

May 9, 2008

Education & Health Standing Committee
<mailto:laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au>

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you in response to an article in the South Western Times calling for submissions to a 'parliamentary inquiry into the adequacy of health detection programs and support services in WA schools.'

I would like to tell you about a program that could offer a solution to your concerns about 'lack of early intervention' and 'failing systems in pre-primary and primary schools'.

Research tells us about the importance of schools, services and communities in supporting children and families and providing the conditions and experiences needed to ensure that all children reach school able to take advantage of the academic and social learning experiences that schools provide.

The Linking Education and Families (LEAF) program provides a framework for achieving the objective of giving each child the best possible start to their education. The program builds on partnerships between education and health, and works with local families and communities to support them to identify priorities and develop a plan to improve the wellbeing of their children.

The history of the program began when the Department of Education and training (DET), Western Australia, identified a need to build closer links with children and families during transition from home to school. This is especially relevant in terms of promoting early literacy and social support and reflects a commitment by schools to enhance school readiness.

In 2005, through DET funding, South Bunbury Primary School released their Kindergarten teacher, Ms Fiona Farren, for one day per week for 12 months to develop strategies to connect with local families with children under four years. This resulted in the development of a program that provides a mechanism by which schools can make early contact with parents and families of pre-school children.

Key elements of the program include:

- Training to prepare teachers for their role as program coordinators
- Family visiting
- Play Cafes

The program is founded on the philosophy and principles of the partnership approach (Olds, 1997, 2002) – a model which proposes that resources must be

offered in skilled, empowering and respectful ways in order to ensure that parents are supported in their role and not disempowered by professional intervention.

Family visiting occurs early in the school year and provides an opportunity for the teacher to build a picture of the child that includes favourite things, toys, and pets etc. This makes conversations much richer and rewarding and helps build a personal relationship between the teacher and parent (facilitating access to family support services if needed).

From term two onwards the school makes facilities available for families of 0-4 year olds to have regular opportunities to interact with each other, the program coordinator for the school and other guest community members eg community health nurses and local service providers. Parents of young children can relax, share information, develop a support network and participate in a variety of learning activities. Activities such as painting, song, and play dough are provided for the children.

The combined strategies of home visiting and Play Cafes have provided many positive opportunities for supporting healthy parent-child interaction. An extensive evaluation of the model (Thomas, K. 2008) contains many glowing testaments from parents, teachers, and health professionals indicating that the program is well received at all levels. The following bullet points list some of the benefits attributed to the program:

- decreases anxiety in both parents and children about the transition to school
- expands parent's support system
- increases family links to community services
- facilitates access to early intervention
- provides access to early childhood information and activities
- increases parents awareness of the importance of early childhood development
- increases partnerships between community and school
- fosters school readiness

Importantly, both home visiting and Play Cafes provide opportunities for early intervention and referral. Home visiting has been instrumental in identifying issues such as speech delay, sleep issues, difficult behaviour, continence problems, sight and hearing issues and concerns with communication and language skills. The opportunity to visit families can also increase understanding of family issues that could influence the child's progress at school. These can include, for example, parental mental health problems, shared custody issues, chronic illness in the family, or family members in gaol.

School teachers are often the first to know when early referral would be beneficial. To assist them in facilitating referral, a local family service directory

has been compiled and is updated annually. The service directory lists locally accessible resources including welfare services; support groups; parenting groups; stress and mental health support services; activities for children; and an A-Z list of child health and safety resources.

Play Cafes help raise parental awareness of the importance of the early years and create opportunities for parents of young children to interact with visiting service providers. The approach is informal, with the visitor mingling in the group and addressing any questions that arise in conversation. This interaction often results in direct referral by the visiting practitioner. The following feedback by a community health nurse illustrates the interaction opportunities that are created through Play Cafes.

