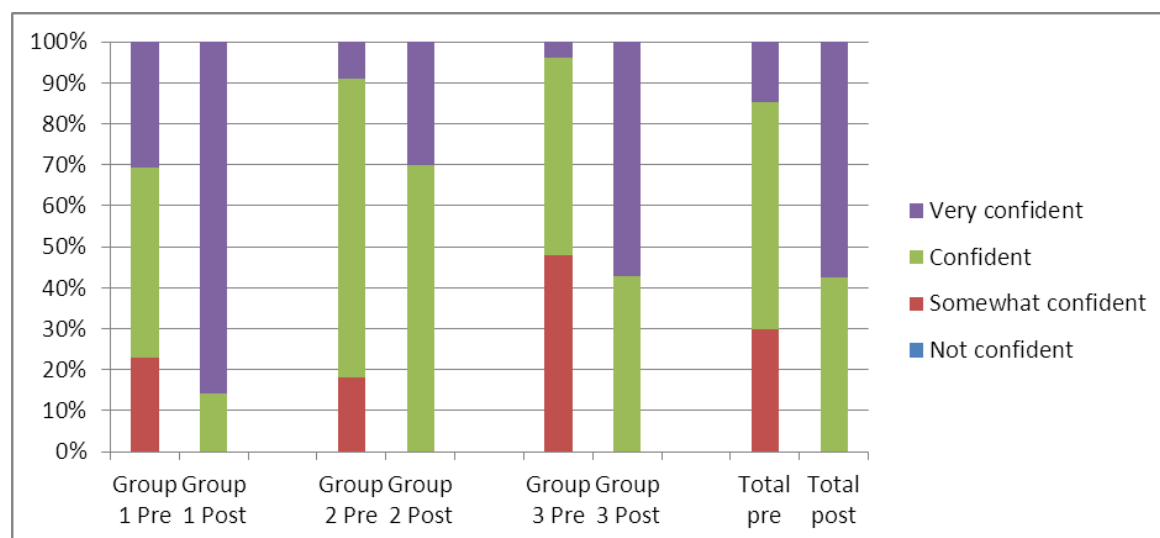
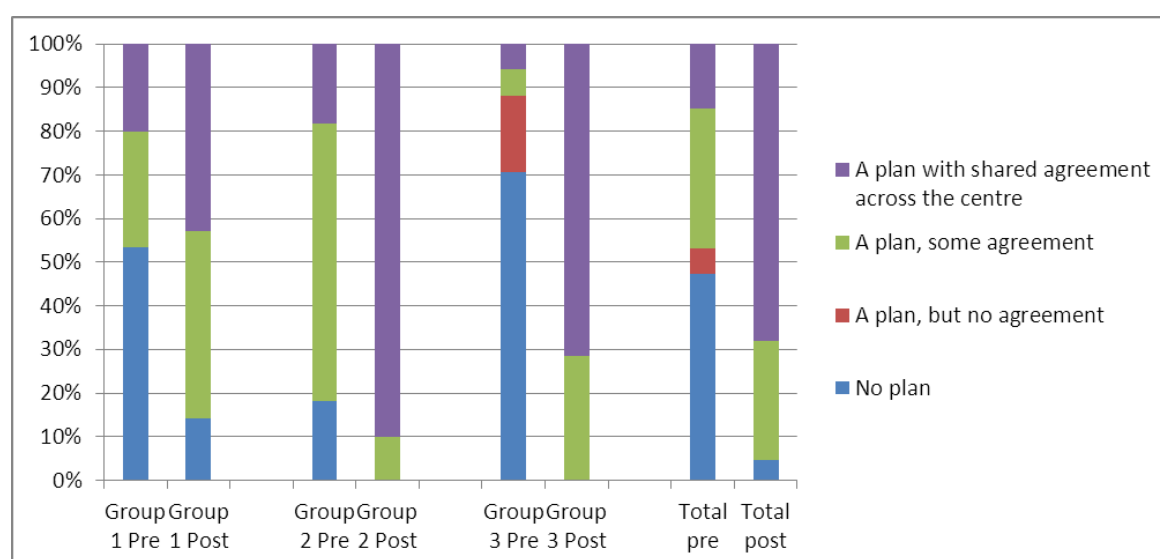


Figure 11: Extent to which there is a shared agreement or plan about how to embed early literacy practices across the centre



Satisfaction with the training and resources

All groups reported satisfaction with the training and support they received and increased confidence and skills to implement Let's Read across their centre, including through a Working Together Agreement and the achievement of the certified service pilot outcomes (see Figure 12).

