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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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

Stage	Activity	Evaluation results	Stage	Activity	Evaluation results	Stage	Activity	Evaluation results
1 Training needs analysis	A training needs analysis with educators from the 15 centres.	 Educators (n=113) needed more: knowledge about child and brain development confidence to engage families about the importance of emergent literacy confidence to model literacy- promoting strategies with families, particularly with families with language 	2 Face-to- face Let's Read training	A three hour face- to-face workshop with 53 educators, directors and area managers from the 15 centres.	 Feedback forms after the training (n=48) and phone interviews three months later (n=50) found that: the training learning objectives were achieved participants had increased early literacy knowledge and confidence to engage with families further information. 	J Follow up professional development support	 Professional development and training packages (interventions) were developed consisting of a face- to-face refresher training program of varying intensity and a suite of resources and supporting materials. Thirty-six people participated across 15 centres. To explore the intensity of intervention required, the 15 centres were split into three groups, with each group receiving a different package. On Goodstart's recommendation, the groups were not randomly selected but allocated an intervention in response to their needs (see Figure 2). Components of the packages: Refresher training Centre champions' training – fostering centre- based leadership Mentoring training workshop – preparation for centre-based mentoring 	 Pre and post evaluation surveys (n=24) showed: a strong increase in knowledge about early literacy a strong increase in confidence to engage families (see Figure 3). a strong increase in confidence to share their learning across their centre that Working Together Agreements provided a platform for ongoing development despite mixed results about the immediate impact of the intervention on behaviour

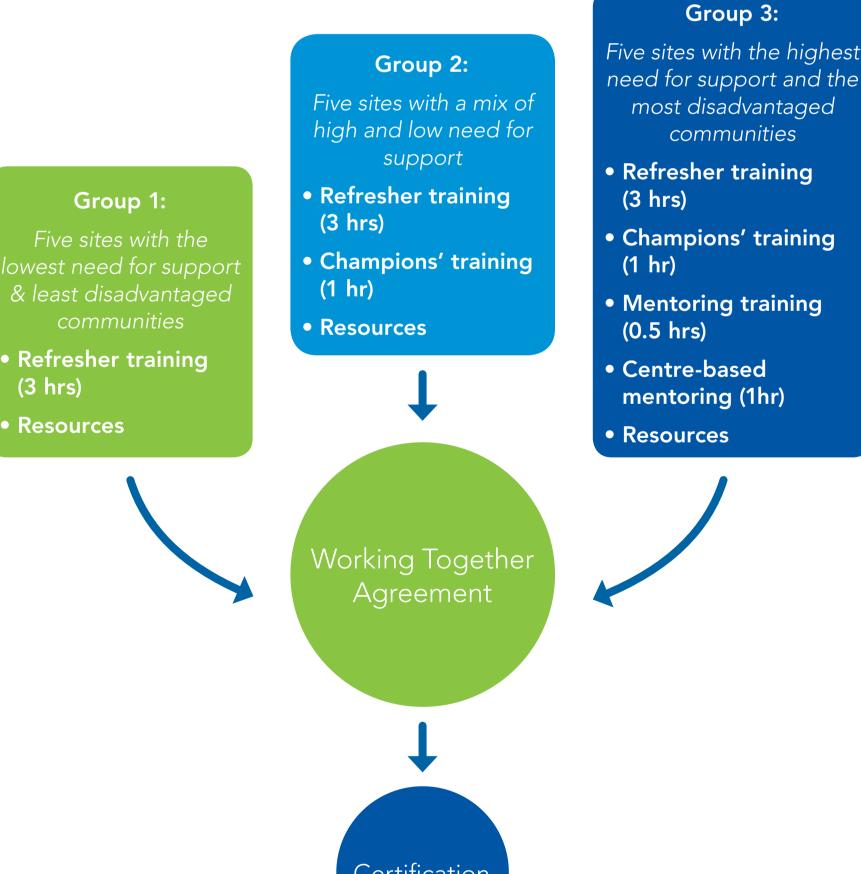
language backgrounds other than English • quality books and resources to share with families.

information resources, training, support and communication between centres was needed.

- Centre-based mentoring support to develop Working Together Agreements
- Resources
- Working Together Agreement statement summarising each centre's early literacy strategy
- Certification

intervention on behaviour, daily implementation of early literacy practices remained the most frequent response after both Stages 2 and 3.

Figure 2: Stratified groups and intervention intensity



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.

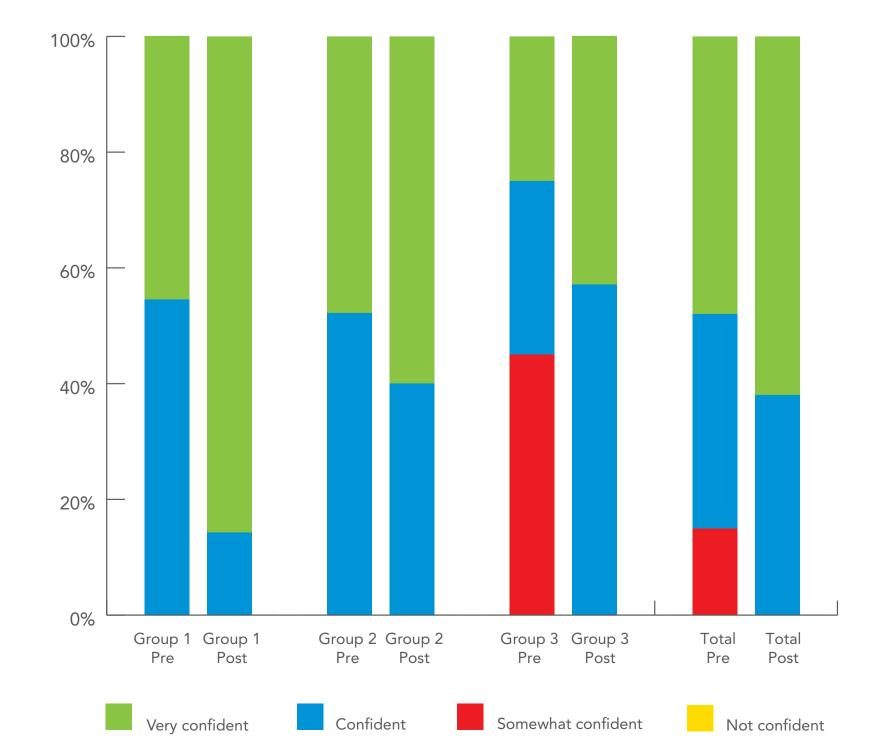
Overall, the similarities between the intervention groups outweighed the differences, indicating that the intervention intensity was well matched to participant groups, and that a low-cost, low-intensity intervention can be effective if it responds to identified need.

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 preadolescent children, The Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry, 06/2001, Volume 35, Issue 3.
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- 6 Whitehurst, G. T., & Lonigan, C. J. (1998). Child Development and Emergent Literacy. Child Development, 69(3), 848-
- 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.
- 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: Guildford 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.

Certification

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



10 Cloney, D., Page, J., Tayler, C., & Church, A. (2013). Assessing the quality of early childhood education and care (Vol. 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 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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