

## Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY)

# Research Snapshot

### Snapshot five

## Building sustainability from the start

Since 2007, the LSEY project has been piloting ways for early years services and schools to work together to refocus their service delivery and supports to offer a more coordinated and collaborative approach to working with children and their families.

Stakeholders in the LSEY community partnerships have included early education and care services, primary schools, child/family community services, early intervention services and local government. The LSEY project evaluation showed that these stakeholders are well placed to work together to lead local service system change and to work with parents as active partners in their children's health, learning and development.

Partnership working can be difficult to put into practice successfully and sustainably. Percy-Smith (2005) believes that it requires careful planning, commitment and enthusiasm from partners; overcoming organisational, structural and cultural barriers; and developing new skills and ways of working (Percy-Smith, 2005, as cited in Moore and Skinner, 2010).

From the beginning, the LSEY project has been building sustainable community-level action and facilitating a capacity-building, community-led approach. The LSEY evaluation identified a series of core components that have contributed to this process.

## Core components

The core components that emerged from the LSEY implementation experience and formed the foundation for community sustainability planning and action are:

- A locally responsive approach (place-based): responds to the impact that local context can have on children and their families.
- A partnership approach: provides a continuum of learning and support for children and families through cross-sector service partnerships.
- Outcomes and evidence-informed planning: use evidence and clear outcomes for children, families and services to inform practice and achieve desired outcomes.
- Community-led: planning and action strengthens local leadership capacity and is led by local families and services.
- Respectful relationships: underpin and drive the effectiveness of community-level responsiveness, planning, action and outcomes.
- Towards sustainable change: builds community capacity to achieve ongoing, long-term practice change and improve outcomes for children and families.

The three LSEY communities all have indicators of sustainability across each of these core components.

## What has LSEY found?

Based on an analysis of data across all the evaluation reports (SPRC, 2008; 2010; 2011; 2012) the LSEY external evaluation has identified sustainability indicators and core components of the way that LSEY was implemented.

The sustainability indicators are evident within the core components of the LSEY approach, which build on the finding that:

*What you do is important,  
but how you do it  
can make the difference*

This means the activities communities implement (the 'what') are important, but it is the LSEY approach (the 'how') that influences effectiveness.

## Core components of the LSEY approach

**A locally responsive  
approach  
(place-based)**

**Outcomes  
and evidence  
informed  
planning**

**A partnership approach**

**Respectful  
relationships**

**Community led**

**Towards sustainable change**

*"I've been working in this community for 40 years and I would classify LSEY as the most important thing that has come up in this time and we want to make sure it progresses at the end of the year (2012)"*

— Policy/practice stakeholder

## Sustainability indicators

Strategies to support the sustainability of LSEY were built in from the beginning and developed over time. The capacity for sustainable partnerships and action has developed differently across each community as they trialled processes for formalising community partnerships and embedded local actions. Sustainability indicators evident across the LSEY communities include:

- site-specific sustainability plans, including contingency actions for facilitation, administrative and financial support (if required)
- joint agreement on partnership governance models and partnership operations into the future
- effective relationships between early years services, schools, child/family community services and local government
- embedded local processes for outcomes-based planning and use of evidence and local data in planning
- continued application of the action-research cycle
- communities providing financial and time resources required for sustainability (or working together to advocate for the resources).

These indicators of sustainability are a platform for LSEY communities to continue working collaboratively towards a shared vision and improving transition outcomes for children and their families.

## Contributing factors

A range of factors contributed to the capacity for sustainable practice across the LSEY communities:

- Capacity building and local leadership developed the understanding, skills and motivation for communities to lead the LSEY approach (planning and action).
- A foundation of local relationships developed a shared vision and understanding of the need to change. It also helped to establish and maintain functional community-led partnership working.
- A flexible implementation model enabled partnerships and actions to be developed and implemented to build on existing good practice and respond to the unique systems and structures within each community.
- An action-research cycle enabled each LSEY community to continually review, evaluate and adapt their activities and practice and ensure their actions were effective.
- Responsive partnership governance structures facilitated locally responsive planning that linked with existing and new initiatives to ensure local resources were used efficiently.

## Implications:

### Policy, research and communities

- Creating and sustaining new ways of working is possible, but effective implementation requires a shared understanding of the need for collaboration and significant capacity building.
- Sustainability requires a commitment to locally developed and agreed 'authorising' environments that enable ongoing and active participation.
- Further research is required to gain a greater understanding of the capacity for communities to refocus their practice and create authorising environments for sustainable systemic change.
- Ongoing facilitation support is required for sustainable community-level planning and action.
- Services and schools need funded time to operate collaboratively as a 0–8 early years profession.

## About LSEY snapshots

The LSEY snapshot series aims to share findings from LSEY's approach and activities. Findings are based on the experiences of three Victorian communities: Corio–Norlane in the City of Greater Geelong, Footscray in the City of Maribyrnong and Hastings in the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

The LSEY pilot has a cross-sectional external evaluation being conducted by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. Data was collected in 2008, 2010 and 2012. These research snapshots explore the 2008-2010 data.

This time-limited series of snapshots will run from 2012 into early 2013 to communicate evaluation findings and highlight examples of good practice from six years of community implementation.

The series will explore:

- The LSEY approach
- Supporting smooth transitions
- Engaging families
- Responsive schools
- Sustainability
- The final findings

For more information about the LSEY project see:

[www.rch.org.au/lsey](http://www.rch.org.au/lsey)

LSEY is a project of the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health.

## References

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