"I have just attended Play Cafe at x Primary School – about 15 mums and 1 dad and two grannies with about double the number of children. All ages – babes in arms up to 4 year olds. Some I know already as they have been clients of mine, others are new. I was there for 1.5 hours. In that time I did an informal talk/discussion on mealtimes and fussy eaters for about 8 mums – with lots of input from them. I also discussed individual problems re meals with one mum, using the Triple P tip sheet. I made an appointment for another for an individual Triple P consult re behaviour (3 year old) and another for toilet training and behaviour (3 year old). Another 4 year old will require follow up for possible speech issues. It is good also just to network with mums, a couple of whom are pregnant."

The program is cost effective and demonstrates significant return for investment of the estimated 40 days (or 0.2 FTE) that are allocated to teachers for program training, home visiting and coordination of Play Cafes.

Program sustainability is an ongoing challenge for supporters of the LEAF program. Funds have initially been sourced through a partnership between DET and a not for profit organisation known as 'Investing In Our Youth Inc. The mandate of Investing In Our Youth is to work across agencies in the South West of Western Australia to support prevention programs and activities that target children and young people. The role of Investing In Our Youth in supporting the LEAF project has involved sourcing funding, monitoring and supporting the program through the involvement of a steering group, and assisting with the development of school and community links. In 2007, Investing In Our Youth was successful with an application to the National Community Crime Prevention Program to secure 12 months funding for a cluster of six primary schools who delivered the program in South Bunbury. In 2008, the program was funded through Lotterywest to support the six schools in Bunbury for a second year and to support an additional school in neighbouring Harvey.

In addition to efforts to secure funds for existing sites, the steering group aims to support the roll out of the program to other locations and respond to the many

requests received for project information. Kindergarten teacher, Fiona Farren, is currently working on the development of a training manual that will include the information needed to replicate the model at other sites. The program is highly portable and can be easily modified to blend with the culture and environment in which it is delivered.

The Department of Education and Training place great importance on the early years. Their 'Children First Strategy' details an intention to build respectful partnerships with parents; strengthen relationships between the family, school and agencies that offer support to families; improve transitions between home and school; and develop leadership and expertise regarding child development and learning in the early years. (DET, 2004). However, while these intentions are commendable, we can find little reported evidence where theory has been translated into practice.

The Linking Education and Families (LEAF) program has been a very successful strategy to support the early identification of risk factors for students 0-4 and importantly, link appropriate supports to families.

The LEAF program can be linked with findings from the Australian Early Development Index. This data can identify areas of high need that can be targeted for intervention.

There are many opportunities to build on the framework of the LEAF program. The cross fertilization of ideas between education and health personnel involved in the program have resulted in ongoing innovation. For example, the South Bunbury site is currently trialing 3 ½ year old health screening through parent completed questionnaires. At the commencement of Kindergarten orientation sessions, either the teacher, teacher assistant or community nurse greet the parents on arrival and ask them to complete the questionnaire. Both the teacher and community nurse then give a brief talk to the assembled parents on aspects of preparing their child for Kindergarten. Any issues identified through the questionnaire are followed up by the community nurse. At the first trial, 33 questionnaires were received, with 3 children identified with issues requiring referral; 6 families received a follow up phone call from the community nurse on issues such as behaviour and toileting; Triple P parenting information was posted to 2 parents; and information on developing fine motor skills was posted to another. Several families will be followed up by the Kindy teacher and also the school nurse.

For more information on the LEAF Project, please contact:

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“Extending the Hand of Welcome”

Final Impact Evaluation of the Linking Education and Families Program

For the
**National Community Crime
Prevention Programme**
National Community Grants Activity
And
Investing In Our Youth Inc.

**Evaluator: Dr. Katie Thomas
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This document was prepared for Investing in Our Youth, Western Australia, December, 2007.

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*"Perhaps one day the world, our world, won't be upside down, and
then
any newborn human being will be welcome. We will say, 'Welcome.
Come.
Come in. Enter. The entire earth will be your kingdom. Your legs
will be
your passport, valid forever."*

*Eduardo Galeano
Uruguayan Author and Historian*

2007

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Executive Summary

The Linking Education and Families (LEAF) program is a population based approach to supporting parents in the early childhood years. It aims to form school-family partnerships in order to foster positive early development outcomes for children. The program involves welcoming parents to the school; linking them with a variety of social support, educational and developmental resources; and supporting them in linking with other members of the school community and with activities that can foster their child's healthy development and school readiness.

