Evaluation of the Supporting Parents - Developing Children Project

Interim Report
Year one of three

December 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluators would like to express their gratitude to those who supported this evaluation including:

Finally, we would like to express appreciation to the Supporting Parents - Developing Children project participants for their support with the evaluation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Supporting Parents - Developing Children: A focus on Literacy, Language, and Learning is a three year project that aims to connect culturally and linguistically diverse families with early years learning and provide opportunities for training and employment for parents. The objectives of the Supporting Parents - Developing Children project are to:

- Increase participation of culturally and linguistically diverse families in innovative early years development and engagement programs and services focused on literacy, language, and learning.
- Foster social cohesion through the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families in early years service programs.
- Build a partnership approach to strengthening social cohesion in southern Hume.
- Create training and learning pathways for culturally and linguistically diverse parents and carers participating in programs in southern Hume City.

Supporting Parents - Developing Children is comprised of the following four programs:

- Flexible Mother and Child English Language
- Bilingual Storytime
- Playgroup Enhancement
- Supported Early Years Hubs.

In addition, the four programs are supported by a multi-disciplinary team comprised of an Occupational Therapist and a Speech Pathologist, who work with families and groups across the four program areas.

The evaluation

The evaluation focused on measuring the achievements and processes by which the Supporting Parents - Developing Children project has been effective in:

- Increasing participation of culturally and linguistically diverse families in early years development and engagement programs.

- Fostering social cohesion through the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families in early years service programs.

- Creating training and learning pathways for culturally and linguistically diverse families.

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, utilising quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure depth and breadth of responses. Quantitative data was gathered through a survey using an administered questionnaire with parents and carers participating in one or more of the four SP-DC programs, as well as a self-complete questionnaire which was emailed to the principals of schools which host an SP-DC supported Early Years Hub. Qualitative data was collected through focus groups, interviews and workshops with parents, carers, program workers and program and project coordinators. A literature review and document analysis were also undertaken in support of the primary data collection.

Ethics approval for this evaluation was sought and granted through The Royal Children's Hospital Human Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Key findings

One hundred and two parents/ carers (101 female and one male) took part in the evaluation project, either through completing a questionnaire, or by attending a focus group. A further sixty project stakeholders, including project and program coordinators, hubs workers, playgroup facilitators and members of the multidisciplinary team also participated in the evaluation (nine in interviews, twenty two in focus groups and twenty nine in workshops).

The responses to the evaluation questions and discussions were overwhelmingly positive, with parents/ carers, workers, coordinators and stakeholders all reporting high levels of confidence and satisfaction with the SP-DC project. Parents/ carers, in particular, tended to report that they enjoyed the programs, that the programs met their needs, that participating in the programs increased their sense of belonging and inclusion, and opened up new training and employment pathways for them. A potential limitation of these findings, however, is that the survey was conducted with parents who attend the SP-DC programs. It is probable that parents who don't find that the programs meet their needs choose not to attend and therefore are not included in these results.

Participation - Parents, carers, project workers and project coordinators all reported that engaging vulnerable and disadvantaged parents/ carers and their pre-school aged children in the supported programs of SP-DC were highly effective and valued means of increasing participation. In particular, the emphasis on shared knowledge of child development and effective parenting in the Australian context were widely felt to be beneficial. This was especially so in the context of newly arrived and socially isolated groups. Communication was also a key issue which affected participation, with effective communication to parents being seen as a key enabler in program participation.

Social Cohesion - is a difficult concept to define, and even more difficult to measure effectively. In line with Scanlon Foundation research into social cohesion, we designed our evaluation to uncover participants' sense of trust, belong and connectedness as ways of measuring social cohesion for individuals. Our participants reported high levels of feelings of connectedness and belonging, as well as identifying the potential sense of exclusion and isolation which might be felt by mothers who did not attend similar programs.

Program workers and coordinators also mentioned some tensions over the concept of social cohesion and what it looks like in practice. In particular, there was uncertainty over whether providing ethno-specific services such as playgroups and storytimes for particular language-speakers contributed to social cohesion or detracted from it. Nonetheless, workers and coordinators articulated ways around this tension, and identified specific strategies to ensure that a diversity of activities and events were available across a range of cultural and linguistic groups.

Training pathways - The development of training pathways as part of the nested programs of SP-DC has clearly been a successful element of the project as it has been implemented so far. As our case study shows, parents find the safe, guided pathways through the programs to be accessible and effective, in a way which they perhaps would not have in a less structured and supported environment. Project workers and coordinators did raise the pertinent question of what comes after training, and mentioned the difficulties inherent in articulating training pathways into sustainable employment opportunities either within the project or beyond it.

INTRODUCTION

This is the interim report of the Supporting Parents - Developing Children (SP-DC) project evaluation undertaken by The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Education Institute and Researching Futures. The report details findings from a comprehensive program evaluation of the 1st year of the SP-DC program conducted from May through October 2012.

The evaluation team was made up of researchers from The RCH Education Institute and Researching Futures. The team collected evaluation data from key program services users (parents and carers) as well as from program facilitators, coordinators and other project stakeholders using both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

This report provides a comprehensive summary of evaluation data collection results from the first year of the evaluation, as well as a detailed discussion of the key findings.

THE SUPPORTING PARENTS – DEVELOPING CHILDREN PROJECT

Supporting Parents - Developing Children: A focus on Literacy, Language, and Learning is a three year project that aims to connect culturally and linguistically diverse families with early years learning and provide opportunities for training and employment for parents. The objectives of the Supporting Parents - Developing Children project are to:

- Increase participation of culturally and linguistically diverse families in innovative early years development and engagement programs and services focused on literacy, language, and learning.

- Foster social cohesion through the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families in early years service programs.

- Build a partnership approach to strengthening social cohesion in southern Hume.

- Create training and learning pathways for culturally and linguistically diverse parents and carers participating in southern Hume City.

As objective 3 is being assessed in a separate evaluation, our evaluation will focus on measuring the achievements and processes by which the project has been effective in:

- Increasing participation of CALD families in early years development and engagement programs.

- Fostering social cohesion through the engagement of CALD families in early years service programs.

- Creating training and learning pathways for CALD families.

The SP-DC project is coordinated by Hume City Council and funded by:

- The Scanlon Foundation

- Australian Government

    - Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations

    - Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

- Department of Human Services (CRS)

- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (Adult Migrant English Program)

- Victorian Government

  - Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

  - Department of Premier and Cabinet

  - Victorian Multicultural Commission.

Supporting Parents - Developing Children is comprised of the following four programs:

1. Mother and Child English Language

2. Bilingual Storytime

3. Playgroup Enhancement

4. Supporting Early Years Hubs.

All four programs in the Supporting Parents Developing Children project take place in Southern Hume. Southern Hume is an area within the Hume City Council region of northern metropolitan Victoria, Australia and includes the suburbs of Broadmeadows, Campbellfield, Coolaroo, Dallas, Jacana, and Meadow Heights.

EVALUATION PARTNERS

The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Education Institute in collaboration with consulting firm Researching Futures was engaged in late 2011 to conduct an evaluation of the Supporting Parents - Developing Children project. A brief introduction to each of these organisations is provided below.

The Royal Children's Hospital Education Institute

The RCH Education Institute works in collaboration with young people, families, schools, and education and health professionals to ensure that children and young people continue to engage in learning and remain connected to their school community throughout their health journey. The work of the RCH Education Institute is enabled by funding from the Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

The goal of the RCH Education Institute is to build the knowledge base of health and education professionals and the broader community through a strong research agenda, a comprehensive interdisciplinary professional learning program and targeted education support services for children and young people and their families.

The RCH Education Institute provides both an evidence base and practical application to create learning environments across the hospital where patients are engaged, interested and curious, just as they would be if they were at school. RCH teachers create vibrant learning spaces and individualised learning opportunities to assist children and young people in their growth and development as learners. These teachers also provide advice about educational issues to children and young people and their families in a range of specialist clinics.

The RCH Education Institute research program focuses broadly on the learning, development and wellbeing of children and young people in out-of-school settings such as hospitals, and in schools and the community. Our interest is in translating this evidence for use in policy, programs and day-to-day practice, with the ultimate aim of improving educational outcomes and the overall wellbeing of children and young people.

Researching Futures

Researching Futures is a research agency that has been designed and positioned to respond to the changing social, economic and political environments of regional Australia. Researching Futures has undertaken projects across these environments informing policy development and new practices from an unequivocal and grounded focus on and within one of the most representative Australian provinces – the region of Greater Geelong.

Researching Futures is about capability development. Capability development for a knowledge era economic paradigm is central to Researching Futures research and facilitation projects. The research activities of Researching Futures have involved projects with schools, Vocational Education and Training and adult education sector institutions, universities, and health and community services providers.

The mission of Researching Futures is to inform local solutions at the regional level of Australian society and to facilitate the uptake of these solutions. In this respect Researching Futures has undertaken research and evaluation projects initially grounded in the Greater Geelong Region of Victoria. Informing and facilitating local solutions in this region has the potential to inform local solutions elsewhere. Researching Futures is provincial in its location, but it is also concerned to impact upon state and national policy development, and upon developments in other regions. A number of its recent projects have had this broader scope.

Researching Futures seeks to contribute to the innovative and creative developments within 'linked-up' approaches to Australia's governance. These approaches are currently being explored within and across the three levels of government with an agenda to better coordinate service provision to regional communities. Researching Futures is positioned to support this inter-governmental agenda for greater coordination through projects that build understanding about how this agenda can be advanced in practice.

The Hume setting

Hume City is located on Melbourne's northwest fringe, approximately 20 kilometres from the Central Business District and includes the suburbs and localities of Attwood, Broadmeadows, Bulla, Campbellfield, Clarkefield (part), Coolaroo, Craigieburn, Dallas, Diggers Rest (part), Gladstone Park, Greenvale, Jacana, Kalkallo, Keilor (part), Meadow Heights, Melbourne Airport, Mickleham, Oaklands Junction, Roxburgh Park, Somerton, Sunbury, Tullamarine (part), Westmeadows, Wildwood and Yuroke (Hume City Council, 2012).

Compared to the average community in Victoria, Hume is characterised by compounding layers of disadvantage, including low socio-economic status. According to the 2006 SEIFA index of disadvantage, Hume ranks as the fourth most disadvantaged municipality in metropolitan Melbourne (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Additionally, Hume City has the second highest rate of unemployment in all Melbourne Local Government Areas (LGA) and high levels of crime against both a person and property (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Department of Health, 2012). Hume also has a large proportion of families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with a mix of approximately 140 different nationalities and over 120 languages other than English spoken in the home (Hume City Council, 2012). Nearly a third of all residents living in the Hume LGA were born overseas and a quarter are from non-English speaking backgrounds

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Many families residing within Hume have only recently settled in Australia and may be adjusting to an unfamiliar culture and learning a new language (Warr, 2007).

In the 2007 Community Indicators Victoria Survey, respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with feeling part of their community on a scale from 0-100 (Community Indicators Victoria, n.d.). For the Hume LGA specifically, respondents reported a slightly lower average sense of community connection compared with the Victorian response average (67.1 and 70.7 respectively) (Community Indicators Victoria, n.d.).

In the 2008 Victorian Population Health Survey implemented by the Victorian Government Department of Health, respondents were asked about community participation, and less than 50% of respondents indicated they had attended either a local community event or participated in organised sport (39.5% and 45% respectively) Only 43% of respondents felt there were a wide range of community and support groups and 46% felt there were ample opportunities to volunteer in local groups. Less than half also reported being members of organised groups including sports, church, community groups or professional associations. Over 70% however, felt that they had easy access to the recreational and leisure facilities available in the Hume City area and 77% felt their LGA had good facilities and services including shops, schools, childcare, and libraries (Victorian Government Department of Planning and Community Development, 2010).

OVERVIEW OF KEY CONCEPTS

Newly arrived and culturally and linguistically diverse families

Newly arrived families and those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds may experience disadvantage in a variety of ways, including being part of a minority group within Australia, their experiences prior to migration, needing to learn a new language, issues having professional qualifications and experience recognised, and varying forms of racism (LDC Group, 2011). Australia is a linguistically diverse country; over 160 languages are spoken, one in four Australian residents were born overseas, and approximately 15 per cent of children speak a language other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1999, 2006).

Migrants who are parents not only need to re-establish themselves within a new country, they also need to support their children through the process of re-establishment (LDC Group, 2011). Parenting in a new country within an unfamiliar culture and new language presents a variety of challenges, including maintaining cultural integrity, and communication and language barriers (Green, Renzaho, Eisenbruch, Williamson, Waters, Bianco, & Oberklaid, 2008). Parenting roles and strategies may be different within an Australian context, and parents may struggle to adapt, particularly at a time during which they may have less support from extended family or the community (LDC Group, 2011). Similarly, families may have limited proficiency in English, and some also may not be literate in their first language (Warr, 2007). Limited language skills may make it difficult to gain awareness of services or become involved in community activities (LDC Group, 2011), and evidence demonstrates that language is fundamental to accessing information and connecting families with resources (Green et al., 2008).

Children from CALD families, particularly those who speak a language other than English at home can experience a range of barriers to learning, including speaking English as a second language, and family circumstances associated with recent settlement in Australia (Goldfeld, O'Connor & Barber, 2012). These children need to simultaneously learn English as an additional language as well as keeping up academically with their peers. Research has indicated that while oral/conversational English can be learned quite quickly, proficiency in 'academic English' - the language skills required to effectively engage with the school curriculum – can take much longer to master (Goldfeld, Mithen, Barber, O'Connor, Sayers, & Brinkman, 2011).

Additionally, children with limited English skills may also experience increased levels of stress due to discrimination, stigma, and trouble accessing the curriculum, potentially contributing to poorer behavioural and psychosocial outcomes (Araújo Dawson & Williams, 2008; Dowdy, Dever, DiStefano, & Chin, 2011).

Early years learning

A child's experience during the early years not only affects their immediate health and wellbeing, but also provides a critical foundation for the entire life course. What children learn in the early years forms the basis for future skill acquisition and development (CCCH, & TICHR, 2007; Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, & Masterov, 2006; Richter, 2004). Physical, social, and cognitive development during the early years strongly influences a child's health, basic learning, school readiness, and educational attainment (Dyson, Hertzman, Roberts, Tunstill, & Vaghir, 2009). Additionally, a child's early language skills and literacy have been linked to the ability to communicate, socialise, and establish relationships (Hopkins, Green, & Strong, 2010).

