

Logan Together Foundation Roadmap –Project scoping

Project title: Explore social connection opportunities for Mums and bubs and strengthen connections to community – wide language and literacy program, home learning programs and Abecedarian approach

Strategic or Chapter-based project:

Strategic Project; links to Education Chapter

Short description:

The community-wide language and literacy program will initially be delivered via the First 5 Forever program. First 5 Forever is a universal family literacy program aimed at supporting stronger language and literacy environments for young children 0-5 years and their families. The First 5 Forever initiative has been established under grant funding provided to Logan City Council Libraries (LCCL) by the State Library of Queensland (SLQ) until 31 December 2018.

LCCL is committed to providing programs and services that foster creativity, literacy and lifelong learning. The First 5 Forever Strategy focuses on the need to strengthen the literacy and language skills of all Logan children to better prepare them to commence their educational journey and to contribute to longer term socio-economic and health benefits.

Early childhood provides a crucial window of opportunity for interventions, which help shape long-term trajectories given the brain development that occurs in the first three years of life. Investment in the early years yields significant financial returns by reducing downstream expenditure on remedial education, school failure, poor health, mental illness, welfare dependency, substance misuse and criminal justice (Fox et al 2015).

The aim of the First 5 Forever Strategy is deliver a universal program which empowers parents, carers and families to be a child’s first teacher by skilling them with knowledge, understanding, resources and strategies to support the development of strong oral language foundations leading to sound pre-literacy skill development for children aged 0-5 years in Logan.

To succeed First 5 Forever will implement new approaches to engaging with parents/carers and families outside the library setting. This will necessitate program delivery in community places and spaces across Logan. Program delivery will adopt a coaching approach designed to build on the existing strengths of Logan parents/carers and provide them with additional knowledge and skills to support children’s language development and pre-literacy skills and to create and extend home learning environments. Success will also entail working in a collaboratively with community and government organisations to reach parents in a coordinated way and providing professional development to early childhood education and care providers to build positive early learning environments for Logan’s children. First 5

Forever will also celebrate the children and parents/carers of Logan through participation in and delivery of community events.

DET has been delivering training of the Abecedarian Approach Australia (3a) to support practitioners working with young children and their families. The set of learning and teaching strategies enhances adult child interaction through language development. Notice that it is adult-child (and not educator-child), because 3a applies to all the adults who interact with the child: educators, parents, relatives, caregivers as well as early childhood practitioners.

The Abecedarian Approach Australia was validated in the Abecedarian research studies. These studies were a series of rigorous scientific investigations to test the power of a specific, high quality early childhood education program to improve the later school achievement of children from vulnerable families and under-resourced environments. The long term positive results of the first three of the randomized controlled trials are now known throughout the world.

Both the First 5 Forever project and the 3a Abecedarian approach provide strategies, resources, training and support which can be tailored to playgroup settings. First 5 Forever and 3a can build the skills of playgroup leaders and volunteers to develop more robust programming and better support the knowledge, understanding and capacity of the parents/carers and families who attend these programs.

What results does it help Logan Together to achieve?

These combined projects will contribute achieving the following key results:

- Reduce % of children developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more AEDC domains by 11.6%
- Reduce % of children developmentally vulnerable on 2 or more AEDC domains by 11.6%
- Reduce % of children developmentally at risk but not yet vulnerable on the five AEDC domains by an average of 4.9%
- Reduce % of children developmentally vulnerable on AEDC language and cognitive domain by 18.8% and at risk by a further 11.4%.
- Reduce % of children developmentally vulnerable on AEDC communication and general knowledge domain by 22.4% and at risk by a further 2.2%.

Why will it help achieve those results?

Children's early years are a critical time in which the foundations for healthy development are laid. Positive stimulation in early life affects their health, wellbeing, coping skills and competence across the lifespan. Children's health and wellbeing is initially characterised by key leading perinatal health indicators and shaped by a range of health and protective factors that either compromise or enhance health and wellbeing of babies and young children. Later, additional indicators of health and wellbeing and the influences that shape

them come into play, including those related to school readiness when children are around 5 years of age (MCEECDYA 2010).

There is a core set of protective factors at individual, family and community levels that are strongly predictive of positive outcomes for young people. At the individual level, relational skills, self-regulation skills, problem solving skills and involvement in positive activities protect even highly vulnerable people from negative trajectories, especially when accompanied by strong parenting competencies, positive peers and caring adults, as well as positive community environment, learning environment and economic opportunities. Importantly the strength and quality of the relationship for parents (and close family) and children is fundamental to the effective development a child's brain architecture and have a larger effect on cognitive outcomes than preschool childcare (MCEECDYA 2010).