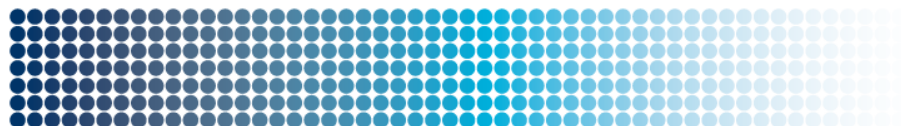
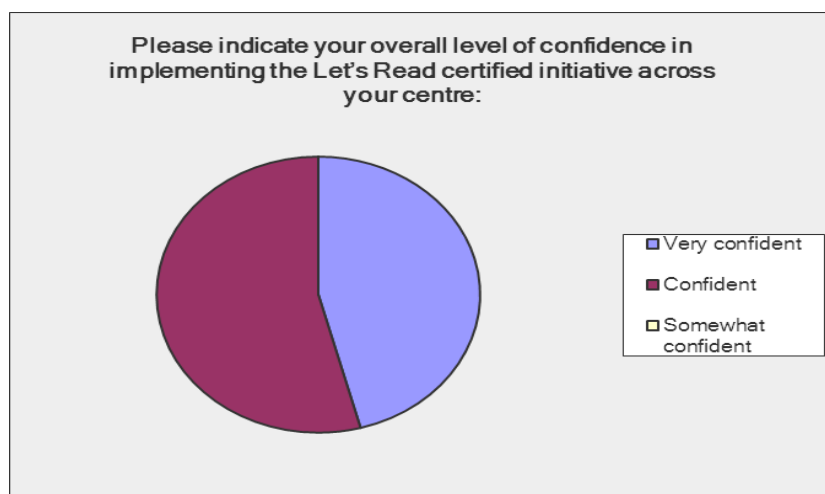
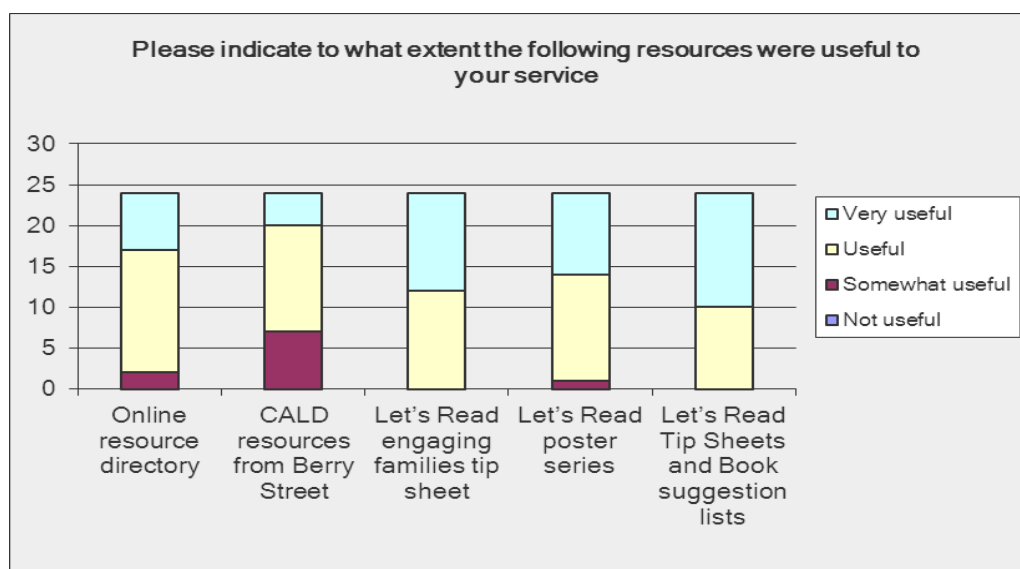


Figure 12: Confidence to implement Let's Read certified initiative



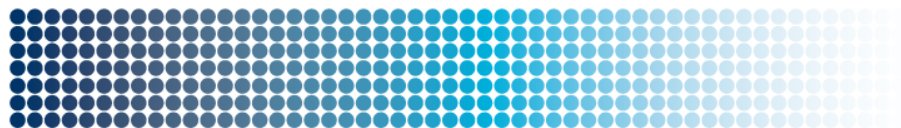
The vast majority were satisfied with the resources they received and found them useful, although the results indicate that the CALD resources could be improved or increased, which is consistent with previous evaluation findings (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: To what extent the resources were useful



Future support needs

Comments in the survey requesting further resources included requests for more books, more training (e.g. regular follow-ups), more resources (e.g. posters), and ways to support and foster communication between Educators and across centres to continue to support literacy-rich environments.