A child's development is impacted by the quality of the environments within which they live and learn, particularly through the relationships they have with parents and caregivers, and the nature and quality of these relationships are major determinants of subsequent intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioural, and moral development (Moore, Fry, Lorains, Green, & Hopkins, 2011; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). Family and other caregivers are the main providers of the relationships and experiences that form a child's learning environments (Moore et al., 2011). In this way a young child's growth in all aspects of health and learning, depends on the capacity of their parents or other caregivers to understand, perceive and respond to the child's needs (Richter, 2004). Therefore, to effectively promote children's development, parents and other caregivers need to have the knowledge and skills to provide environments that protect, nourish, and promote development and well-being (Moore et al., 2011). A corollary to this insight is the promotion of parent support and education, including the encouragement of parents' reading and parental encouragement of children's reading (Vinson, 2009). With regard to families who speak a language other than English at home, further to the introduction to speaking and reading in English is the importance of nurturing a child's first language. This is seen to be essential for cultural integrity and academic development (Clarke, 2011).

It is well established in research literature that education cannot be separated from the other developmental domains of young children, and that best practice pedagogy incorporates a holistic understanding of the many literacies that children acquire in the early years and the settings across the home-early school-years spectrum (Hopkins, Green, & Strong, 2010). Early years programs may address one or more developmental domains, including cognitive, language, social, emotional, and physical development, and are a fundamental element of success in childhood and future learning and achievement (Heckman, 2000; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). While the quality and appropriateness of early years programs are core considerations in determining whether they improve outcomes for children (Dyson et al., 2009), high quality early years services can have a significant, positive impact on children's short-term and long-term development, including school readiness and performance in later life (Boethel, 2004; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004; The Future of Children, 2005). Research indicates that spending at least two years in preschool programs improves school readiness, and that every month of preschool after age two is associated with better intellectual development, and improved independence, concentration, and sociability (Moore et al., 2011). A child's long-term success in school therefore derives from their learning experiences before school and the ongoing learning environment in the early school years (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2007).

Transition to school

Commencing school is an important developmental and social transition point for children. Starting school requires children and their families to negotiate a multitude of changes across learning, physical, and social environments, and in their relationships and identity (Docket & Perry, 2001, 2007; Fabian, 2007). These changes present children and their families with both opportunities and challenges, and while the transition to school may be a positive experience, the more dramatic these changes are, the more difficult it can be for children and their families to transition to school successfully (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008).

Evidence has suggested that a positive start to school sets children up for ongoing positive educational experiences and future life opportunities (Dockett & Perry, 2001). Specifically, the culture of the school is critical in supporting this transition and shaping the practice and thinking of children. If children effectively understand the specific school language and social knowledge (i.e. expected ways of behaving), they are more likely to cope with the demands of school (Fabian, 2007). These children tend to like school more, look forward to attending, and show steady growth in their academic and social skills. If children do not experience a positive transition to school however, and cannot manage the demands of this new environment, then their engagement in school activities and even their attendance can be negatively affected (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008).

The Victorian education system is designed around the expectation that parents should and will be involved in schools and education (The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2007), and research indicates that children make better progress academically and socially if their families are actively and positively involved in their learning activities across the home, early childhood (Weiss, Caspe & Lopez, 2006, as cited in Centre for Community Child Health, 2008), and school settings (Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy & Weiss, 2007; Caspe, Lopez & Wolos, 2006/07, as cited in Centre for Child Community Health, 2008). Similarly, successful school transitions are also more likely to result in families being actively involved in their child's education, and in teachers and families appreciating and valuing each other (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008).

While it is generally the case that involvement in schooling by families is low in new and emerging culturally and linguistically diverse communities (The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2007), successful school transition is partially dependent upon how well the school culture is understood by the parents and family, and how trusting and respectful families are of the school (Clancy, Simpson & Howard, 2001, as cited in Centre for Community Child Health, 2008). Parents and carers whose own experiences of school were negative may have little understanding of or support for the school, making it important for schools to establish positive relationships with families even before school starts, and to maintain these during and after the transition to school (Centre for Community Child Health, 2008). Thus the relationship between the child, their family and the school community (including the teaching staff, other parents and other children who attend the school) is vitally important in assisting the children of newly arrived and CALD families to successfully transition to primary school. The way these relationships are cultivated must help newly arrived and CALD families to feel accepted as valued members of the school, and the broader, community.

Social cohesion

This feeling of belonging to, being accepted by, and being included in a community or group is academically referred to as social cohesion. This notion has no one single definition, principle, dimension or indicator; however common elements in the definitions in the literature include the concepts of relationships, community, interactions and participation. At the most basic level, *"social cohesion is viewed as a characteristic of a society dealing with the connections and relations between societal units"* (Berger-Schmitt, 2000, p.2). Such units can include individuals, groups, and associations. As this notion relates to connections and relations, the strength of social relations, shared values, common identity, and a sense of belonging and

trust are important characteristics in the process of developing social cohesion.

According to The Scanlon Foundation (Markus & Dharmalingam, 2007, p.25), there are three common elements in the various definitions of social cohesion. These include:

1. A shared vision: social cohesion requires universal values, mutual respect and common aspirations or identity to be shared amongst the societal unit.

2. The property of a group or community: social cohesion often describes a well-functioning group or community in which there are shared goals, responsibilities, and readiness to co-operate.

3. A process: social cohesion is not just an outcome, but a continuous process of achieving social harmony.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics adopts the Berger-Schmitt and Noll (2000) definition of social cohesion, stating that it can be understood as the bonds and relationships people have with their family, friends, and the wider community. On the basis of this definition, social cohesion is fostered through day-to-day interactions between people in a community that builds trust and reciprocity between them. For these reasons, issues relating to social cohesion have been conceived in the broadest possible terms, including addressing differences based on ethnic or cultural backgrounds, economic status, gender inequality, ageism, rurality, and family structures (Markus & Dharmalingam, 2007).

There have been numerous efforts to determine the factors important in developing or facilitating social cohesion. In 1998, Jenson described social cohesion as having five dimensions: 1) belonging, 2) inclusion, 3) participation, 4) recognition, and 5) legitimacy. In 1999, Bernard added a sixth dimension: equality. Other authors have considered the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion only as making up the notion of social cohesion, however most authors now agree that while social exclusion and inclusion form a part of this notion, consideration of only these factors falls short of the mark in defining the links and interactions between societal units that give the full story of social cohesion (Berger-Schmitt, 2000).

Social cohesion thus can be viewed at both individual and group or community levels. At a group level, organisations such as The Scanlon Foundation measure whether or not a community is socially cohesive based on their responses to questions related to belonging, social justice, immigration, tolerance, and sense of self-worth. The SP-DC project is however largely working at an individual level of social cohesion through the provision of supports and activities to help individuals to make links and bonds with others in the community and provide a place for the trust and belonging to develop for individuals. In this way, more specific questions related to an individual's sense of belonging to their community(ies) is more appropriate.

An Australian analysis of social inclusion and social exclusion within the context of culturally and linguistically diverse communities - such as is apparent for the SP-DC project, concluded that culture, language, migration history, English proficiency, and religious differences may contribute to outcomes indicating social exclusion and therefore a lack of social cohesion (Hayter, 2009). The very nature of the programs developed for the SP-DC project is therefore vitally important in addressing these factors and providing the appropriate circumstances for social cohesion to be developed and fostered.

For the purposes of the evaluation of the SP-DC project, social cohesion will therefore be assessed at an individual level, primarily in terms of community engagement and belonging. To do this, participants attending SP-DC programs will be asked questions relating to the strength of their relationships, and feelings of belonging in the City of Hume and broader communities, both prior to and since they have started participating in the SP-DC programs.

METHODOLOGY

The following section outlines the evaluation questions which guided the evaluation methodology and the data collection approach.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation focused on measuring the achievements and processes by which the Supporting Parents - Developing Children project has been effective in:

- Increasing participation of culturally and linguistically diverse families in early years development and engagement programs.

- Fostering social cohesion through the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families in early years service programs.

- Creating training and learning pathways for culturally and linguistically diverse families.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

A number of quantitative and qualitative research methods (detailed below) were used to collect evaluation data from program participants and program stakeholders during the evaluation period. An overview of the SP-DC evaluation methods and respondents is provided in Table 1 below.

Stakeholder interviews

Interviews provide a useful mechanism by which to explore and access people's understanding of a situation and their construction of reality (Punch 1998). Interviewing is a means of obtaining rich and detailed information about the lives, experiences and situations of participants as expressed in their own words (Minichiello et al. 1995; Britten 1997; Fontana & Frey 2000; Mason 2002). The value of a semi-structured approach rests in the degree of flexibility within the interview process allowing for discussion that is focussed on issues that are central to the evaluation questions. In this evaluation stakeholder interviews were conducted with project and program coordinators, program facilitators and other appropriate stakeholders.

Focus groups

A focus group is a method that allows for involvement of several people at a time, that reveals a richness of data at a reasonable cost (Morgan & Krueger 1993). This method provides an opportunity for group members to interact, elaborate on issues and commonly simulate memory. Focus groups in this evaluation were conducted with program coordinators and workers and parents who participated in SP-DC programs.

Surveys/Questionnaires

Surveys are a common descriptive research method where respondents are asked a series of questions in a standard manner so that response can be easily quantified and analysed statistically (Liamputtong, 2010). Responses are derived primarily from self-completed surveys or through interviews. In this evaluation, surveys included a mix of closed and open response questions and were administered face-to-face with parents, including with the help of an interpreter if required.

Workshops

Two workshops were held in 2012. These workshops were designed to a) provide information about the evaluation to various stakeholders; and/or b) to obtain input into the evaluation process; and/or c) to provide feedback on the progress of the evaluation and to discuss recommendations. Workshop 1: Program facilitators, leaders, and coordinators, of the Playgroup Enhancement, Bilingual Storytime, and MCELP were invited to attend an initial workshop in early 2012 to explain the overall plan for the evaluation, and to specifically discuss the pre- and post-program questionnaires that will be conducted with participants (parents and other carers) of the programs they facilitate or coordinate.

Workshop 2: An additional workshop was held to specifically discuss the Supporting Early Years Hubs program with relevant stakeholders, including the hubs project worker, hubs workers, and other relevant stakeholders including school principals or assistant school principals as appropriate. This was a participatory workshop, and included discussion regarding the hubs models being utilised, how the hubs function, and how the hubs might be evaluated. All workshops were facilitated by experienced personnel from the RCH Education Institute and Researching Futures.

Document analysis

Existing project documents were used as a source of input for the evaluation. The stability of documents as a source of information and their capacity to be repeatedly reviewed are core strengths in the consideration to use documents as data sources (Kellehear 1993). The documents in this instance included key project and program documents and completed reporting templates which provided background and program context information for the evaluation team.

Data analysis

The survey data was entered into Microsoft Excel with descriptive statistics and statistical tests completed as appropriate for the data. All participant focus group discussions and stakeholder interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed verbatim. Each transcript was then analysed using open coding to determine concepts and categories. Quantitative data was independently scrutinised by two researchers, who coded the data thematically in line with the three guiding evaluation questions, as well as creating some new key themes from the emerging data. The two independently derived sets of themes were compared and discussed, and an complete set of key themes, or findings were agreed on by the team members.

Ethics

Ethics approval for this evaluation was sought and granted through The Royal Children's Hospital Human Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Table 1: Overview of the SP-DC evaluation methodology

Method		Program(s)	Participants	
			Stakeholder group	Number
Semi-structured interviews	1	All programs	Project coordinator	1
	2	All programs	Multidisciplinary team	2
	3	Playgroup enhancement	Program coordinators	2
	4	Bilingual Storytime	Program coordinators	1
	5	Mother Child English Language Program (MCELP)	Program coordinators	2
	6	Supporting Early Years Hubs	Program coordinators	1
	7	Case study	Program participants (parents and other carers)	1
Focus groups	1	Parents and carers (Playgroup enhancement, Bilingual Storytime)	Program participants (parents and other carers)	2
	2	Parents and carers (Playgroup enhancement, Bilingual Storytime)	Program participants (parents and other carers)	8
	3	Parents and carers (MCELP)	Program participants (parents and other carers)	3
	4	Facilitators – Playgroup enhancement, Bilingual Storytime	Program leaders, coordinators, and other stakeholders	7
	5	Facilitators –MCELP	Program leaders, coordinators, and other stakeholders	6
	6	Hub workers – Supporting Early Years Hubs	Program leaders, coordinators, and other stakeholders	9
Surveys	Pre-program	Playgroup enhancement, Bilingual Storytime and MCELP	Program participants (parents and other carers)	61
	Post-program	Playgroup enhancement, Bilingual Storytime and MCELP	Program participants (parents and other carers)	27
Workshop	1	Playgroup enhancement, Bilingual Storytime and MCELP	Program leaders, program coordinators	15
	2	Supporting Early Years Hubs	Program leaders, co-ordinators, and other stakeholders	14
Document analysis		Program Documentation	Council literature, Strategic Plans, Program Reports, Newsletters	

PROGRAMS OF THE SP-DC

The Supporting Parents - Developing Children project is comprised of four separate but intrinsically linked programs. The individual programs have evolved over a number of years and underpin the delivery of SP-DC services to culturally and linguistically diverse families with young children in the Hume community.

1. **Mother and Child English Language Program (MCELP)**

The MCELP program has been developed over the past six years as a program in which mothers and children from CALD families can learn English together in a community setting. The program combines the English as a Second Language (ESL) course for parents and carers as well as providing childcare and a joint mother and child playgroup.

The ESL curriculum is structured around topics that support child development, is delivered within the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) curriculum, and enables participants to achieve learning outcomes at appropriate levels of the CSWE. This curriculum framework is flexible and will allow for further customisation to strengthen the child development and mother /child engagement focus of the program.

The playgroup component includes a period where children attend playgroup while their parent or carers, typically their mother, attends the ESL program. At the completion of the ESL session, carers join their child for the remainder of the playgroup session. Children and parents engage in a shared learning program, where a focus is on early childhood development and the further development language and literacy skills through play and social interaction.