The program is founded on the philosophy and principles of the partnership approach – a model which proposes that resources must be offered in skilled, empowering and respectful ways in order to ensure that parents are supported in their role and not disempowered by professional intervention. The Home Visiting and Play Café' formats are two arms of the LEAF approach that are used to foster relationships with parents and to give them access to early intervention services. LEAF aims to give parents access to a range of information resources about the critical development that occurs in the early years and about how parents can foster their child's healthy development.

The 2007 LEAF program met all of the agreed implementation deadlines, was found to include all proposed program activities and to be facilitating information flow, school and service links for families as per the funding parameters. In addition, the program introduced and sustained a number of community building activities above and beyond those included in the funding contract. LEAF was demonstrated to be reaching the target population and program activities were found to be fostering a strong sense of community for parents entering the school and a sense of positive expectancy for parents and children for the schooling experience ahead. Each of the cohorts involved in the LEAF program: the children and parents, LEAF coordinators, Allied Health professionals and school personnel, expressed good satisfaction with the program and desire for its expansion and continuance. The program outcome statistics were extremely robust and demonstrated an excellent investment-return benefit for the funding outlay of 40 days of program time per teacher. The program was found to be clearly efficacious and cost-effective in providing a range of family, school and community linking, social capital development and early education services to families with pre-school children.

Training

The statistics from the training program demonstrated that it was effectively giving teachers the information and competencies they needed to implement the LEAF tools autonomously and effectively. Teacher-Coordination appreciated the peer support aspects of LEAF training which enabled them to synergistically share resources and planning for program implementation. The training was found to be effectively transmitting the relevant information in regards to the Partnership Approach, Early child development and the Home Visiting and Play Café' engagement tools. Teachers expressed the desire for adequate program funding to ensure program continuance.

Home Visiting

The number and quality of activity outcomes for Home Visiting was impressive. In the 2007 program 151 Home Visits were conducted with a total of 197 parents and 232 children. Over four and a half thousand pieces of information about early development and early development services were distributed through the LEAF program. In order to evaluate level of satisfaction with Home Visiting one hundred and seventy one feedback forms were completed with parents and fifty five one-to one interviews were completed with participants. Both parents and teachers reported extremely high satisfaction with the Home Visiting program and the benefits of this family-centred activity was clearly demonstrated in the feedback data. Positive outcomes were reported for all groups involved: parents, teachers and children but the positive outcomes for children were overwhelming rated highest.

The greatest impact of Home Visiting was found to be its impact on the child; their positive expectancy about school and increased comfort in the school environment. After the Home Visit children showed decreased anxiety in the learning environment; communicated more, were more relaxed with the teacher and displayed a greater range of social skills in the school environment. Advantages for adults from the Home Visit included that it fast tracked a sense of belonging to the school community, was a valuable resource for gaining information about schooling and their child's development and for allaying their anxiety. Teachers expressed appreciation for the contextual information they gleaned from the home visit and for the immediate relationship benefits they gained with parents and children. They also reported that the added insight into individual children gleaned from the visit enabled them to draw on a greater range of the skills and learning capacities of individual children and to respond more effectively if children experienced learning or behavioural difficulties.

Participants were clear that the LEAF program increased the number and depth of their social connections and gave them a sense of having an expanded support system. Respondents included not just school families but also school and service provider personnel in their expanded definition of support system. This highlights the centrality and benefit of using a respectful, non-invasive partnership approach when professionals are assisting families. The Home Visiting gave families an increased sense of connection with the teacher and gave children increased positive expectancy about their relationship with the teacher and school. Home Visits were enormously popular with both parents and children who stressed that having the teacher in their home helped them to feel comfortable approaching her with questions, queries and concerns and helped them to feel that both the teacher and the school were part of a system of social support they could access. In this sense, the Home Visit can be seen as an important tool in reducing wariness and distrust of the school as a bureaucratic system and for increasing parents' sense of the school as a support resource for parent and child. The focus of Home Visits on relationship building, respecting confidentiality and people's homes and adhering to the partnership approach was a critical element of the success of the LEAF Home Visiting program.