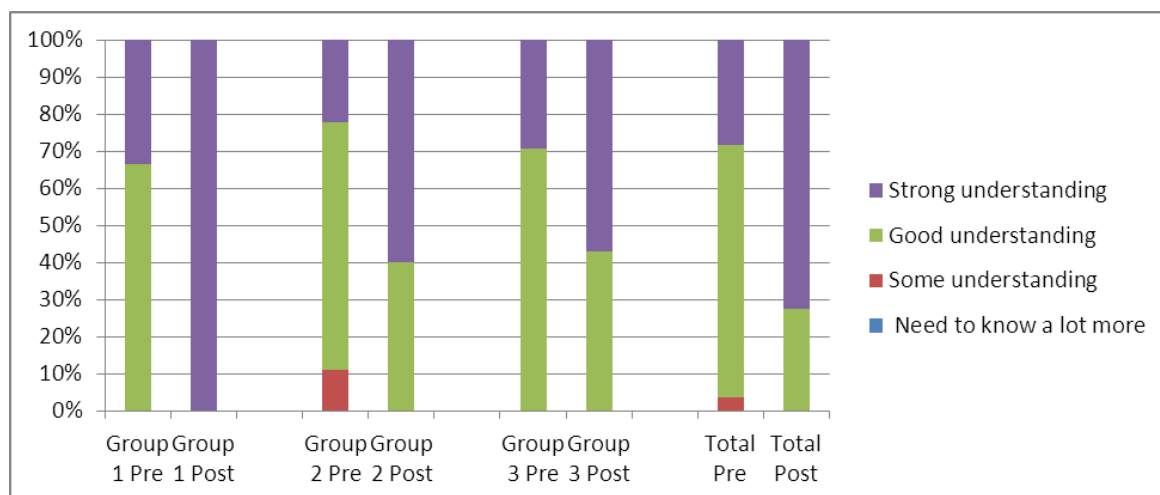
Other suggestions for future support included all Educators being able to participate in training, either face-to-face or online, other online information provided, one-on-one mentoring and regular follow ups.

Differences between groups

Given the small sample size, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the differences between groups. Overall, the similarities between the intervention groups outweigh the differences.

Group 1, with the highest pre-existing level of capacity, and the lowest level of intervention, showed the strongest increase in knowledge about the importance of early literacy (see Figure 13), but the greatest likelihood of implementing early literacy practices 'less than monthly' (although 'daily' remained the most frequent response).

Figure 13: Understanding why we promote early literacy skills



While their confidence to implement early literacy activities remained high, there was an unexpected, albeit small, decrease in confidence among some educators. Group 3 showed the greatest decrease in confidence (from 'very confident' to 'confident') to implement early literacy activities and practices (see Figure 14^{xviii}), which may be because their more intensive intervention increased their understanding about the extent of practice change required to support literacy-rich environments.

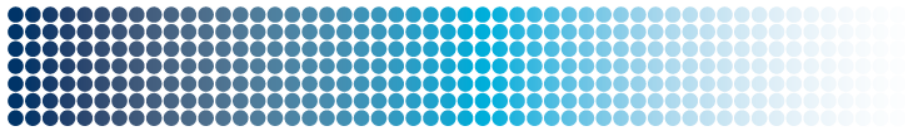
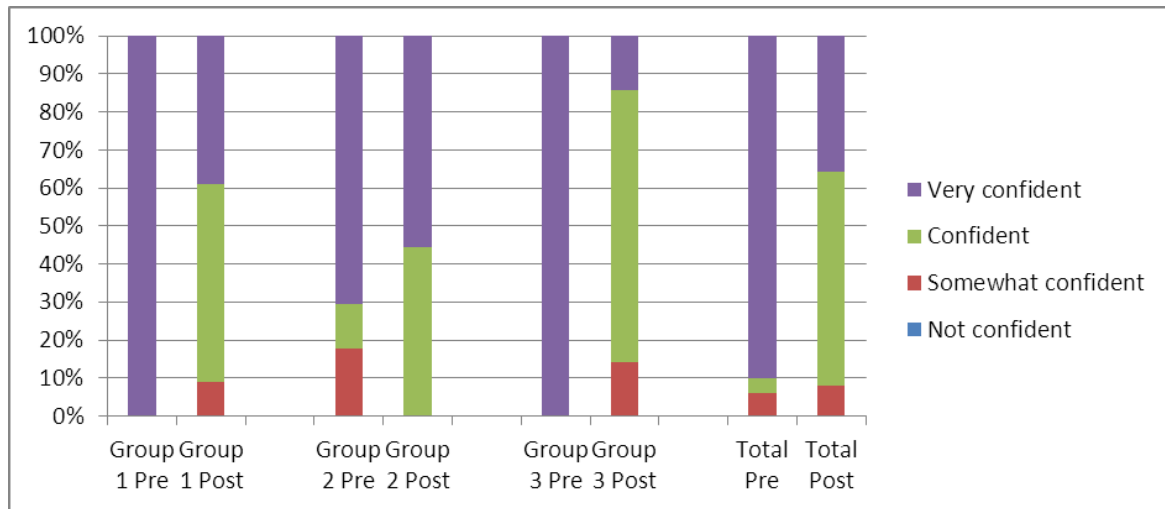