In 2012, three MCELP programs were established as part of SP-DC. Two of these programs were conducted in SP-DC funded Early Years Hubs while the third was conducted at the Broadmeadows Leisure Centre. Thirty two adults enrolled in a MCELP program in 2012.

2. **Enhanced Playgroup Program**

Enhanced playgroups provide additional services and support to parents, carers, children and families from ethically and culturally diverse backgrounds. The playgroup programs are facilitated by bilingual staff and aim to make it easier for mothers and children to come together in a safe setting where children and carers can come together to play and learn.

In addition to normal playgroup activities, the facilitated playgroups aim to provide opportunities for social connectedness by providing links for parents and carers to local services and to the wider community. The CALD facilitated playgroups typically run in the early years hubs and currently include playgroups facilitated in a range of community languages including Arabic, Assyrian/Chaldean and Nepali.

Playgroups contribute a vital role in strengthening positive family relationships, promoting and facilitating engagement of families with others in their community and creating linkages with community service providers. recognised as a way of linking newly arrived, socially isolated or marginalised families to the community, early years services and primary schools An important component of this program is the engagement of community members in training to become bilingual workers and support the delivery of playgroup programs across southern Hume.

In 2012, eight facilitated playgroups were established or continued under the auspices of SP-DC. Three of these playgroups were multicultural and open access, while five were language or culture specific. The language groups supported in these playgroups were Arabic, Assyrian/Chaldean and Nepali (Bhutanese). One hundred and two parents/carers (including grandparents) with 131 children attended these playgroups.

3. Supporting Early Years Hubs

Early years hubs are usually placed at the local primary school and provide programs and services for toddlers and pre-school aged children and their parents and carers. The hubs are linked to the wider school, neighbourhood kindergartens and other local service agencies. The hub model is viewed as an innovative and effective way to increase social cohesion in their neighbourhoods.

The hubs often have bilingual staff and CALD support staff on hand to provide assistance. They provide a range of services including playgroup programs, courses and information sessions targeted to their local communities. There are many established 'hubs' in the Hume community and new hubs are regularly being established. Six new hubs have been established in local primary schools as part of the SP-DC program. This includes hubs at: Meadow Heights, Campbellfield Heights, Bethal, Broadmeadows Valley, Holy Child and St Dominic's Primary Schools. SP-DC also supports three existing early years hubs, located at Coolaroo South, Meadows and Dallas Brooks Community Primary Schools.

Services which hubs provide vary quite considerably between different hubs, and include services run by the hubs, such as the SP-DC facilitated playgroups, as well as being a venue for external agencies to deliver services such as dental care. The services delivered by different hubs range from computer clubs, breakfast clubs, speech pathology, English language classes, financial literacy courses, family support groups, community kitchens and visits by the Maternal and Child Health Nurse. Hub workers are also actively providing information to families to improve their knowledge of services and opportunities and making referrals to outside services such as employment agencies where appropriate. At present the SP-DC hubs are hosted by primary schools with the support of school principals and other staff. In 2012 over 50 programs were delivered through the SP-DC hubs.

4. Bilingual Storytime

The Bilingual Story-time program was established in 2005 and offers sessions at Hume libraries and a number of community settings including childcare centres, pre-schools, playgroups and schools. The program is provided in several languages including Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese, Assyrian and Singhalese and encourages interaction between parents and children through literacy and learning activities.

Songs and stories are told in both English and the first language of the group. Storytime sessions are aimed at assisting children from linguistically diverse backgrounds to develop good language and to help facilitate the transition to kinder and school. Sessions are run by trained storytellers who use a range of bilingual resources including LOTE books, songs and craft activities.

Bilingual storytellers are central to Hume's literacy program and play an important role in providing community information and building relationships with CALD families. In addition the program also provides learning and training pathways for parents and carers. The pathways provide a series of stepping stones into greater confidence, social connectedness, participation and opportunity.

In 2012 there were five bilingual storytime sessions run each week as part of SP-DC, in conjunction with the facilitated playgroups.

Multidisciplinary team

In addition to the four programs, a multidisciplinary team consisting of a speech pathologist and occupational therapist is working across all four programs, while a Hubs Project Worker is currently providing support to the early years hub development component of the program.

Table 2. Evaluation of the Supporting Parents Developing Children Project: Funded programs

Location (Hubs and Other)	Playgroup Enhancement	Bilingual Storytime	MCELP
Bethal Primary School • Total enrolment 223 students • 62% LOTE background • 61% bottom socio-economic quartile	Multicultural		
Broadmeadows Valley Primary School • Total enrolment 208 students • 54% LOTE background	Bhutanese Multicultural (2 sessions)	Bhutanese	
Campbellfield Heights Primary School • Total enrolment 185 students • 94% LOTE background	Arabic	Arabic	Program established
Holy Child Primary School • Total enrolment 360 students • 94% LOTE background • 65% bottom socio-economic quartile	Assyrian/ Chaldean/ Syriac	Assyrian/ Chaldean/ Syriac	Program established
Meadow Heights Primary School • Total enrolment 620 students • 90% LOTE background	Arabic	Arabic	
St Dominic's Catholic Primary School • Total enrolment 225 students • 92% LOTE background • 65% bottom socio-economic quartile	Assyrian/ Chaldean/ Syriac	Assyrian/ Chaldean/ Syriac	
Coolaroo South Primary School • Total enrolment 265 students • 75% LOTE background			
Meadows Primary School • Total enrolment 275 students			
Dallas Brooks Community Primary School • Total enrolment 520 students • 91% LOTE background • 48% bottom socio-economic quartile			
Broadmeadows Leisure Centre (non-hub)			Program established

EVALUATION FINDINGS

This section discusses the pertinent findings of research with project stakeholders:

- Parents and carers

- Project workers (playgroup facilitators, Hub workers, multidisciplinary team)

- Project co-ordinators.

For each of these participant groups the pertinent research methods are first described, and then the key findings of the project are explained using both quantitative (parents and carers findings only) and qualitative data. The findings are grouped by the themes of participation, social cohesion and training pathways in line with the evaluation objectives. A detailed individual case study of one parent's engagement with SP-DC has been included in the parents and carers response section, to highlight to significance and importance of the project for this individual and her family.

Italicised text is used throughout to identify the voice of respondents.

PARENTS AND CARERS FINDINGS

Evaluation data was collected from parents and carers attending the Playgroup Enhancement/ Bilingual Story time or the Mother and Child English Language (MCELP) SP-DC programs via two methods: a questionnaire and a series of focus groups. All participating parents and carers attending the program sessions selected for evaluation were invited to complete the questionnaire or attend a focus group. Data was collected from each of the nine SP-DC play group sessions, which include: 4 open language playgroups, 2 Assyrian/Chaldean playgroups, 2 Bhutanese and 1 Arabic group. Data was also collected from each of the 4 MCELP programs. These programs were located over 7 different locations within the Hume area.

Attendance data from both facilitated playgroups and MCELP indicate that 135 parents/carers, including grandparents (the majority of them women), attended SP-DC funded programs in 2012. From those participants, 52 went on to enrol in a recognised training pathway. Seventeen of these enrolled in the Bilingual storytime/playgroup leader training program conducted under the SP-DC auspices. The thirty five women who enrolled in training pathways beyond SP-DC undertook a variety of courses, including 16 who enrolled in a certificate III course in children's services and three who enrolled in a computer class. The majority of playgroup or MCELP participants (88 out of 135, 65%) also participated in one or more parenting education sessions conducted by the SP-DC multi-disciplinary team and family support agencies.

Nineteen women found employment with the SP-DC program, seven of them as playgroup leaders, ten as casual childcare workers, one as a computer teacher and one as a storyteller in the Bilingual Storytime Program. A further six participants in SP-DC went on to paid employment in related fields. Of these, three obtained work as Multicultural Education Aides in project schools, one was employed as a refugee mentor by the Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups and two obtained positions as education support officers/ integration aides at schools outside the SP-DC project.

One hundred and one parents/carers participated in the evaluation either by completing a face to face administered questionnaire, or by attending an evaluation focus group. This constitutes a very positive 75% response rate from the 135 adults enrolled in SP-DC programs.

Questionnaire Demographics

A total of 88 parents or carers attending either the Playgroup Enhancement/Bilingual Story time or the MCELP programs within the city of Hume completed a program evaluation questionnaire. An evaluation team member was present during all sessions where participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and access to an interpreter was provided to non-English speaking groups to assist participants to complete the questionnaire. Questionnaires were administered at two time points, firstly in May 2012 and again in September/October 2012.

Time Point 1 – May 2012

There were 61 female parents and carers who completed the questionnaire, across 8 playgroups or MCELP programs. A total of 56 participants (92%) were born outside of Australia, the majority from Iraq (43%), then Bhutan (11%) and Vietnam and Lebanon (8%), with the remainder coming from 11 different countries. Most participants were of non-English speaking background with fifteen language backgrounds represented, including; Arabic, Syriac/Assyrian/Chaldean, Vietnamese, Nepali and Greek.

The majority (66%) of participants brought only one child to playgroup, while the remainder brought 2 (21%), or 3 children (2%) and 10% of participants, mainly from the MCELP, reported having no children in attendance.

The 61 participants reported residing across 11 suburbs within the Hume region, with the majority living in Westmeadows (20%), Meadow Heights (16%), Campbellfield (13%) and Roxburgh Park (13%).

Time Point 2 – September/October 20102

There were 27 parents and carers (one male) who completed the questionnaire, across 8 playgroups or MCELP programs. Of these, 17 participants had also completed the questionnaire at the first time point and were able to have their responses tracked across time to examine changes in attitude over the intervening months. The responses of these seventeen participants is reported separately below. The remaining ten responses which were recorded in this round have been combined with the responses recorded at time point one in the analysis that follows. This is because the fluid nature of playgroup attendance and the difficulty in assessing how long a respondent had been involved in the program precludes the separation of the data into those newly engaged with the program from those who had been attending since the commencement of SP-DC the previous year.

Of the ten new responses recorded at this time point, all participants (100%) were born outside of Australia, most from Iraq (50%),but also Bhutan, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. Participants spoke different languages including Arabic, Syriac/Assyrian/Chaldean, English, Vietnamese, Nepali and Greek.

The majority of participants brought only one child to playgroup, a quarter had 2 children attending and just over 10% had 3 children attending playgroup. Participants lived in a range of suburbs across Hume, including Campbellfield, Meadow Heights, Roxburgh Park and Broadmeadows.

Focus Group Demographics

Qualitative evaluation data was collected from a sample of 13 parents and carers who were currently attending either the Playgroup Enhancement/Bilingual Storytime or the Mother and Child English Language (MCELP) SP-DC programs within the City of Hume, who volunteered to take part. Three separate focus groups were conducted as follows:

1. Parents and carers (Playgroup Enhancement/Bilingual Storytime – Open/ Multicultural) held on

Tuesday 11th September 2012 at Broadmeadows Valley Primary School

2. Parents and carers (Playgroup Enhancement/Bilingual Storytime – Open/ Multicultural) held on Tuesday 21st August 2012 at Bethal Primary School

3. Parents and carers (MCELP) held on Thursday 23rd August 2012 at Holy Child Primary School

PARENT AND CARER PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Participants were asked a series of questions via the questionnaires or focus groups aimed at evaluating the success of the SP-DC programs in engaging and meeting the needs of program users, as well as meeting the overall project objectives of increasing participation, improving social cohesion and facilitating training pathways. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide comments on how the playgroup program is or isn't meeting their needs. Comments are reported verbatim and shown in italics.

One of the main objectives of the SP-DC programs is to Increase participation of culturally and linguistically diverse families in innovative early years development and engagement programs and services focused on literacy, language, and learning. Respondents to the questionnaire in both May and September/October overwhelming reported being satisfied with the program they were attending (playgroup or MCELP). Overall 80 (91%) participants agreed that the program they were attending was meeting their needs, 5 people (6%) reported that the program failed to meet their needs and the remaining 3 (3%) did not answer the question.

Eighty five participants (97%) agreed that the program they attended was both positive and welcoming. Only one person disagreed with this statement and 2 people did not answer the question. Parents commented:

> *I enjoy this time here.*

> *The children enjoy coming.*

Parents and carers were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding their playgroup experience on a 5 point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree about their playgroup experience.

The majority of parents either strongly agreed or agreed that the program they were attending had provided the opportunity to meet other parents who had been supportive of them, had helped them to understand more about how their children learn and had taught them about wider community services available to their families.

> *Playgroup I think meets all mothers' needs especially for mums who do not have much friends, they can meet new people and share experiences. It is good for the children to mix with other children.*

> *I engage with my friend at play group. My baby is happy with friends. My child learn sharing with others.*

In addition they were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding their satisfaction with playgroup on a 5 point Likert scale from very satisfied to very dissatisfied.

Parents and carers (92%) reported being very satisfied with the level of activities provided at the program they attended, with 6% reported neutral feelings and 2% reporting being very dissatisfied.

Children learn different activities. We have time to learn English because our children are in playgroup. We learn English at the same time.

Because me - I am so happy here learning English and teaching it to children. My son is playing and learning English and learning to share.

My son has the chance to play with different toys and interact with children.

I think playgroup meets most of my needs but it could have some more educational things to prepare kids for pre-school.

Just over 90% reported being very satisfied (58%) or satisfied (33%) with the level of communication from playgroup staff. Four percent of respondents reported being dissatisfied, of which half were very dissatisfied

I learn many things about playgroup. If I need help then I know where to go and get help.

A total of 51 respondents (68%) of the 75 who rated the Bilingual Storytime component of their playgroup were very satisfied and a further 12 (16%) were satisfied. Ten people (13%) reported being neutral and only one person was dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the Bilingual Storytime.

Overall 97% of the 83 people who responded to being asked their overall satisfaction with the playgroup program responded positively. Only one person was very dissatisfied with the program and two were neutral.

My son is very happy to come at playgroup because he can meet other children and he likes to play and draw and paint. I like playgroup because I meet other people.

Happy my children socialise with other children. I want my children to be familiar with this playgroup in this school so when they attend it will be familiar surroundings.

I want more - because different levels within class – [I] would like extended English. Travel a long way to come, would be good if things like this were closer to home too (Epping).