Challenges

The main challenges to Home Visiting program were found in poorer neighbourhoods where parents were working long hours and under extreme pressure and/or were nervous, reluctant or hesitant to engage with professionals and teaching staff. Standardization of home visiting across schools would address some of the stigma and concerns about a home visit which can be generated if parents perceive it as 'out of the ordinary' or targeted at them individually - a critical issue for parents from marginalized or lower SES communities. LEAF Coordinators reported that adequate funding needs to be allocated to ensure that Home Visits can be fully conducted and completed as part of teachers' paid professional duties. Baseline funding needs to allow at least 2 hours per family visit – for transport, engagement and the paperwork following the visit.

Professional Linking and Service Provision Activities

LEAF peer support was being fostered through frequent contact with other coordinators and mentoring (377 contacts). The LEAF program achieved some extraordinary outcomes in linking families to community services and early intervention providers – particularly given the investment of only 40 days per school area. Although it was beyond the scope of the evaluation to track all of the service provider contacts which were initiated by the program at least 107 informal referrals were made to services and 76 early interventions were conducted with children as a result of the LEAF program. In addition LEAF program activities resulted in the distribution of over 1800 pieces of service provider information to families and in the provision of 388 pieces of information regarding early childhood progress and development of children to Primary Schools involved in the program, thus facilitating better service and information links.

Play Café's

Play Café's were extremely successful in all outcomes. During 2007 one hundred and fifty Play Café's were offered in the six designated catchment areas. There were over 1700 parent attendances and almost 2400 child attendances at Play Café' activities. These attendances enabled not only early intervention and referral for children but also gave families access to a range of early development information and activities, enabled the fostering of increased social support and of stronger school-family links. Attendance was strong with some Play Café's registering over 70 attendees for a single session. In the evaluation parents valued and rated the Play Café's highly with 100% of parents attending rating the Café's as Highly Beneficial or Beneficial and zero parental ratings of "little or no benefit." This was an impressive evaluation outcome.

It was clear that the informal, relaxed and supportive approach fostered by Co-ordinators in both the Home Visits and the Play Cafe's was experienced as positive by participants and also that it empowered them to further seek services and professional support for their families. Parents reported that their experience of interacting with professionals as a part of the LEAF program was so positive that it increased their willingness to engage with other service providers. Again, it is critical to note the centrality of using a respectful partnership approach to foster this willingness. Play Cafe's were also cited as increasing the partnerships between teachers and other health providers and allied Health providers reported increased involvement in the school community as a result of the LEAF program.

One of the most significant impacts of the LEAF program was found to be its impact on fostering school readiness. Parents almost unanimously reported that the LEAF activities of Home Visiting and Play Café' had increased their child's readiness for school as well as parents' confidence that they could support their child in managing the transition for schooling. A number of key aspects of the LEAF program were cited as assisting children to attain school readiness. These were the way that LEAF familiarizes children to the school environment in a relaxed manner and introduces them gradually to aspects of school life so that they could assimilate the change gradually without undue levels of arousal, anxiety or stress. Parents reported that not only did Play Cafe' lower childrens' anxiety about school but that it fostered excitement about beginning school and a positive expectancy in relation to education.

Parents cited a number of other ways that LEAF helped prepare their child for school and that they felt the program built a range of skills in children that increased their child's capacity to benefit from the educational experience. A significant outcome was parents' heightened awareness of the importance of the early childhood period; of child developmental stages and of their own role in fostering their child's healthy development. Some parents contrasted the benefit of having access to this information with their experience with older children and reported that LEAF enabled them to support healthier developmental experiences for their child.