Conversely there is a core set of individual, family and community stressors which are predictive of adverse outcomes for children. These include the absence of positive attachment and warm family relationships, poor parenting behaviours and limited cognitive stimulation, presence of toxic stress caused by such factors as parental mental illness, family violence or substance abuse and community factors such as unsafe neighbourhoods, social isolation and poverty. It is important to note that parenting is so influential that it can moderate the impact of social and economic disadvantage (Fox et al 2015).

In the first three years of life, a child's brain grows from approximately 25% to 80-90% of adult size. The brain undergoes a process of 'wiring' where neural pathways (synapses) are formed. During early childhood these brain connections undergo a process of hard-wiring where some connections are bedded down through repeated use and others dissipate because they are not seen as 'necessary' (RACP 2006, McCain, Mustard & Shankar, 2007).

A child's experiences and environments shape these neural connections. These pathways typically form from sensory pathways to language development and higher cognitive function. In the first five years of a child's life there is the most potential to learn and embed these connections because of the neural plasticity of the brain. A child's early experiences will either enhance or diminish potential, laying either a strong or fragile platform for all further development and learning (Silburn et al 2011, MCEEDYA 2010).

Early experiences have a powerful influence on the neural pathways that underlie a person's capacity to use language, become literate and understand the complexities of their environment. Neuroscientists have concluded that the brain circuitry required for phonetic analysis, grammar and syntax are constructed during the early years. The sounds infants are exposed to from birth influence how auditory neurons develop and function (McCain, Mustard & Shankar, 2007). Language and memory form the mortar, which holds together the skills a child needs to achieve success at school. From birth children develop their sensory skills (sight, touch, taste, smell etc.) then building their gross and fine motor skills, visual and auditory processing skills which all contribute to their ability to play, use imagination, their social behaviour, organisational ability and emotional regulation. Holding these skills together is their ability to be able to communicate their preverbal needs leading to vocabulary development, understanding and communicating concepts, grammar,

pragmatics¹ then abstract reasoning and metaphorical language. The development of strong language skills in early childhood contributes to a child’s executive functioning ability.

The period of time in early childhood is a critical window of opportunity to engage with parents, given an increased openness to information about children and their contact with children’s health services. Positive parenting is a protective factor for a range of negative outcomes (including behavioural problems, poor language development, mental illness, obesity, disengagement from school, substance misuse and antisocial behaviour). AEDC data shows that it is not just ‘poor’ parents who need guidance to support good developmental outcomes for children. Universal approaches are needed to reach all parents and to support social norms, which respect and enable parents as a child’s first teacher. The interventions with the strongest evidence in the early years are high quality early learning and parenting education with promising evidence for interventions focused on improving home learning environments (Fox et al 2015).

In a benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian program costs are estimated for three different resource "settings" in which the program might be offered. Program benefits are generated for 6 categories for which it was possible to obtain monetary estimates: 1) earnings and fringe benefits of participants, 2) earnings and fringe benefits of future generations, 3) maternal employment and earnings, 3) elementary and secondary education cost-savings, 4) improved health, 5) higher education costs, and 6) welfare use.

Project details:

Priority intervention pathways and rationales and proposed responses

Infancy, early childhood and preschool		Proposed First 5 Forever response alongside DET
Parenting skill development	In the first three years parenting skill is one of the most significant determinants of a child’s early language acquisition, cognitive development, sense of self and security, emotional regulation and ability to form positive peer and other relationships (Fox et al 2015).	<p>Interactive and engaging early literacy programs delivered in libraries and community settings, including playgroups, which incorporate messages of the role of parents. Parents are provided with opportunities to develop and practice skills in programs. Abecedarian approach can be embedded into these programs.</p> <p>Resources are available to support knowledge and skill development via digital portal through programs.</p> <p>Library staff, community workers, playgroup leaders and volunteers have knowledge and understanding of child development in</p>

¹ Pragmatics refers to how children express a range of intentions such as giving information through gesture, vocalisation and language; how a child reacts to and understands the communication from other people, in particular decoding tone of voice and facial expressions to create meaning and how a child participates in interaction and conversation through initiation, turn taking and repair (Dewart & Summers 1988)