The analysis of the 17 people for whom there was questionnaire data from both rounds of data collection (May 2012 and Sep/Oct 2012) revealed a small increase in overall satisfaction on a composite satisfaction index. To create the index we combined the above mentioned four questions on participant's satisfaction with the type of activities provided through playgroup, the level of communication from staff, and the bilingual and playgroup programs overall. Scores could range from a low of 1 to a maximum of 5 with a higher score representing higher levels of satisfaction. At the first round of data collection the mean satisfaction score was very high at 4.66. Although there was not much room for improvement, by the time of the second round of data collection the mean score had risen to 4.77 – certainly a move in a positive direction but due to the high first round score and the small sample size, this increase was not statistically significant at the traditional $p = .05$ level and instead returned a still reasonable p value of .15, meaning the increase in the mean score could have occurred 15% by chance (instead of by only 5%).

We also investigated the change overtime on each of the four satisfaction questions individually. Two questions/measures showed a significant increase in satisfaction. At the first round of data collection 7 (41%) participants were satisfied with the level of communication from staff at playgroup and 10 (59%) participants were very satisfied. By the second round of data collection 5 participants had moved from being satisfied to very satisfied. The increase was statistically significant at the $p = .03$ level.

Figure 1   How satisfied: Level of communication from staff at English class/playgroup? (First and second rounds)
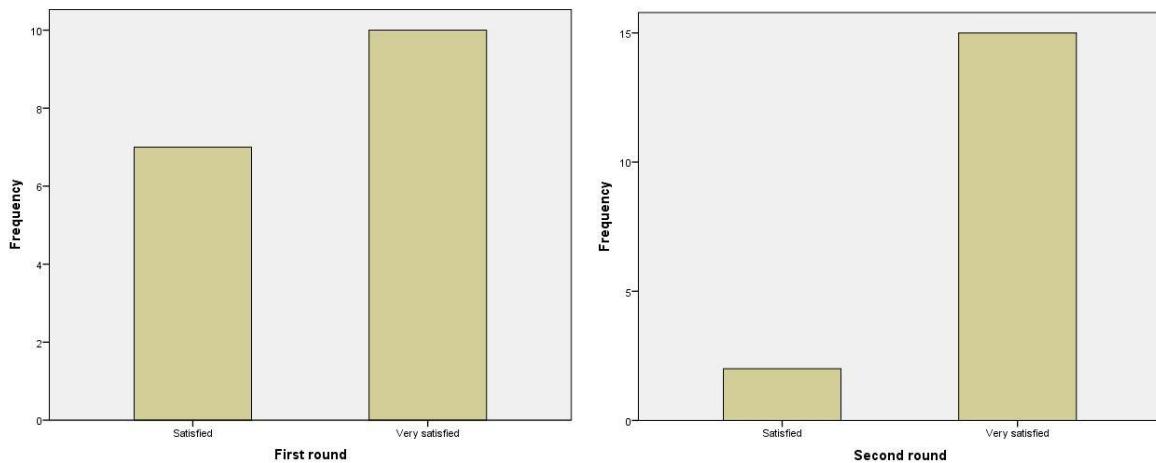
Participants satisfaction with Bilingual Storytime also increased but due to the small sample size and some missing data the increase was only significant at the *p* = .18 level.

Figure 2   How satisfied: Bilingual Storytime? (First and second rounds)
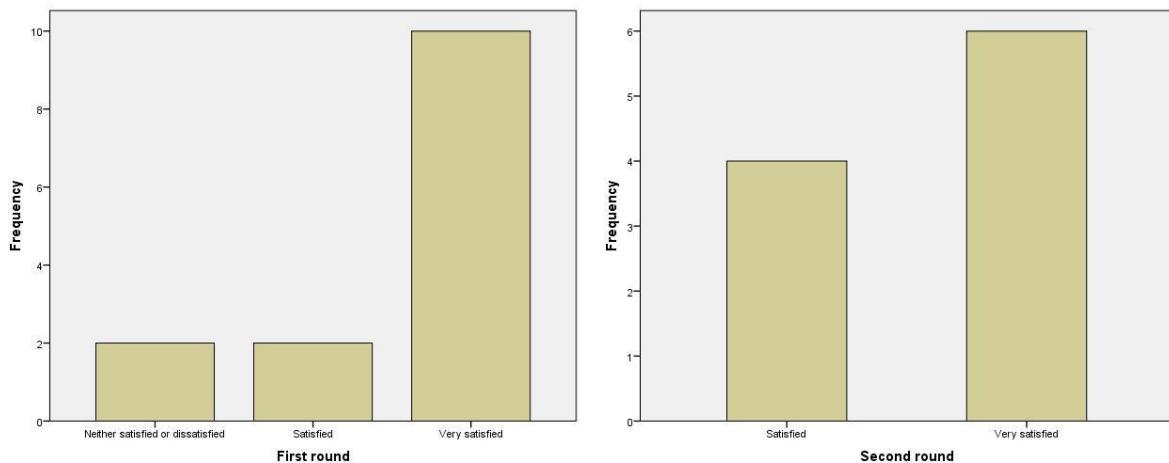
Parents were conscious of the opportunities for improving their child's language and literacy skills through participation in SP-DC:

> *Children learn new things day by day and learn to share and play cooperatively and understand new language (i.e. English).*

Some parents who participate in SP-DC programs also participate in other early years services and programs in Hume. When asked about the local services respondents currently use, have previously used or plan to use in the future most reported currently using GP services. Many were also currently using Maternal and Child Health Centres and Early Years Hubs, as illustrated in the table below. Currently the least used services were childcare and preschool/kinder, although 21 participants planned to use kinder services in the future. In part this reflects the fact that many of the parents attending playgroup have children younger than kindergarten age. Indeed, analysis of the 17 people for which there was questionnaire data from both rounds of data collection showed that of the 7 people who said they had never used childcare at the first round, by the second round 5 people still reported they had never used childcare and 2 people reported they were either currently or had previously used childcare.

Table 3: Local Service Usage. N = 88

Service Usage

	GP	MCHC	Library	Hub	Childcare	Kindergarten
Current	82	49	38	54	18	31
Previous	17	29	21	15	7	7
Never	0	4	20	9	38	17
Planned	13	5	11	5	6	21

Further analysis of the responses of parents attending playgroup who have children of pre-school/ kindergarten age indicates that 78% of both three- and four- year old children attend a pre-school or kindergarten program. Only five three-year olds at playgroup and six four-year olds at playgroup did not attend a pre-school or kindergarten program. Some of these children may be amongst those planning to attend in the following year. Some parents, however, felt that playgroup in itself, was enough and did not feel the need to participate in other services or activities.

> *Not really – the children are happy with what is here. Just playgroup is fine.*

Parent and carer focus group participants reported several ways in which they became aware of the SP-DC program they were attending. Primarily MCELP participants were informed via their school or Hub worker. Playgroup members learnt of the program from the school, other parents, friends and family and referrals from other services such as the maternal and child health nurse. Parents also liked receiving information about other services through participating in playgroup:

> *There are a lot of services in the area – health centre, kindergarten. We ask about what is happening and they (the playgroup leaders) tell us.*

The decision to attend was often motivated by the need for parents or their children to socialise more, to overcome a sense of isolation, to connect to the community and to make the transition to kinder easier. MCELP participants were motivated to improve their English and liked that their children would be cared for while they attended class.

In order to measure improvements in children's ability to socialise, early language and early numeracy skills, parents were asked in the questionnaire to mark against 12 early child learning and development indicators.

Of the 17 parents or carers for which we had data from both rounds of data collection, 10 had provided information to this set of questions. From a round one mean score of 8.5 (out of a maximum of 12) on the child early development index, we saw an increase to a mean of 9.2 by the second round of data collection, but given the small sample size this increase was significant only at the $p = .17$ level and even in these limited data, the age of the child was highly correlated with the parent's/carer's rating of their child's early development ($r = .7$, $p = .07$) and explained half of the difference in the ratings.

Figure 3   Parent's rating of their child's early development by age of child (n = 10)
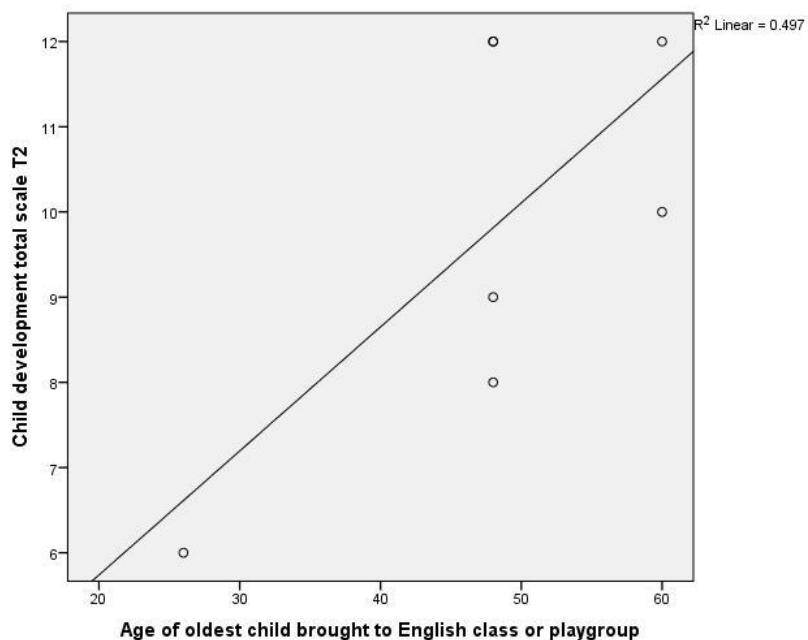
Parents also mentioned in focus groups that the SP-DC facilitated playgroups in the hubs were more appealing than other playgroups, and that they preferred to attend SP-DC:

> *Because the other playgroups that we've gone to have been old, rundown and [the hub worker here] is an exception; so it's to do with, cause my playgroup, we used to just sit and drink coffee and the kids would go; we had no workers. So it's [because of] [hub worker] [that we come].*

Parents also preferred to attend English classes through SP-DC's MCELP program than elsewhere because of the childcare available:

> *I come to this class because of my child. I can't afford to pay for childcare, so with other classes, because of my child I cannot attend.*

Other things that were seen as facilitating attendance were the fact that the children enjoyed the playgroups, rooms were clean and peaceful, the parent's ability to focus on the child and being provided with a safe space. They liked the convenience of being integrated with the school and the ability to meet and socialise with others in their area.

MCELP participants liked the opportunity to learn, the availability of childcare and the opportunity to meet others.

Some barriers to attending the programs were discussed; these included being busy, having work commitments and the demands of having large families, conflicts with kinder schedules and differing levels of English abilities (MCELP).

Parents and carers were asked to comment on any areas where the programs could be improved in order to increase participation by both current and potential service users. In regards to MCELP and playgroup, participants suggested that outings or excursions could be included. With regard to playgroup structure, the playtime and activities could be more structured and stimulating and there could be more rules and guidance. In terms of infrastructure and facilities; lockers, access to computers and tea and coffee making facilities were requested. Overall more focus was required on preparation for kinder, good nutrition and healthy food ideas. Greater access to guest speakers and educators was also talked about. One parent suggested:

> *Facilities for playgroup organisation to provide food. Could have more access to interpreter for more info.*

Parent and Carer reports of Social Connectedness

A main objective of the SP-DC program is to foster social cohesion through the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families in early years service programs.

Participants were asked a series of questions via the questionnaires and focus groups aimed at evaluating the success of the SP-DC programs in regards to strengthening and broadening the parent or carer, child and family connectedness to the wider community. Questions specifically asked respondents about their sense of belonging, community connections and confidence in accessing the services available to them.

Nearly all (99%) of parents who took part in the evaluation felt that they belonged in their playgroup, with 78% strongly agreeing. Only one person reported feeling that they did not feel a sense of belonging. The majority identified with their cultural community (92%).

In regards to the wider community, 84% of respondents agreed that they felt that the belonged in the City of Hume, 4% disagreed that they belonged, 8% were neutral and 4% did not respond. Most respondents agreed that they felt a sense of belonging in the wider community, 87% identified as part of the Victorian community (55% strongly) and 90% with the Australian community (64% strongly).

When asked about family and friend networks, most people agreed that they had an established network in the area. However 13% of respondents had neutral responses and 9% of respondents disagreed that they had a family network in the area.

> *I don't have any direct family here in Australia (sisters, brothers etc) so when I come here to this playgroup, I meet other mothers which I enjoy a lot. And my daughter plays with other kids like her age which she enjoys a lot too.*

Respondents were asked questions with regards to accessing local services. Most people (78%) agreed that they had access to services they needed and 6% disagreed, the remainder were neutral or did not respond. The majority reported (84%) that they were able to access child services in the area and only 6% reported they could not.

> *I feel very happy and get a lot of information about the community and learn a lot about English.*

Parents and carers mainly reported that they were confident to seek help and support from local services (85%). The remainder were neutral (14%) and 1 disagreed.

In regards to their English language skills, the majority of respondents reported being confident in their English speaking (69%), reading (70%) and writing (66%) skills. However across the board they were more likely to respond that they 'agreed' than 'strongly agreed' with regard to their level of confidence.

Overall 93% of respondents either strongly agreed (72%) or agreed (21%) that they felt confident in their parenting skills. The remainder were neutral or did not respond to the question. In focus groups, parents and carers talked about community connectedness and inclusion. They talked about the programs being a conduit for friendships and mentioned that they felt supported by other parents and playgroup staff and felt a sense of belonging. MCELP participants thought it was a good way to meet people from other backgrounds and that it facilitated social interaction.

For the 17 parents or carers for whom we had data from both rounds of data collection, we used their scores from the 15 questions on belonging, connections and confidence to create four sub-scales (belonging, networked with family and friends, access to services, and confidence with English), and one overall belonging scale (made up of the four sub-scale scores).

All sub-scales showed an improvement in the mean score between the first and second rounds of data collection but none of these improvements were statistically significant, although two sub-scales approached significance. The belonging subscale mean score increased from 4.6 (out of a maximum of 5) at round one, to a mean of 4.8 at round two ($p =.10$). The access to services sub-scale mean score increased from 4.3 at round one, to a mean of 4.6 at round two ($p =.17$).