Figure 14: Confidence to implement early literacy activities and practices





6. Discussion

The training needs analysis identified that at the start of this project Goodstart Early Learning Educators held a belief about the importance of early literacy foundations, but wanted more knowledge about child development and brain development. The extent to which Educators were engaging with children to foster early literacy environments is not known.

There was a clear need identified in the training needs analysis for increased confidence to engage with parents and form partnerships that foster early literacy development, particularly in relation to engaging families with language backgrounds other than English. The need for more books and resources, particularly to share with families, was also identified.

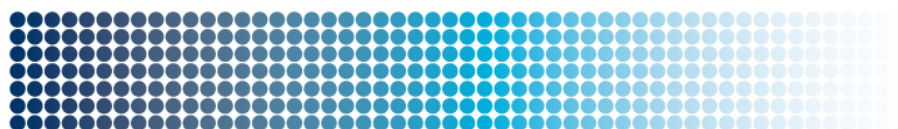
Recommendations based on these findings informed the development of the face-to-face training workshops, and in turn the eLearning course, and the development of further resources and follow-up professional development workshops.

All recommendations from the training needs analysis were adopted for the delivery of the initial face-to-face workshops. After the workshops, all participants agreed that the learning objectives from the training were achieved. This included not only an increased understanding of early literacy and its importance, but also an increased understanding of the importance of engaging with families about emergent literacy, and increased confidence to do so.

The follow-up phone survey highlighted recommendations relating to resource development, further training, support and communication between centres. In response to these evaluation findings a suite of further Let's Read resources were developed, and Stage 3 piloted refresher training, as well as further mentoring with selected centres.

A pre-training survey in advance of the Stage 3 interventions for all groups found that a strong knowledge base around early literacy had been maintained and confidence remained high. The evaluation of the Stage 3 interventions found that the additional training and support offered to the stratified groups was effective in further consolidating learning on participants' knowledge about learning and confidence to engage families.

At each stage, the pilot has developed participating Educators' skills and confidence, such that discussion at the end of the pilot centred on the extent to which intervention groups are 'confident' or 'very confident' to engage with families. Evidence of positive behaviour



change was also found, particularly in relation to working across the staff team to implement centre-wide changes.

The evaluation highlighted that, despite increased confidence and skills, further support might be needed to sustain confidence and maintain enthusiasm to implement practice changes, particularly in how to implement early literacy activities daily with children and how to engage families with language backgrounds other than English.

The small sample size makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the difference between the three stratified groups. Overall, the similarities between the outcomes for all groups outweighed the differences. The evaluation demonstrated the effectiveness of the training in achieving its outcomes, and consolidated a knowledgeable, skilled and confident group of Educators who are enthusiastic about Let's Read and want to share their knowledge and skills with others.

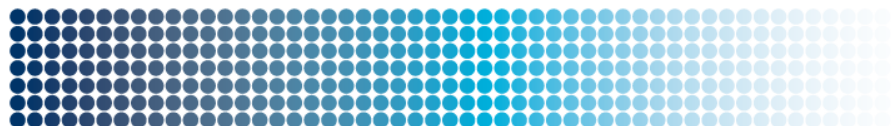
Because the follow-up evaluation was completed only a matter of weeks after the end of the intervention, it is unknown whether the impact on behaviour change will be sustained. The effect of the Working Together Agreements has yet to be evaluated, but may prove effective in sustaining change.

7. Conclusion

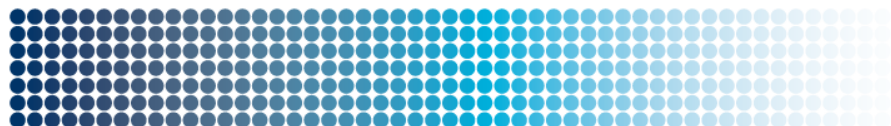
The pilot achieved its intended outcomes for all pilot sites. It successfully laid the foundations for cross-centre collaboration to create and sustain high quality early literacy environments.