		<p>general and can deliver accurate messages about early literacy/language development and support parents.</p> <p>Partnerships are expanded with Children’s Health Queensland to support the delivery of information about early literacy/language development and support parents.</p> <p>Partnerships are established with Playgroup QLD and local playgroup leaders to support the delivery of information about early literacy/language development and support parents.</p>
Home learning environment	Home learning environment exerts significant influence on young children’s language and cognitive development with impacts on preschool success and transition to school. It also has a stronger effect than either social class or parental education. (Sylva et al 2004).	<p>Early literacy programs incorporate messages/resources to support the creation/expansion positive home learning environments through rollout of Abecedarian within targeted areas utilising ECEC sector, community organisations and playgroup settings.</p> <p>Resource packs produced with books and idea sheets.</p> <p>Digital portal to support 24/7 access to resources.</p>
Social Connections and support	Enhancing social connections and developing opportunities for informal social support has an important impact on child and family wellbeing. Families with social support networks have increased access to information, resources and friendship networks which can assist them in daily life and in parenting young children (Ferguson 2006).	<p>Early literacy programs incorporate opportunities for parents/carers to connect with other participants and other service providers.</p> <p>Programs are delivered in community spaces through a soft entry approach.</p> <p>Abecedarian Play groups and program are set up in targeted areas including school hubs and other Integrated Services</p>
Early Education	High quality early learning environments improve children’s cognitive and wellbeing outcomes (Centre for Community Child Health 2003b).	<p>Professional Development training and information is provided to current and future early childhood educators, community workforce, playgroup leaders and volunteers to improve professional practice.</p> <p>Abecedarian is part of this approach.</p>

<p>Speech and language development</p>	<p>The early years establishes the cognitive and language skills that set the foundation for future development. The Preschool years are the optimal time for the development of early expressive and receptive language and the acquisition of functional language impacts not only reading and later language behaviour but also the brain architecture which supports linguistic function in the school years (Preston et al 2012).</p>	<p>Training and information is provided to current and future early childhood educators, community workforce, playgroup leaders and volunteers to improve professional practice. (Abecedarian is part of this approach.)</p> <p>Interactive and engaging early literacy programs delivered in libraries and community and playgroup settings which incorporate messages of the role of parents. Parents are provided with opportunities to develop and practice skills in programs. Abecedarian approach can be embedded into these programs.</p> <p>Resources are available to support knowledge and skill development via digital portal through programs.</p> <p>Library staff, community workers, playgroup leaders and volunteers have knowledge and understanding of child development in general and can deliver accurate messages about early literacy/language development and support parents.</p>
<p>Participation in sport and community activities</p>	<p>Living in safe, socially inclusive and cohesive neighbourhoods with access to community, recreational, arts, cultural and sporting facilities and the opportunity to participate in community life whether through cultural, sporting, social support or civic activities are all important factors contributing to positive growth and development (ARACY 2012)</p>	<p>Early literacy programs incorporate opportunities for parents/carers to connect with other participants and other service providers. Programs are delivered in community spaces through a soft entry approach.</p> <p>The First 5 Forever program works in partnership with the Department of Education, Logan City Council –Logan Art Gallery, Logan Entertainment Centre, Parks, Environment and Sustainability, Sport, Leisure and Facilities, as well as local sporting clubs and has a presence at community events to build knowledge, awareness and capacity of parents.</p>

Data and scale:

Babies and pre-schoolers are among the top four emerging demographic groups representing 8.2% of Logan’s population which is higher than that of Greater Brisbane (7%).

The 5 to 9 year old age group (7.5%) is also higher than that of Greater Brisbane (6.6%). In addition 34.2% of households comprise families with at least one child under the age of 15.

The *Logan: City of Choice State of the City 2013* report captured facts and goals in education and early childhood development in Logan City. Key findings included:

- While the vast majority of Logan's children are at or above the National Minimum Standards for literacy and numeracy as measured through NAPLAN, Logan's children still fall below the Queensland average across all NAPLAN domain for Years three and five students.
- The Australian Early Developmental Census (AEDC) measures children's development as they enter school. In 2009, almost 40% of Logan's children were developmentally vulnerable on one or more AEDC domains. This improved by 7% in 2012. The area of greatest vulnerability in 2009 was in the area of language (21.7%). While this improved in 2012 (13.2%) this was still above the Queensland result (9.1%) for this domain and nearly double the Australian average (6.8%).
- Related to this is the finding that disadvantaged children in Logan are less likely to be encouraged to read by their parent/s (83.5%), compared to Queensland children overall (88.9%).
- These children are also less likely to attend an early childhood program than Queensland children overall.

The 2013 Snapshot of Key Data: Children and Young People in Queensland reported that 36% of Queensland parents of 0-2 year olds and 52% of Queensland parents of 3-8 year olds do not regularly engage with their children in informal learning opportunities, such as reading.