An overall belonging scale based on the four sub-scales was created. This overall belonging scale showed a significant increase between round one (mean score 4.3) and round two (mean score 4.6) and was highly significant ($p = .02$).

Figure 4   Overall belonging scale: mean scores at rounds one and two.

Error bars: 95% CI
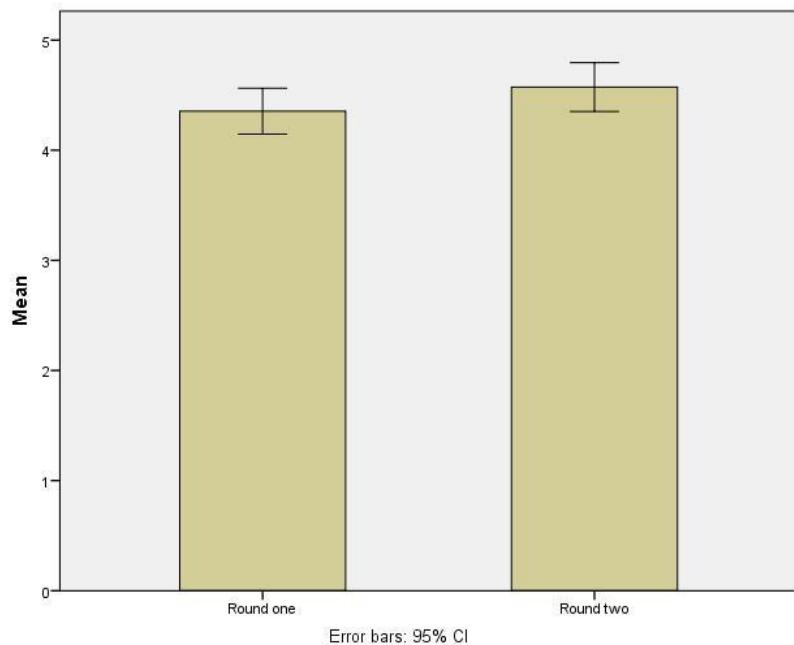
Participants also felt there were social benefits to participating in the programs leading to greater community participation. In particular they had been provided information on other services, had the opportunity to ask questions and had developed greater community awareness. They felt more motivated to go out, had greater confidence when accessing services and were able to communicate better with service providers such as with doctors. Parents attending MCELP noted that improving their English helped them feel more connected to the world around them. One parent noted that she had lived in Australia for fifteen years, but because her family and friends, as well as service providers like her doctor, all spoke Arabic, she had not felt the need to learn English. Since attending MCELP she felt more confident in helping her son learn to read, while becoming literate in English had made a difference to the places she felt able to access and make use of in the community:

> *Yes. There were places, I didn't know them, I didn't know how to read them. A whole lot of things make a difference. I'll also be more aware of what's happening around me if I learn more English.*

Another parent in MCELP noted that attending the class gave her the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds, to learn about their cooking and to share ideas. This gave her more motivation to go out.

When asked about community services and programs they had recently accessed, program participants talked about Kindergarten, Health Centre, Mother Goose, Homework Club and school services such as the school library. Awareness and utilisation of such services is a good indicator of connectedness to community services as well as trust in service providers and agencies.

Parent and Carer evaluation of training and learning pathways

The third major aim of the SP-DC program is to create training and learning pathways for culturally and linguistically diverse parents and carers living in southern Hume City. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked a series of questions about their current training and work history since attending playgroup and future plans over the next twelve months.

Thirty five respondents reported having attended a training course since having started at playgroup, 17 at the early years Hub and 16 at other venues, which included playgroups, online courses, TAFE, certificate, diploma and council-run courses.

In regards to volunteer activities, 16 respondents reported they had recently volunteered in the community, two of which were with sporting groups.

There were 10 people who reported having undertaken paid employment since beginning the playgroup/MCELP program; 2 fulltime, 2 part time and 6 were employed casually.

Thirty-nine respondents reported that they planned to undertake training of some kind over the next 12 months: 14 indicated the training would be completed at the Hub and nine listed other locations, including university, TAFE, the Leisure Centre and online courses.

In regards to volunteer activities, 19 said they planned to volunteer over the next 12 months, 15 within the community and 4 with sporting groups.

Employment plans included 6 wishing to undertake full time employment, 5 part time employment and 4 casual employment.

During the focus groups, parents attending the playgroups talked about having improved their parenting skills and having greater knowledge of local services. Some had started to develop new interests and skills such as drawing and cooking as a result of interacting with other parents and carers within their playgroups. The MCELP focus group participants were asked more specifically about skills developed as a result of attending the program. They talked about having enhanced their English skills and reported that through the playgroup component they were able to practice their English, as well as learn about parenting and child development. The course had improved their confidence, developed new skills and made them more employable. One person commented that she was now able to teach her son reading.

Parent participant case study

To illustrate the practical impact of the SP-DC project for individuals and families, one participant in the project was identified as an exemplary case study and interviewed at length regarding her qualitative experiences and pathway through the SP-DC project. This is her story:

Aisha, originally from Lebanon, immigrated to Australia in 2002, shortly after meeting and marrying her husband. She has four children all of whom were born in Australia. The three older children were born in Sydney where the family lived before moving to Melbourne and settling in the northern suburbs, where her youngest son was born.

Having left both Lebanon, and then Sydney, Aisha had few family or social support networks in her new suburb. With her two older children in school, she began to look for opportunities for her pre-school aged boys to meet and play with other children of the same age. In her interview, she also talked of her feelings of isolation and her own need "to get out of the house and connect with others".

Her local kindergarten teacher told her about special playgroup program based in English and Arabic that ran at the Early Years Hub at the local primary school. The playgroup incorporated the Bilingual Storytime Program, where books, songs and games are facilitated in both Arabic and English. Aisha started attending the playgroup with her boys and after attending for some time, the Playgroup co-ordinator suggested that she should complete the Bilingual Storytime Training course and become the playgroup facilitator. With the encouragement and support of the other playgroup mothers and the playgroup coordinator, Aisha decided to undertake the training. She attended the facilitator course one day a week over 10 weeks. Having successfully completed the course, she is now employed as the facilitator of the playgroup.

Aisha has been attending the playgroup for three years and she talked at length about the benefits the playgroup has provided for her family. It has opened up opportunities for her children to socialise with others, to learn and to share. It has given her the chance to learn about the community and to improve her knowledge of child development, including ways to engage with the children individually. This has benefited her in her role as a mother, as well as being of benefit to her children and their relationships with their peers. She feels a greater connectedness to others within her community and an improved sense of belonging. She has extended her friendship group beyond her family and has many new friends – "maybe too many", she laughs.

Playgroup provides Aisha with an opportunity to practice speaking English. Often mothers are not confident in communicating in English, but inside the playgroup they feel confident to practice with the group. Playgroup has also provided opportunities to learn about other services within the community. At first Aisha had no idea what a library was and had never visited one. Now she has been a few times.

During her training as the playgroup facilitator she was encouraged by the other mothers, who have continued to support her in her role as playgroup facilitator. She also felt well supported by the playgroup coordinators and support staff.

She feels her experience with attending both playgroup and the playgroup facilitator training has given her more self-confidence and recently she has volunteered her time at a local school playgroup for children with behavioural issues or disability. She talks positively about her future and thinks that when all her children are in school she may progress to do further qualifications in childcare.

However, like any busy mum of four, finding the time for herself is difficult, especially fitting her own personal development in between the demands of the children and school schedules.

Aisha now has a new set of skills and feels that her involvement with the SP-DC project has also equipped her with better parenting skills and the ability to communicate more effectively with her own children. Not only has she broadened friendships on a personal level, she now has a professional network as well, such as the occupational therapist, speech pathologist and playgroup coordinator to support her ongoing career development. She finds the idea of having this network of mums and work colleagues "lovely" and it has given her a sense of freedom and self-assuredness. In her own words, she sums up her journey –

"First you feel like you're doing something for yourself, especially like after like leaving your country and coming here, nothing to do, not confident you know. Of course you have a role, you're a mum, you're doing like lot of things, but still you have to do something for yourself to feel like you're still alive."

PROJECT WORKER FINDINGS

Supporting Parents Developing Children Project workers include the hubs workers, playgroup facilitators, bilingual story-tellers and the members of the multi-disciplinary team. The project workers participated in the evaluation either through group interviews or focus groups. The interviews and focus groups aimed to uncover evidence about the ways in which the project workers perceive the Supporting Parents Developing Children project to be meeting its explicit aims, as well as to reveal their perceptions of the barriers and enablers to effective project implementation. Project workers who participated in the evaluation were very articulate about the benefits of the project for families, children and communities across the three project aims of participation, social cohesion and training pathways. Identified areas of need which were currently unmet included, engaging a music therapist to connect children and families across language barriers and more opportunities for excursions to broaden the horizons of socially isolated families.

Participation

Project workers were very clear about the focus of the project being on supporting parents in their parenting, on empowering parents and on preparing children for formal education. Project workers had a clear understanding of the importance of focusing broadly on language and literacy, but also on supporting and enhancing developmental play.

And so we, a lot of what we do is about actually putting in those education and therapy frameworks into the programs that are in existence so that we are enhancing um, making taking them from merely entertaining or childcare or you know these sorts of very narrow focus's to actually making them developmentally appropriate and educative and therapeutic.

We'll do that by giving information session to parents at a story time, we'll do that by giving information session to storytellers you know a PD session to storytellers and playgroup facilitators. We'll do it by writing and delivering the training for the playgroup facilitators and then we do it at the level where we consult then into the meetings about planning those programs like the MCELP and things like that. We actually look at one of the major changes since we've been along in story time and probably a little bit more happening now in playgroups is about them actually understanding when you plan a session you can actually teach a child something…

Project workers were appreciative of the difference that access to the multi-disciplinary team made for the families in the project. Tension does exist around the roles of individual team members, however, particularly the ethical dilemma of identifying a family's need and not being able to respond, either by directly providing a clinical service or through the difficulty of getting children into available public services in the area.

The facilitators also noted that through attending playgroup, the children learn to share toys, become more confident and to make new friends. Importantly, the mothers and their children have time together and become more connected with each other.

In response to questioning about their programs achievements, the facilitators listed a range of outcomes. These included:

- Teaching about nutrition and the observable difference in the lunches the children bring;
- Giving the mothers a chance to develop their English skills and learn through discussion on topics about child development;
- Parents taking home the ideas that they have learnt about at the Early Years Hubs;
- Explaining to some parents about how they can use public facilities such as playgrounds; and
- For some mothers, the only opportunity to interact with other mothers

Facilitators noted the collaborative and accessible nature of the programs:

> It's a sharing of ideas more than teaching them.

> Program workers provide a role model for the mum.

Social Cohesion

Project workers were clear about the aim of linking parent participants both to suitable early years services and to other parents and community members. In particular, the hubs workers had an explicit focus on providing connections between families and schools. Some of this work is done at a group level, for example, helping isolated mothers feel comfortable in school spaces by attending playgroups there, while some of this work is done at a more individual level.

> There's more of a need with especially the um, the Bhutanese community they need, they're quite socially isolated and, ...what I do with my programs is you actually sit with the parents and you help them write out the referral to ECIS... Or to Community Health then you say what did your maternal child health say? She said this, that, that actually meant this you know and um, and it's that actually supporting them to link in "Oh did you know ... we have a L to P program for young mums or newly arrived mums where someone will drive you in their car and you get your driving practice" and you know all that sort of stuff that's links them... into the community. So that in some ways makes us a community development worker um, but you know that's the social cohesion thing.

Project workers also articulated the pleasure they get when the informal networks which they support are shown to be working effectively.

> the other thing, the joy to me is when, and the recognition of success I think, is when I get a phone call from a mother or from another worker who has heard because their friend went to a playgroup the other day .... who said I [project worker] was there and did this and can I meet with you 'cause I have a worry about my child? And that says to me that the network is working…

Cultural and community barriers and trust in spaces and institutions is also critically important in encouraging both program participation and the social cohesion which flows from it.

> *I think it's other reasons. I would imagine that it's that they are transport poor um, but there is that sense of trust, there is that sense of it's taking a while for people to feel they have a space that they can relate to. And who the particular person in that space may be and then that person says now you know "I'll even go with you down to that space" and there's a pulling back. We often find and I don't know whether that happens on your sites guys but we often find beforehand we have the fathers come in and check the space and the activity and the person who's running it out. So for a number of our families it won't happen until we allow one person in. We basically call it an Introduction Day or Fun Activity Day and dads will come and sometimes they bring their wife and their children, sometimes they come in on their own and have a conversation or say yay or nay. So you know some of that inbuilt trust about it and then saying well they're going to go off and do something else particularly if I may, in the financial literacy, ... I had two experiences where dad just said "I don't want her learning anything about finances" and the mums were very keen to actually find out what a budget looked like and then came back embarrassingly had to say "He won't let me because he doesn't want me to know about his finances, our finances, his finances".*

Working with community and identifying both community need and culturally appropriate experiences are critical components of the project workers' role in encouraging and supporting diverse communities to benefit from programs like SP-DC.

Training pathways

Training pathways were identified as a critical component of the project, especially in terms of the longevity and sustainability of the programs, as well as being individually empowering for the women involved. Training pathways were identified as happening along a continuum from playgroup participants, through to story tellers, facilitators and workers.

> *we needed someone to help us so we got volunteers but then realised that that was actually making this program more sustainable and just after we did the training recently, we've selected ... three of the ... women from that group to actually volunteer in playgroups we run and we think that these are the kind of women that actually are not going to be playgroup facilitators they're actually, one of their goals is she said "I want [co-ordinator's] job"…*

Workers also recognise, however, that there is a disjuncture between the number of people trained and the number of jobs on offer, as well as the tension between training people for employment while also meeting fair and transparent employment and recruitment strategies.

> *In terms of providing employment pathways for all of the participants who've been trained as part of the training program, that isn't feasible within the funding given. There's forty-five people [trained] and roughly eight hours a week [of work], so something has to give somewhere.*

> *There are also challenges with recruiting from a specific pool of individuals, rather than in accordance with Hume guidelines which say you need to externally advertise.*

PROGRAM AND PROJECT COORDINATOR FINDINGS

As part of the evaluation, interviews were conducted with the coordinators of each of the Supporting Parents Developing Children Project's programs (bilingual storytime, facilitated playgroup, Mother and Child English Language Program and early years community hubs) as well as the overall Project coordinator, based at Hume City Council. As would be expected, program and project coordinators were able to assess the Project from a more overarching viewpoint, and offered feedback about the ways in which the Project, through the different programs, has been able to meet its aims, and what the barriers to implementation in the first year have been.