Summary

The 2007 uptake of the program in the South Bunbury region was extremely successful and achieved the intended impacts on school readiness, community partnerships and social wellbeing. All targets for intervention: School-family partnerships, family access to early intervention services, family connection to community service providers, social support networks and increased exposure to early development information were achieved. As a result of LEAF implementation increased community participation patterns were achieved as well as greater levels of parent satisfaction with the school community and the services offered by the school.

The LEAF program was successful in linking parents to the school and in helping to create a sense of belonging to the school community. LEAF increased parents' sense of confidence about managing their child's transition to school, their sense of working in partnership with the teacher and the school and their willingness to ask for and to access, education and other support services. In addition it was clearly a resource for parents in nurturing their children educationally, socially and emotionally. A resource like LEAF clearly enables parents to assist and prepare their child for a positive school experience and hence for better employment, health and life outcomes. .

The LEAF program achieved its core goal of fostering home-school partnerships and greater social connectivity for families thereby decreasing the specific risk factor for families of social isolation. In addition LEAF provided a range of resources – social, informational and educational – during the 2007 implementation that supported parents in nurturing their children during the early childhood period. The program was highly successful in increasing parent access to, and comfort with, a range of early intervention services and ensured non-invasive early identification of learning and developmental delays in pre-school children engaged with the program. It was clearly successful in fostering positive relationships between parents, health and educational staff, thereby creating an environment where everyone could work together in partnership for the benefit of the child.

The Linking Education and Families Program

The Linking Education and Families (LEAF) program is a universal, population health approach which has as a core priority the aim of increasing the social wellbeing and school readiness of children prior to their formal entry into the school system. The program aims to support the families of pre-school children by increasing their social support resources; their positive identification with education and with their school community and their awareness of, and access to, early childhood intervention services within their communities. LEAF uses a positive family engagement framework based on the Family Partnership Training approach developed by Dr. David Olds in the United States (Olds, 1997, 2002). Recognition of the benefits and effectiveness of Olds' Family Partnership approach for engaging families has resulted in its utilization in standardized postnatal home visiting programs across the United States and Britain (Berkenes, 2001; Greene et. al, 2001). It is one of the few home visiting programs which has been demonstrated to have statistically significant outcomes for affecting family and child wellbeing.

The LEAF program was also developed in acknowledgement of the validity of neuroscience research demonstrating how critical the early childhood period (0-4 years of age) is to the achievement of optimal neurodevelopment. Researchers have found that the high plasticity of the brain during early childhood means that the child's experiences during this time can have lifelong impact on their education and skill acquisition capacities (Perry & Pollard, 1997; McCain and Mustard, 1999, 2002). Neuroscience research into the effects of prenatal teratogenic exposure, the neurophysiology of traumatic life events and the long-term cognitive, behavioral, emotional, social, and physiological effects of the early childhood period have demonstrated how childhood experiences change the biology of the brain – and, thereby, the health of the child (McCain & Mustard, 1999; Perry, Southwick & Giller, 1990; Perry, Stolk, et. al., 1983; Rakic, 1996).

Early childhood has therefore been identified as a critical period for health and education intervention. Investment during infancy and early childhood has been shown to have a higher benefit per dollar investment than at other periods of the lifespan (Barnes & Freude-Lagevardi, 2003). The LEAF program, as developed by Ms. Fiona Farren, uses the tools of Home Visiting and Play Café's in order to offer educational and social support to families with children in the critical developmental period of 0-4 years of age and thereby to support the health and development of the child.

LEAF also aims to increase the readiness of children for school; to increase families' positive identification with education and schooling and to provide early identification of children with developmental delay and other risk factors which could affect school readiness. Early identification is for the purposes of addressing a child's risk factors at the earliest possible juncture thereby preventing the compounded educational damage caused by late detection and intervention. The Home Visiting and Play Café' format are also tools which provide an avenue for opportunities for schools and service providers to work in partnership with families in order to foster the wellbeing of children during the critical early childhood period.