In 2011 the City of Logan rated 970.9 on the SEIFA Index of disadvantage – with nearby Ipswich, this is the lowest score of any major urban area in Queensland. There is a range of advantage levels across Logan with many parts of the City doing well but some of the central urban areas experience some of the highest levels of disadvantage in Australia. For example, the suburb of Forestdale scores above average on the SEIFA Index indicating low levels of disadvantage whereas the suburbs of Woodridge and Logan Central score below 800 indicating high levels of disadvantage.

There is disagreement amongst the academic literature on the impact of SES on children's cognitive development. Melhuish et al (2008) reported that higher SES parents may use more developmentally enhancing activities which support specific skills but also develop children's ability and motivation to learn more generally. Conversely, Sammons et al (2008) reported that a better home learning environment² is correlated with positive long-term

² Home learning environment describes activities such as talking and reading to children, singing songs and nursery rhymes and learning through simple activities and play. Some studies state that the home learning environment is the single most important behavioural factor influencing children's outcomes at age three and five (Fox et al 2015).

impacts after controlling for parent education levels, SES and income. They strongly concluded that low SES parents with few qualifications can improve children's progress and give them a better start at school by engaging in activities which stretch the child's mind. Interestingly, poor children who experience good parenting do better than wealthier children experiencing poor parenting demonstrating that positive parenting and a strong home learning environment can mediate the impacts of poverty (Fox et al 2015). Two significant Canadian studies undertaken in 2002 confirmed that positive parenting practices were strong predictors of children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes (Russell 2008). There is good evidence that parenting behaviours are modifiable and engaging parents and influencing their knowledge, understanding and skills is a significant feature and many systems reforms undertaken internationally. Recent UK evidence demonstrates the importance of engaging parents in a collaborative approach, building on their strengths, taking into account their views and experiences and making resources available for access in ways that account for their work and life commitments (Fox et al 2015).

It must also be recognised that vulnerable children exist in all SES groups but populations are not evenly distributed. The largest numbers of children are found in the middle groupings. The lowest SES group often has the greatest percentage, but a smaller number of vulnerable children. Conversely, the greatest number of vulnerable children will be found in the middle SES group because of the size of the group. Restricting programs to vulnerable children in low SES groups will therefore miss the majority of children experiencing difficulties (McCain, Mustard & Shankar, 2007). For example, the 2009 AEDC showed that 31.9% or 17,000 children who were developmentally vulnerable came from the most disadvantaged SES group but the number of children who were developmentally vulnerable totals around 36,000 for the other SES groups. This prevention paradox means that interventions that only target the most disadvantaged will not make changes at a population level (CCCH & Telethon Institute 2011). Therefore, for First 5 Forever to be successful within the Logan context an optimal approach will adopt a proportionate universalism approach that combines universal and targeted interventions (Fox et al 2015; Logan Together 2015).

Partners:

Department of Education and Training

Playgroups QLD

Communities for Children

Primary Schools in Logan City Council area

Early Childhood Education and Care providers – long day care, family day care, kindergartens, playgroups

Parents Next providers

Foster care co-ordinators and foster care families

Child safety

High Schools, TAFE & RTOs providing Early Childhood training

Local businesses

Co-design:

Parents and children

Ethnic and Community Leaders

Education Queensland representations

Playgroup leaders

Early Education and Care representatives

Quick wins:

Libraries already play a critical role in fostering early literacy development. Families are traditionally heavy users of public library services both as borrowers from the children's collection and as participants in programs targeting young children. Libraries provide free literacy resources and are one of the few agencies, along with maternal and child health services, helping parents to be their child's first teacher. From February – November 2015, LCCL delivered over 1600 early literacy sessions to more than 39,000 participants. This comprehensive program will continue in 2016 and beyond.

Early literacy session Feb-Nov 2015		
Session name	Number of sessions	Number of participants
Baby time	397	7,027
Story time	729	14,297
Toddler time	379	9,889
Other 0-5 year session	119	1,875
Outreach targeting 0-5 years	139	5,917

To successfully deliver this early literacy initiatives the project will need to operate as active connector – providing programs to support parents/carers and children not just within libraries but also within the wider community through outreach, skilling other professionals, and building and maintaining collaborative partnerships (ALIA 2011). A team of eight casual officers are currently being recruited to deliver the community outreach program. Strong connections are being built with community playgroups and community organisations to build a soft entry program of activities which will commence rollout from March 2016. A training program for early education and care providers is also in development.

In March the second cohort of participants in the Abecedarian approach will commence with 60 ECEC practitioners who are committed to delivering the Approach to both children and families in the areas of Kingston, Woodridge, Crestmead, Marsden and Waterford.

This builds on the 1st round of training which had over 80 participants from multi – disciplinary services throughout Logan LGA.