Participation

Program coordinators were very clear about the ways in which their programs deliver on the Supporting Parents Developing Children Project aims, such as increased participation:

> *So just getting them really engaged with their child's learning but thinking about their own learning as well so they don't get left behind. That was one of our key messages … don't get left behind and how you participate in this society and that language is the key but knowing about what services are there is also a key and feeling comfortable about how to use them in a way that really works for you. Its all that in [our program].*

> *I think the fact you've got your play group parents coming in to a school environment starts to support those relationships about schools not being these foreign lands that no one steps on unless you've got kids there. It gets them to… especially for the refugee population who have such very different ideas of school settings and authority and how they defer everything to you, you're the expert. I think even the ideas of what play is and Maternal Child Health going out there and doing outreach and meshing it with Kinder and Prep, especially Prep, I just think it creates… for that community… it just creates an ease and a knowledge base that they will probably otherwise really not have. I think that can only support children's learning when they get into school. Even if they just get the benefit of playgroup or just Kinder or just… even if they give it the benefit of one service it can still make a difference, let alone if they've had multiple service interventions.*

> *The message is the importance of Early Years and how it affects learning. If there are more advocates advocating that message out in the community it will reach a bigger portion of the community we're trying to help.*

In essence the program staff were very conscious that

> *The whole focus ... at the end, is children['s development].*

Hubs in particular, can be very good for exposing participants of one program to various other programs. For example, if parents are attending playgroup in a hub then its easier to engage them in other activities that are also held at the hub like Maternal and Child Health visits. Schools are also perceiving the benefits of the integrated programs offered in hubs:

> *Anecdotally the teachers are talking about how the women are becoming aware of what's out there, really surprising things that… Child Maternal Health services, preventative health measures, dental care…*

… kindergarten enrolment. In the past and even now "Why should I send my child for two or three hours? By the time I go home and come back it's not worth it." It's changing that they're becoming aware it's important to enrol your child

Interviewer: So do you think overall SP-DC has increased participation of families?

Respondent: I think so. Yes. I mean I think that if all these things, you have to keep working at it, because you are targeting vulnerable families and you have to go to the organisations, like settlement services, to make sure that you're getting people in, new people all the time. So the communities are changing, and often the ones that you really want to reach are the hardest to reach, you know, so you've got to do additional things to engage them, and make sure that you're not always talking to the same people. So I think it has... has increased participation, definitely. Certain key messages concerning the importance of the early years in child development. But I think there's still a lot more, it's an ongoing challenge.

Social cohesion

Project coordinators recognise the importance of improved participation as a pathway to social cohesion, along with developing confidence, trust and belonging. Yet while staff at the coordinator level recognised that the project aims at social cohesion, there is tension within the project over what this looks like:

I know with the Principals… in particular one school, even a few schools, although they're politically correct about how they say it the ethnic specific playgroups… some schools are a bit cautious about having them labelled ethnic specific because they are excluding other people. That's a valid and sensitive thing. I don't know the ins and outs but there's something about having to brand it a certain way for funding .... They find a way to work around it.... Some of my suggestions have been to have more events which are non-ethnic specific such as International Women's Day or Literacy Week. There are ways around all that while still being able to service particular communities with particular needs.

The coordinators were clear, however, that addressing these issues is indeed part of the Supporting Parents developing Children Project brief:

I have been in meetings where things like that do come up about people being… even when there's a few cultures in a group, they're kind of segregated. That comes down to the role of the facilitators or even the hub workers working the room and knowing how to work the room to bring people together. ... again, that's where the project has a lot of potential. You're creating situations where people are coming together to build on that and you can do so much if that's an issue.

Interviewer: What about social cohesion? Do you think that's an outcome of SP-DC?

Respondent 1:   … yes, it is, because it's not only one community who is learning English, they are understanding each other's culture and respecting each other. You would see a Vietnamese and a Syrian or Greek and in one class we have ... Spanish and Greek and Arabic and Iraqis together. The population who are here, its not selective for specifically Arabic or so on, it's everybody and there is a range of diverse cultures and they feel friends with each other because the class has provided that opportunity and the playgroup. When they come back, even though they're with their children they sit down together and chat and that's provided an avenue.

> *Respondent 2:   That's right, it's about social cohesion, it's about mingling, it's about settling, it's about opportunities and transitioning through other services. Actually, what has been reported also, that the children have been the driver of their mothers to the playgroups.*

The interrelated and overlapping nature of the three project aims of participation, social cohesion and pathways to training is nicely summarised in this statement from one of the coordinators:

> *I think the sense of social connectedness has been really good for a lot of the parents, too. Um, you know participation in the programs. And I think, again, for a lot of them it's really got them thinking about themselves, what they want to do next, what skills they might develop, what sort of career they might have – maybe not career, but what opportunities are available to them.*

Training pathways

It is clear that participation in Supporting Parents Developing Children Project's programs is a key steeping stone from some women into further training and employment opportunities.

> *it is the connection and by learning English you participate in the school with your child by learning English and it opens avenues for you for a further education. You can go and do any different Certs that you want to do and if you had an interest in your country or an education where you want to build on this you can further your English and then alongside with your interest of education so it's, again, a pathway to education and employment.*

> *In some of our longer running ones like the GLC we've had women who come for long enough that either their kids have now gone to school or they've now completed their 510 hours [of English tuition]. That's interesting because what do they do? They may have functional English, there's one woman who does have functional English. She's really not the target for this MCELP anymore but she loves it, she really likes the teacher and so she's coming back as a classroom volunteer. That's ideal. She's getting some pathways planning for herself, she's working out what she wants to do… because she likes that classroom assistant role so she'll probably look at doing that with some sort of training. I think that's very real, when we talk about pathways for these women and going on to education and training…*

> *we see that the playgroups own their playgroups and the Mother's can be upskilled and then take over so, we don't hold our playgroup leaders, it's just give them the opportunity and then they move on and new people upskilling other people, so could be a Mother participating in a playgroup who shows interest in running the playgroup and then our role is to link her ... to the playgroup leader in training or to any RTO organisation to do their Children's Services Certificate III if they are willing to do that, so we give them those opportunities and referrals to enhance their skills. It has been great actually.*

> *I think that's something that's been really successful, and if they're not doing some sort of training or learning, they're thinking about it, and it's been done in a very, very accessible way. If you put a parent and a child in a playgroup, where they can go, make friends, build confidence, and then they're here, it might be, you know, a playgroup course for people who maybe want to become a playgroup facilitator, it's an easy stepping stone, they're already there, they've built up their confidence, so it's provided a stepping stones, it's not somebody receiving a flyer at home about a playgroup leader course, you've given them a pathway.*

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This section summarises the results described above, with particular reference to the research questions of:

- Increased participation in early years services

- Increased social cohesion, and

- Improved access to training and learning pathways.

In general the respondents were very positive about the implementation of the SP-DC Project's programs – Playgroup, Bilingual Storytime and Mother & Child English Language programs. Parents found the programs accessible and enjoyable for both themselves and their children. The links with the primary school were seen to be valuable as were the support provided by facilitators and workers. The facilitators and workers also noted the significance of the Early Years Hubs located within their primary school precinct.

Respondents emphasised the opportunities the programs provided for CALD parents to connect to one another, to their local primary school and to the services in their community. An increase in parents' confidence in accessing services was a common observation. This development was seen to be a contributor towards greater social cohesion for CALD families.

Respondents also noted the importance of developing a sense of belonging amongst parents and program leaders using terms such as trust, belonging and family to describe this sense. Reference was made to the success some parents had in pursuing training pathways.

The resources provided by the programs have broadened parents' child rearing skills, all informed by increased awareness of play activities, child development, nutrition and shared parent/child reading. Program workers had observed growth in the participating children's confidence, social interactions and language development.

Suggested improvements to the programs were, in total, as follows:

Parents:

- Tea and coffee available for parents and carers;
- Lockers for spare clothes when the children get wet playing; and
- More activities to stimulate the children's thinking, especially the older children.

Program Facilitators:

- Addressing timetabling of other activities in a library-based program that can interfere with the daily program;
- Having a few computers on-site;
- Engaging a music therapist, because music is an effective way of connecting with people.; and
- Having excursions for the parents and children so as to broaden their horizons.
- More time for planning the daily program; and
- Providing some groups with easy access to resources such as photocopiers

PARTICIPATION

Parents, carers, project workers and project coordinators all reported that engaging vulnerable and disadvantaged parents/ carers and their pre-school aged children in the supported programs of SP-DC were highly effective and valued means of increasing participation. Increasing participation may be considered along two axes of measurement: increasing the number of parents who participate; and increasing the level of participation of those already engaged. There is clear evidence given above that SP-DC increases participation along both these measures. The enrolment of over one hundred adults, most of them socially isolated women

from CALD, newly arrived and emerging communities, demonstrates both the need for these types of programs and the ease of accessing them for vulnerable and potentially disengaged families and individuals. The fact that half of these women moved on to training, further education, voluntary employment and paid employment over the course of the year indicates that SP-DC enhances the depth of parent participation, as well as the breadth. In particular, the emphasis on shared knowledge of child development and effective parenting in the Australian context were widely felt to be beneficial. This was especially so in the context of newly arrived and socially isolated groups. Communication was also a key issue which affected participation, with effective communication to parents being seen as a key enabler in program participation. The MCELP program is also an effective means of increasing participants' ability to participate more broadly due both to increasing confidence, and also improved English language skills.

The relationship between SP-DC and the schools which are the physical spaces in which most of the SP-DC programs operate is a key facilitator of increased participation. This includes participation in SP-DC programs, as well as connecting parents into other hub activities and school based activities and events, making schools a more familiar, comfortable and safe environment for both parents and pre-schoolers.

SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion is a difficult concept to define, and even more difficult to measure effectively. To overcome these difficulties, evaluation questions asked respondents about their sense of belonging, community connections and confidence in accessing the services available to them, as a proxy measure of social cohesion. Parents were confident in describing their own sense of connectedness and belonging, as well as identifying the potential sense of exclusion and isolation which might be felt by mothers who did not attend similar programs. Program workers and coordinators also mentioned some tensions over the concept of social cohesion and what it looks like in practice. In particular, there was uncertainty over whether providing ethno-specific services such as playgroups and storytimes for particular language-speakers contributed to social cohesion or detracted from it. Nonetheless, workers and coordinators articulated ways around this tension, and identified specific strategies to ensure that a diversity of activities and events were available across a range of cultural and linguistic groups. Evaluation findings from questionnaires and focus groups with parents indicate that SP-DC participants feel high levels of connectedness to community, belonging and trust in the community and services.

TRAINING PATHWAYS

The development of training pathways as part of the nested programs of SP-DC has clearly been a successful element of the project as it has been implemented so far. Half of the parents enrolled in SP-DC programs have participated in training or further education during the year, either internally with SP-DC, or with an external provider. Some parents have also been able to gain volunteer and paid employment opportunities as a result of their participation in the program. As our case study shows, parents find the safe, guided pathways through the programs to be accessible and effective, in a way which they perhaps would not have in a less structured and supported environment. Project workers and coordinators did raise the pertinent question of what comes after training, and mentioned the difficulties inherent in articulating training pathways in to sustainable employment opportunities either within the project or beyond it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from the responses of those parents, workers and coordinators who participated in the evaluation process that the implementation of SP-DC to date has indeed been effective in meeting its project goals of increasing participation, improving social cohesion and providing training and employment pathways for

disadvantaged mothers of young children. The support of SP-DC workers, project and program coordinators, genuine goodwill on behalf of all stakeholders and a commitment to improving the situation of vulnerable parents has resulted in a remarkable amount of work being undertaken in the first twelve months of the program and in achieving measurable change for individuals and communities.

Some clear messages did emerge from the first stage of the evaluation which may prove useful in the roll out of the later stages of the SP-DC program. These findings are listed here as interim recommendations to improve the project over the next implementation period. The recommendations are:

- A focus on ensuring that the most newly arrived, most socially isolated and hardest to reach individuals, families and communities are identified and encouraged to participate in the opportunities available, in addition to engaging individuals and families who are already beginning to establish themselves in the community.

- A focus on ensuring that balance in achieved between supporting parents within their language/ cultural group and enhancing social connections and cohesion between individuals with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

- A focus on ensuring that training pathways lead to sustainable, real-world employment opportunities for participants.

REFERENCES

Araújo Dawson, B., & Williams, S. (2008). The Impact of Language Status as an Acculturative Stressor on Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviours among Latino Children: A Longitudinal Analysis from School Entry through Third Grade. Journal of Youth & Adolescence, 37(4), 399-411. doi: 10.1007/s10964-007-9233-z.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (1999). Australian social trends. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006). Census of Population and Housing: Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), Australia - Data only. Retrieved 25 July, 2012, from
        http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2033.0.55.0012006

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). Census Community Profile Series: Hume (C) (Local Government Area). Retrieved 13 December, 2012, from
http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/communityprofile/LGA23270?opendocument&navpos=230

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006). Information Paper: An Introduction to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Berger-Schmitt, R. (2000). Social cohesion as an aspect of the quality of societies: Concept and measurement. Centre for Survey Research and Methodology: Mannheim.

Boethel, M. (2004). Readiness: School, family, and community connections. Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Britten, N. (1997). Qualitative interviews in medical research. In N Mays & C Pope (Eds.), Qualitative Research in Health Care (pp. 28-35). BMJ Publishing Group: Great Britain.

Caspe, M., Lopez, M. E., & Wolos, C. (2006/07). Family involvement in elementary school. Harvard Family Research Project Report No. 2 (Winter 06/07). As cited in Centre for Community Child Health (2008). Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services.

Centre for Community Child Health, & Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. (2007). Australian Early Development Index - Building better communities for children. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.

Centre for Community Child Health. (2008). Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services.

Clancy, S., Simpson, L., & Howard, P. (2001). Mutual trust and respect. As cited in Centre for Community Child Health. (2008). Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services.