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 may 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.



- i 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.
- ii Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) PIAAC 2011-12 Preliminary Findings: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4228.0main+features992011-2012>.
- iii Neuman, S., & Dickinson, D. K. (2002) *Handbook of early literacy research*. New York: Guilford.
- iv Whitehurst, G. T., & Lonigan, C. J. (1998). Child Development and Emergent Literacy. *Child Development*, 69(3), 848-872.
- v 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.
- vivi 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.
- vii 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.
- viii Cloney, D., Page, J., Tayler, C., & Church, A. (2013). *Assessing the quality of early childhood education and care* (Vol. 25): Centre for Community Child Health.
- ix Adapted from *Childcare and Children's Health*, Vol 8 No 4 and Vol 11 No 4.
- x See www.letsread.com.au for more information about Let's Read
- xi See www.goodstart.org.au for more information about Goodstart Early Learning
- xii The majority of staff were Educators. The term 'Educator' will be used in the main to refer to participating Goodstart staff.
- xiii Originally, 16 sites participated and subsequently, there were 15 pilot sites.
- xiv Let's Read has a comprehensive range of quality English language books suitable for age groups 0-5 years. In addition, Let's Read has worked with publishers to ensure access to a range of popular titles in dual languages which are a great way to engage CALD families in reading. Let's Read has resources including tip sheets in several languages other than English and these were made available for the pilot.
- xv The Family Partnership Model was developed by Professor Hilton Davis and colleagues from the Centre for Parent and Child Support, U.K (www.cpcs.org.uk) and is based upon an explicit framework that integrates the use of core helping skills and qualities with the processes of a goal oriented approach.
- xvi The content of this training has been capture to a large extent in the eLearning course subsequently developed by Let's Read. See www.letsread.com.au/professionals/training for more information.
- xvii All workshops were developed by MCRI and were finalized and completed in complete consultation with the Let's Read Goodstart Advisory Group prior to implementation in pilot sites, based on all previous Goodstart evaluation findings, including the TNA, training evaluation and phone interviews.
- xviii NB Figure 14 is a repeat of Figure 7, above.



8. References

Centre for Community Child Health (2004). Let's Read Literature Review. Retrieved 13 April 2012; http://www.letsread.com.au/pages/documents/LetsRead_LitReview.pdf

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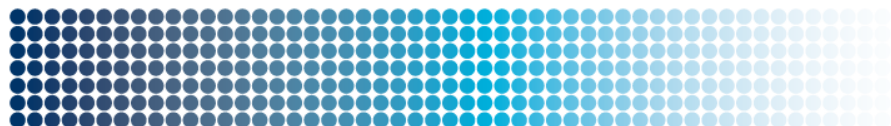
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9. Appendix A – Sample Working Together Agreement

Share books, stories, songs and rhymes with children every day from birth

Let's Read Certified Services A pilot with Goodstart Early Learning Centres



LET'S READ

www.letsread.com.au

Goodstart Early Learning Melton – High Street

This is to certify that Goodstart Early Learning Melton – High Street is a Let's Read Certified Service

Let's Read certified services aim to ensure:

- Children are confident and involved learners and experience the sort of environments that support and encourage their language and literacy growth every day

- Families and caregivers are empowered and encouraged to share books, stories, songs and nursery rhymes with their children every day from birth

- Staff and educators work together every day to provide children with environments that support and encourage language and literacy growth

To do this, every day at Goodstart Early Learning Melton – High Street we will work together with:

Children at our centre to:

- Share books and stories
- Share rhymes and songs
- Have a "Literacy Bear" and book to borrow and take home for a week
- Talk with them about the games they are playing
- Let them take their favourite books home
- Sign in their own name every day in their sign in book in the Kinder room
- Help them notice words, sounds and letter in everyday life
- Encourage them to bring their favourite books to the centre

Families and caregivers to:

- Share strategies for promoting early literacy with their children
- Share information about the importance of early literacy development
- Encourage families' to come and read books or sing songs with the children
- Encourage the donation of books to help build a library at our centre

Staff and educators to:

- Share successes and problem solve challenges
- Discuss the importance of early exposure of children to literacy with staff
- Ensure all staff have access to quality early literacy training and resources
- Encourage staff to broaden their understanding of literacy

The Australian Government is working in partnership with the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute and The Smith Family to deliver Let's Read.

Project partners:



Healthier Kids. Healthier Future.

Affiliated with:



always daily



The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne



raisingchildren.net.au
the national parenting website

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