Clarke, P. (2011). Learning English as an Additional Language in the Early Years (birth to six years). Resource Booklet. Melbourne: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

Community Indicators of Victoria. (n.d.). Hume Wellbeing Report. Retrieved 25 July, 2012, from
http://www.communityindicators.net.au/wellbeing_reports/hume

Cunha, F., Heckman, J., Lochner, L., & Masterov, D. (2006). Interpreting the evidence on life cycle skill
formation. In E. Hanushek & F. Welch (Eds.), Handbook of the Economics of Education. Amsterdam:
North-Holland.

Department of Health. (2012). 2011 Local government area profiles. Retrieved 25 July, 2012, from
http://www.health.vic.gov.au/modelling/planning/lga.htm

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2001). Starting school: effective transitions. Early Childhood Research and Practice,
3(2), 1-14.

Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2007). Transitions to School: Perceptions, expectations and experiences. Sydney, NSW:
University of New South Wales Press.

Dowdy, E., Dever, B., DiStefano, C., & Chin, J. (2011). Screening for emotional and behavioral risk among
students with limited English proficiency. School Psychology Quarterly, 26(1), 14-26.

Dyson, A., Hertzman, C., Roberts, H., Tunstill, J., & Vaghri, Z. (2009). Childhood development, education and
health inequalities. Fair Society, Healthy Lives: The Marmot Review. M. Marmot. London. **1:** 55.
Retrieved 19 December 2012, from http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-
healthy-lives-the-marmot-review

Fabian, H. (2007). Informing Transitions. In A. Dunlop & H. Fabian (Eds.), Informing Transitions in the Early
Years. Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J.H. (2000). The interview: From structure questions to negotiated text. In N Denzin & Y
Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Ed.)(pp. 645-72). Sage Publications: London.

Goldfeld, S., Mithen, J., Barber, L., O'Connor, M., Sayers, M., & Brinkman, S. (2011). The AEDI Language
Diversity Study Report. Melbourne: Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital,
Murdoch Childrens Research Institute. Retrieved 19 December 2012, from
http://ww2.rch.org.au/emplibrary/aedi/120089_AEDI_Language_Diversity_Study_Report.pdf

Goldfeld, S., O'Connor, M., & Barber, L. (2012). Australian Early Development Index - Language Diversity.
Retrieved 1 August 2012, from http://www.rch.org.au/aedi/studies/index.cfm?doc_id=14763

Green, J., Renzaho, A., Eisenbruch, M., Williamson, L., Waters, E., Lo Bianco, J., & Oberklaid, F. (2008). Parent-
centred and culturally-competent literacies for health promotion with newly arrived African
communities: A literature review.

Heckman, J. (2000). The real question is how to u se the available funds wisely. The best evidence supports the
policy prescription: Invest in the Very Young. Chicago: Ounce of Prevention Fund and the University of
Chicago Harris School of Public Policy Studies.

Hopkins, L., Green, J., & Strong, G. (2010). Literacy and numeracy in the early years. *Spotlight: Research into
Practice*. Research monograph #1. The Victorian Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Department of

Education and Early Childhood Development. Retrieved 19 December 2012, from

http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/shinespotlightlitnum.pdf

Hume City Council. (2012). City Profile. Retrieved 25 July 2012, from

http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/About_Us/Our_City/City_Profile

Kellehear, A. (1993). The unobtrusive researcher: a guide to methods. Allen & Unwin: St. Leonards, NSW.

Kreider, H., Caspe, M., Kennedy, S., & Weiss, H. (2007). Family Involvement in Middle and High School

Students' Education. Family Involvement Makes a Difference. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard

Family Research Project.

LDC Group. (2011). Refugee family resource and mentoring program: Evaluation report. Retrieved 19

December 2012, from www.ldc.net.au/_literature_101844/VICSEG_new_futures_final_report

Liamputtong, P., & Jirojwong, S. (2009). Health needs assessment of communities and populations. In

Jirojwong & Liamputtong (Eds.). Population health, communities and health promotion (pp. 45-68).

Oxford University Press: Victoria.

Markus, A., & Dharmalingam, A. (2007). Mapping social cohesion: The 2007 Scanlon Foundation Surveys.

Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements: Melbourne. Retrieved 19 December 2012, from

http://www.scanlonfoundation.org.au/mappingofsocialcohesion2007.html

Mason, J (2002). Qualitative Interviewing: Asking, listening and interpreting. In T May (Ed.), Qualitative

Research in Action (pp. 225-41). Sage Publications: London.

Minichiello, V., Sullivan, G., Greenwood, KM & Axford, R (1999). Handbook for research methods in health

sciences. Addison-Wesley: Frenchs Forest, NSW.

Moore, T., Fry, R., Lorains, J., Green, J., & Hopkins, L. (2011). Review of the evidence base in relation to early

childhood approaches to support children in highly disadvantaged communities for the Children's

Ground Project. Melbourne: The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne.

Morgan, D. and Krueger, R. (1993). When to use focus groups and why. In D. Morgan (Ed.), Successful Focus

Groups: Advancing the State of the Art (pp. 3-20). Sage: Newbury Park, CA.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). Young Children Develop in an Environment of

Relationships. NSCDC Working Paper No. 1. Waltham, Massachusetts: National Scientific Council on

the Developing Child, Brandeis University.

PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2011). A practical vision for early childhood education and care.

Punch, K. (1998). Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. Sage Publications

Ltd: London.

Richter, L. (2004). The Importance of Caregiver-Child Interactions for the Survival and Healthy Development of

Young Children: A Review. Geneva, Switzerland: Department of Child and Adolescent Health and

Development, World Health Organisation.

Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2004). The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education [EPPE] Project: Final Report. London, UK: Institute of Education, University of London. Retrieved 19 December 2012, from http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/e/eppe%20final%20report%202004.pdf

The Future of Children. (2005). Summary of special issue on School Readiness: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps. The Future of Children, 15 (1).

Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture Inc. (2007). The education needs of young refugees in Victoria. Retrieved 19 December 2012, from www.foundationhouse.org.au/LiteratureRetrieve.aspx?ID=25058

Victorian Government Department of Planning and Community Development. (2010). Indicators of community strength at the local government area level in Victoria 2008. Retrieved 19 December 2012, from http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/30641/Indicators_of_Community_Strength _at_LGA_level_2008_FINAL_low-res.pdf

Vinson, T. (2009). Social Exclusion and Early Childhood Development. Canberra.

Warr, D. J. (2007). Outside the school gates: A model for tackling disadvantage and promoting participation in preschool education at the Meadowbank Early Learning Centre. Melbourne: School of Population Health, Melbourne University.

Weiss, H., Caspe, M., & Lopez, M. E. (2006). Family involvement in early childhood education. Harvard Family Research Project Report No. 1 (Spring 2006). As cited in Centre for Community Child Health. (2008). Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE DATA (MAY 2012)

Table 1. Respondent Gender

Female	Male
61	0 male

Table2. Respondent Age

*Program	MCELP	Playgroup	Total
20-25	5	6	11
26-30	8	8	16
31-35	4	12	16
36-40	5	6	11
41-45	2	3	5
46-50	0	0	0
51-60	0	1	1
61-75	0	1	1
Average	31.5	33.5	61

*Note – Programs include Carers, Parents and Grandparents.

Table 3. Suburb lived in

Suburb	Total
Broadmeadows	4
Campbellfield	8
Coolaroo	5
Dallas	7
Fawkner	2
Glenroy	1
Greenvale Lakes	2

Jacana	2
Meadow Heights	10
Roxburgh Park	8
Westmeadows	12
Total	**61**

Table 4. Language spoken at Home

Language	Total#
Arabic	18
Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac	23
Bhutanese	1
Chaldean	2
English	17
Greek	2
Indian	1
Moroccan	1
Nepali	8
Persian	1
Samoan	1
Spanish	1
Sri Lankan	1
Turkish	1
Vietnamese	5

Table 5. Average Number of Languages Spoken

# Languages per Respondent	Total
2 languages	**16**
3 languages	**3**

Table 6. Country Of Birth

Birth Country	Total #
Australia	3
Bhutan	7
Cambodia	1
El Salvador	1
Greece	1
Iran	1
Iraq	26
Lebanon	5
Morocco	1
Nepal	2
New Zealand	2
Sri Lanka	1
Syria	3
Turkey	1
Vietnam	5
Western Samoa	1
Total	**61**

Table 7. Average number of Children brought to playgroup

Program	MCELP	Playgroup	Total
0 children	4	2	**6**
1 child	13	27	**40**
2 children	7	7	**14**
3 children	0	1	**1**
Total	**24**	**37**	**61**
Average age (*mths*)	32.4	30.3	**31**

Table 8. Social Connectedness

Belonging, connections and confidence

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Belong in playgroup	44	15	0	0	1
Belong in cultural community	39	16	4	0	1
Belong in Hume community	35	14	6	2	1
Belong in Victorian community	41	12	3	2	2
Belong in Australian community	41	14	2	1	1
Have network of family in local area	34	12	10	2	2
Have network of friends in local area	32	17	9	1	0
Have access to services needed in local area	29	17	8	5	0
Have access to child services needed in local area	34	14	4	5	0
Confident to get help in local area	31	19	10	0	0
Confident accessing services in local area	34	19	6	1	0
Confident speaking English	16	25	11	4	4
Confident reading English	16	27	5	8	4
Confident writing in English	14	27	6	9	4
Confident in parenting skills	43	12	5	0	0

Table 9. Program Satisfaction

Satisfaction with Playgroup/MCELP

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Received info for kinder participation	Yes	44		No	11
If yes, was it sufficient?	Yes	43		No	0
Satisfaction with activities	36	19	2	0	2
Satisfaction with staff communication	32	21	3	1	2
Satisfaction with Bilingual Storytime	35	6	9	1	1

Satisfaction with overall program	40	15	1	0	1
Playgroup/MCELP is positive/welcoming	**Yes**	59		**No**	1
Playgroup/MCELP meets needs	**Yes**	55		**No**	4

Table 10. Community Services Used

Services accessed	Currently using	Previously used	Never used	Planned Use next 12 mth
General Practitioner	58	10	0	9
Maternal Child Health centre	35	20	4	3
Library	25	12	16	7
Early Years Hub	36	10	5	2
Childcare/crèche	10	7	28	5
Preschool/kindergarten	20	6	13	14

Comments (written verbatim)

She shares the things with others. She communicates with other friends.

I myself and my baby engage with different friends and gain more experiences.

Playgroup I think meets all mothers' needs especially for mums who do not have much friends, they can meet new people and share experiences. It is good for the children to mix with other children.

Because my daughter before shy, now she is happy and talks.

APPENDIX B: PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE DATA (OCTOBER 2012)

Table 1. Respondent Gender

Female	Male
26	1

Table 2. Respondent Age

*Program	MCELP	Playgroup	Total
20-25	0	3	**3**
26-30	3	5	**8**
31-35	1	5	**6**
36-40	1	6	**7**
41-45	0	1	**1**
46-50	0	0	**0**
51-60	0	0	**0**
61-75	0	2	**2**
Average	**30.8**	**35.8**	**35**

*Note – Programs include Carers, Parents and Grandparents.

Table 3. Suburb lived in

Suburb	Total
Broadmeadows	5
Campbellfield	3
Craigieburn	1
Dallas	1
Epping	1
Greenvale Lakes	2
Jacana	3
Meadow Heights	7
Roxburgh Park	2

Table 4. Language spoken at Home

Language	Total#
Arabic	6
Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac	15
English	6
Vietnamese	1
Nepali	3
Greek	1

Table 5. Average Number of Languages Spoken

# Languages per Respondent	Total
2 languages	**5**

Table 6. Country of Birth

Country of birth	**#**
Bhutan	3
Iraq	13
Lebanon	2
Sri Lanka	1
Syria	2
Vietnam	1

Table 7. Average number of Children brought to playgroup

Program	MCELP	Playgroup	Total
0 children/no answer	0	1	**1**
1 child	2	14	**16**
2 children	0	7	**7**
3 children	3	0	**3**
Total	**5**	**22**	**27**
Average age (*mths*)	29.3	40.6	**34.6**

Table 8. Social Connectedness

Belonging, connections and confidence

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Belong in playgroup	17	10	0	0	0
Belong in cultural community	19	6	0	0	0
Belong in Hume community	13	11	1	1	0
Belong in Victorian community	13	10	1	2	0
Belong in Australian community	15	9	1	2	0
Have network of family in local area	13	7	1	1	3
Have network of friends in local area	15	8	2	0	0
Have access to services needed in area	17	5	3	0	0
Have access to child services needed in area	18	7	2	0	0
Confident to get help in local area	15	9	1	1	0
Confident accessing services in local area	14	9	4	0	0
Confident speaking English	10	9	5	0	3
Confident reading English	9	9	5	1	3

Confident writing in English	9	8	6	1	3
Confident in parenting skills	20	6	0	0	0

Table 9. Program Satisfaction

Satisfaction with Playgroup/MCELP

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Helped with meeting other parents	23	3	0	0	0
Parents have provided support	18	7	2	0	0
Assisted with understanding children's learning	17	8	1	1	0
Assisted with knowledge of services available	18	6	3	0	0
Received info for kinder participation	**Yes**	20		**No**	6
If yes, was it sufficient?	**Yes**	15		**No**	3
Satisfaction with activities	18	6	3	0	0
Satisfaction with staff communication	18	7	1	1	0
Satisfaction with Bilingual Storytime	16	6	1	0	0
Satisfaction with overall program	18	7	1	0	0
Program Positive/welcoming	**Yes**	26		**No**	0
Playgroup/MCELP meets needs	**Yes**	25		**No**	1

Table 10. Community Services Used

Services accessed	Currently using	Previously used	Never used	Planned Use next 12 mths
General Practitioner	24	7	0	4
Maternal Child Health centre	14	9	0	2
Library	13	9	4	4
Early Years Hub	18	5	4	3

Childcare/crèche	8	0	10	1
Preschool/kindergarten	11	1	4	7

Appendix C: Questionnaires and Guiding Questions

Parent Questionnaire

Supporting Parents - Developing Children Project

Program Evaluation

Section 1: Parent/Carer Details

Name:

_____

Are you: ❏ Female ❏ Male

How old are you? _____ years

What suburb do you live in?

_____

What is your country of birth? ❏ Australia
❏ Other - please specify:
_____

If you <u>were not born in Australia</u>, what year did you arrive in Australia? _____

What is your cultural identity?

_____

What language do you speak at home?

❏ Arabic	❏ Assyrian / Chaldean / Syriac	❏ Burmese	❏ Chin
❏ Chinese	❏ English	❏ Indian	❏ Karen
❏ Samoan	❏ Somali	❏ Sri Lankan	❏ Turkish
❏ Vietnamese	❏ Other _____		

Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? ❏ No ❏ Yes

Section 2: Child/Children Details

How many children do you bring to playgroup? _____

	Age	Kindergarten attendance *(please tick where applicable)*	What is your relationship to the child *(please circle)*
Child 1	_____ months/years	❑ 3 year old ❑ 4 year old	Mother / Father / Carer / Grandparent / Other
Child 2	_____ months/years	❑ 3 year old ❑ 4 year old	Mother / Father / Carer / Grandparent / Other
Child 3	_____ months/years	❑ 3 year old ❑ 4 year old	Mother / Father / Carer / Grandparent / Other
Child 4	_____ months/years	❑ 3 year old ❑ 4 year old	Mother / Father / Carer / Grandparent / Other

Have your child or children that come to playgroup attended any maternal child health visits at the following ages: *(please tick all that are applicable)*

	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4
Home visit	❑	❑	❑	❑
2 weeks	❑	❑	❑	❑
4 weeks	❑	❑	❑	❑
8 weeks	❑	❑	❑	❑
4 months	❑	❑	❑	❑
8 months	❑	❑	❑	❑
12 months	❑	❑	❑	❑
18 months	❑	❑	❑	❑
2 years	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.5 years	❑	❑	❑	❑

If you bring more than one child to playgroup, please complete the following questions for the <u>oldest child</u> you bring to playgroup.

What is the age of the <u>oldest child</u> you bring to playgroup? _____ months/years

Thinking about this <u>oldest child</u> you bring to playgroup: *(please tick all that are applicable)*

	Yes
Can he/she play and share with others cooperatively?	❑
Can he/she clap in time with songs or rhymes?	❑
Is he/she attentive when listening to a story in the language you speak at home?	❑
Is he/she attentive when listening to a story in English?	❑

Does he/she know what words are in the language you speak at home?	❑
Does he/she know what words are in English?	❑
Does he/she know what numbers are in the language you speak at home?	❑
Does he/she know what numbers are in English?	❑
Can he/she can say or sing the alphabet in the language you speak at home?	❑
Can he/she can say or sing the alphabet in English?	❑
Can he/she retell experiences or stories in the language you speak at home?	❑
Can he/she retell experiences or stories in English?	❑

Section 3: Services accessed

Have you and the child or children you bring to playgroup attended bilingual storytime? *(please tick all that are applicable)*

- ❑ Yes, at playgroup
- ❑ Yes, at the library
- ❑ No

Have you <u>ever used</u> or do you <u>plan to use</u> any of the following services in the future:

	Currently using	Previously used	Never used	Plan to use in the next <u>12 months</u>
General practice (doctor)	❑	❑	❑	❑
Maternal Child Health Centre	❑	❑	❑	❑
Library	❑	❑	❑	❑
Early years hub	❑	❑	❑	❑
Childcare / crèche	❑	❑	❑	❑
Preschool / kindergarten	❑	❑	❑	❑

<u>Since you started to attend playgroup</u>, have you undertaken any of the following activities?
- ❑ Attended a training course (either at an early years hub or somewhere else)
    - ❑ At an early years hub   ❑ Somewhere else (where: _____)
- ❑ Volunteered with a community group
- ❑ Volunteered with a sporting group
- ❑ Participated in paid employment (full-time, part-time or casual)
    - ❑ Full-time   ❑ Part-time   ❑ Casual

In the next 12 months, do you plan to undertake any of the following activities?
- ❑ Attend a training course (either at an early years hub or somewhere else)
    - ❑ At an early years hub   ❑ Somewhere else (where: _____)
- ❑ Volunteer with a community group
- ❑ Volunteer with a sporting group
- ❑ Participate in paid employment (full-time, part-time or casual)
    - ❑ Full-time   ❑ Part-time   ❑ Casual

Section 3: Belonging, connections and confidence

How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel I belong in my playgroup	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel I belong in my cultural community	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel I belong in the broader City of Hume community	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel I belong in the Victorian community	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel I belong in the Australian community	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I have a network of family in my local area	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I have a network of friends in my local area	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I have access to the services I need in my local area	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have access to the services my child needs in my local area	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I am confident I can get help or support in my local area if I need it	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel confident accessing services in my local area	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel confident speaking English	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel confident reading English	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel confident writing in English	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
I feel confident in my parenting skills	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Section 4: Satisfaction with playgroup

Thinking about the playgroup, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This playgroup has helped me meet other parents	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
The parents I have met through this playgroup have provided me with support	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
This playgroup has helped me understand more about how children learn	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
This playgroup has taught me about services available for me and my children	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Have you received any information about the importance of kindergarten participation for your pre-school children? ❑ Yes, at playgroup ❑
Yes, from another person/place ❑ No

    If yes, do you feel you received sufficient information on the importance of kindergarten participation for your pre-school children?

    ❑ Yes ❑ No

Thinking about the playgroup, how satisfied are you with the:

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Type of activities provided through playgroup	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Level of communication from staff at playgroup	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Bilingual Storytime program	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Overall program provided through playgroup	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Do you feel that the playgroup program is positive / welcoming? ❑ Yes ❑ No

Would you say that the playgroup meets your needs? ❑ Yes ❑ No

Why? Please explain.

_____

_____

_____

_____

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – PROJECT COORDINATOR

Section 1: About the project

1. What expectations did you have in relation to what SP-DC would achieve?

2. Has SP-DC achieved its objectives, in terms of the intended short-term outcomes?

3. Do you feel that SP-DC has been implemented in an effective way?

4. In what ways has SP-DC provided value for money?

    a. Prompts: better opportunities, ways of working, improved relationships? How does this compare to alternative arrangements (i.e. SP-DC funds not available)?

Section 2: Achievements and lessons

5. What do you see as the biggest successes or the best achievements of the SP-DC project as a whole?

6. What do you think are the three main things that have helped the work of the SP-DC project as a whole?

7. What do you think are the three main things that have hindered the work of the SP-DC project as a whole?

8. How do you feel the SP-DC project as a whole has increased the participation of CALD families in early years service programs?

9. How do you feel the SP-DC project as a whole has created training and learning pathways for CALD parents and carers?

10. How do you feel the SP-DC project as a whole has fostered social cohesion for CALD families?

11. What, if anything, do you think the impact is of the SP-DC project as a whole for individuals in southern Hume?

    a. Prompts: children, parents and carers

12. What, if anything, do you think the impact is of the SP-DC project as a whole for the community of southern Hume?

13. What, if anything, do you think the impact is of the SP-DC project as a whole on relevant service providers in southern Hume?

    a. Prompts: early years services, primary schools, TAFE, health care providers

14. What critical factors contributed to the successes and challenges of the SP-DC project as a whole?

15. To what extent do you find dissemination of information from SP-DC activities helpful in your planning and to what extent is this information used by other people in your organisation?

16. How do you use the learnings from the SP-DC project within your own organisation?

    a. Prompts: organisation-wide involvement? does information impact on the organisation-wide agenda? conversations/decision-making?

Section 3: Future

17. What would you like to see continue in relation to implementation of the SP-DC project as a whole?

18. What would you like to see done differently in relation to implementation of the SP-DC project as a whole?

19. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Section 1: About the program

1. What are the goals and aims for the program?

2. Could you please describe how your program links with the objectives of SP-DC?

3. What expectations did you have in relation to what the program would achieve?

4. Did the program achieve its objectives, in terms of the intended short-term outcomes?

5. What opportunities did SP-DC funding create for this program?

6. Do you feel that the program was implemented in an effective way?

7. In what ways did the program provide value for money?
   a. Prompts: better opportunities, ways of working, improved relationships? How does this compare to alternative arrangements (i.e. SP-DC funds not available)?

Section 2: Achievements and lessons

8. What do you see as the biggest successes or the best achievements of the program and SP-DC project as a whole?

9. What do you think are the three main things that have helped the work of the program and the SP-DC project as a whole?

10. What do you think are the three main things that have hindered the work of the program and the SP-DC project as a whole?

11. How do you feel the program and SP-DC project as a whole has progressed the participation of CALD families in early years service programs?

12. How do you feel the program and the SP-DC project as a whole has created training and learning pathways for CALD parents and carers?

13. How do you feel the program and the SP-DC project as a whole has fostered social cohesion for CALD families?

14. What, if anything, do you think the impact is of the program and SP-DC project as a whole for individuals in southern Hume?
    a. Prompts: children, parents and carers

15. What, if anything, do you think the impact is of the program and SP-DC project as a whole for the community of southern Hume?

16. What, if anything, do you think the impact is of the program and SP-DC project as a whole on service providers in southern Hume?
    a. Prompts: early years services, primary schools, TAFE

17. What critical factors contributed to the successes and challenges of the program and the SP-DC project as a whole?

18. To what extent do you find dissemination of information from SP-DC activities helpful in your planning and to what extent is this information used by other people in your organisation?

19. How do you use the learnings from the SP-DC project within your own organisation?

    a. Prompts: what are the connections to your role? organisation-wide involvement? does information impact on the organisation-wide agenda? conversations/decision-making?

Section 3: Future

20. What would you like to see continue in relation to implementation of the program or SP-DC project as a whole?

21. What would you like to see done differently in relation to implementation of the program or SP-DC project as a whole?

22. Is there anything else you would like to add?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS – PARENTS AND CARERS

Section 1: About the program

1. How did you find out about playgroup/M&CELP?

2. Why did you decide to come to playgroup/M&CELP?

3. What do you like most about playgroup/M&CELP?

4. Do you attend any other activities at the early years hub?

   a. Prompts: mother goose, homework club

Section 2: Achievements and lessons

5. In what ways has attending playgroup/M&CELP contributed to your daily life?

   a. Prompts: skills, confidence, employment, demands on time, friendships, new connections in the community

6. What things helped and/or hindered you to continue to attend playgroup/M&CELP?

7. Thinking about people who may not have continued to attend playgroup/M&CELP, what sorts of things do you think may have stopped or prevented them from being able to participate in playgroup/M&CELP?

8. Do you feel more included within the community as a result of your participation in playgroup/M&CELP?

9. Do you feel more able to participate in the community as a result of your participation in playgroup/M&CELP?

   a. Prompts: confidence to access services, volunteering, employment

10. Thinking about playgroup/M&CELP, what aspects of your participation have you found the most useful and why?

Section 3: Future

11. What would you like to see continue in relation to playgroup/M&CELP?

12. If you could suggest three ways to improve playgroup/M&CELP, what would these be?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Section 1: About the program

1. What are the goals and aims for the program?

2. What expectations did you have in relation to what the program would achieve?

3. Do you feel the program achieved its objectives, in terms of the intended short-term outcomes?

4. Do you feel that the program was implemented in an effective way?

5. In what ways did the program provide value for money?

    a. Prompts: better opportunities, ways of working, improved relationships, better program, output, outcomes? How does this compare to alternative arrangements (i.e. SP-DC funds not available)?

6. In what ways, if any, does the program collaborate with the other programs that are part of the SP-DC project?

Section 2: Achievements and lessons

7. What do you see as the biggest successes or the best achievements of the program?

8. What do you think are the three main things that have helped the work of the program?

9. What do you think are the three main things that have hindered the work of the program?

10. How do you feel the program has progressed the participation of CALD families in early years service programs?

11. How do you feel the program has created training and learning pathways for CALD parents and carers?

12. How do you feel the program has fostered social cohesion for CALD families?

13. To what extent do you find dissemination of information from SP-DC activities helpful in your planning?

Section 3: Future

14. What would you like to see continue in relation to implementation of the program?

15. What would you like to see done differently in relation to implementation the program?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

CASE STUDY QUESTIONS

'The program' will be replaced with the name of the Supporting Parents - Developing Children (SP-DC) *program/s as relevant to the case study participant, including:*

- *Playgroup*
- *Bilingual storytime*
- *Mother and child English language program (M&CELP)*
- *Early years hubs.*

1. Section 1: About you and your family
2. Tell us about your family...
   a. Prompts: how many children do you have, how old are your children, where were your children born, how many children do you bring with you to the program/s?
3. What language/s do you speak at home?
4. Where were you born?
   a. if you were not born in Australia, what year did you arrive in Australia?
5. What suburb do you live in?
   a. how long have you lived here (e.g. in area of southern Hume)
6. Do you have other family and/or friends that live in the local area?

7. Section 2: About the program/s
8. How did you find out about the program/s?
9. Why did you decide to come to the program/s?
10. What do you like most about the program/s?
11. Do you attend any other activities at the early years hub or in the community?
    a. Prompts: mother goose, homework club, local library, preschool, kindergarten
12. Do you attend any education or training courses at the early years hub or in the community?
    a. Prompts: course details, how did you find out about the course, what do you hope to achieve from participating in the course (e.g. plans for volunteering or paid work)

13. Section 3: Achievements and lessons
14. In what ways has attending the program/s contributed to your daily life?
    a. Prompts: skills, confidence, employment, demands on time, friendships, new connections in the community, impact on family (e.g. spouse)
15. What things helped and/or hindered you to continue to attend the program/s?

16. Do you feel more included within the community as a result of your participation in the program/s?

17. Do you feel more able to participate in the community as a result of your participation in the program/s?

    a. Prompts: confidence to access services, volunteering, employment

18. Thinking about the program/s, what aspects of your participation have you found the most useful and why?

19. Section 4: Future

20. Do you plan to continue attending the program/s?

    a. Prompts: in the next 12 months, over the next few years (depending on age of children)

21. Do you plan on participating in any other education or training programs?

    a. Prompts: in the next 12 months, over the next few years (depending on age of children)

22. Do you plan on participating in any volunteering or employment opportunities?

    a. Prompts: in the next 12 months, over the next few years (depending on age of children)

23. Is there anything else you would like to add?