The LEAF program consists of three core components:

1. LEAF Training: To prepare teachers for their role as LEAF Coordinators,
2. Home visiting with families with children attending kindergarten in 2007, and,
3. Play Café's for families with children in the 0-4 age group within the catchment domains.

The training program consists of five half day training modules and uses the Family Partnership model as the underpinning philosophy for teacher engagement with families in both the Family Visiting and the Play Café activities. The training aims to foster teacher efficacy and familiarity with the role and skills required for the role of LEAF Co-ordinator. The LEAF program also includes the provision of ongoing support for those teachers who take on the role of LEAF Co-ordinators in addition to their regular activities in order to implement Home Visiting and Play Café's within their school district. The training and mentoring offered by the LEAF program ensures that these services can be provided to families and children across the designated catchment areas.

As a direct result of the National Community Crime Prevention Program (NCCPP) grant and the Department of Education and Teaching in Western Australia (DETWA) in-kind contribution, six school catchment areas in South Western Australia were involved in LEAF program delivery in 2007. These catchment areas were: South Bunbury Primary School, Carey Park Primary School, St Mary's Primary School, Withers Primary School, Bunbury School and Cooina Primary School.

Home Visiting provides an individualized welcome to school life for families and provides them with a range of information and service options for the critical early years of schooling. It aims to foster links between the family and school and also provides an avenue for early detection of developmental delay. The Play Café's provide increased social support and assistance to parents in preparing their children for school, provide an avenue for familiarising and welcoming parents to the school community and also provide an accessible domain for families to be linked to local service providers.

The LEAF program aims to increase family awareness of, and access to, the range of early childhood services that are extant within the community and available for their children. It also aims to provide a range of support services to families to provide them with a positive and supported first experience of schooling and to support them to assist their child to attain a successful transition to school life. Fostering such a transition has the goal of increasing children's willingness and preparedness to engage with educational experience.

Impact Evaluation: Overview

The LEAF Impact Evaluation and Final Report considers to what extent the program met its stated objectives of assisting the target group in their social skills as parents, children and teachers; in assisting their understanding and appreciation of the importance of positive early childhood experience and increasing skills and confidence in fostering healthier early childhood and school readiness outcomes. Specifically, it investigates the impact of the program in terms of its capacity to effect changes in the target populations':

- Knowledge, skills and attitudes to the community, early childhood and school readiness.
- Social support structures
- Community participation patterns
- Satisfaction with the school community
- Links to service providers and early intervention services

2.1 Impact Measures

2.1.1 Impact Measure One: Program Utilization

This measure was used to evaluate whether or not the LEAF program reached its target group. The impact summary was drawn from the quantitative and qualitative data collected over the duration of the 2007 implementation. It includes data on the number of people who participated in the program and includes the impact of the program on the following target populations:

- Number of teachers engaged in Home Visiting
- Number of families visited through Home Visiting
- Number of Home Visits conducted
- Number of families participating in Play Café's
- Number of Play Café sessions offered

2.1.2 Impact Measure Two: Social Support

The social support measure was focussed on documenting the number of social support links which were fostered and facilitated by the LEAF program. It includes the quantitative measures of:

- Number of social connections facilitated for participants.
- Number of service providers involved in Play Café's
- Number of referrals from Play Café's
- Number of referrals from Home Visiting
- Increased links between service providers
- Increased knowledge of available services and social support.

Teacher and co-ordinator records of links to service providers, families and referral partners provided to parents and children in the target group represented a core component of this measure. Interviews with families and anecdotal reports were also utilized to assess the extent to which LEAF has reduced the risk factor of social isolation and enhanced the social support available to families. Participant perception of available social support and satisfaction with the social support offered to them through LEAF was assessed.

2.1.3 Impact Measure Three: Community Participation

The Community Participation measure was assessed by examining the impact of the LEAF program on parents' attitude to the school community, their willingness to participate in school preparation through the vehicles of home visiting, play café's and other school community activities, and by the changes to their patterns of community participation that were facilitated by participant exposure to LEAF.

Anecdotal and interview evidence was the primary component of this measure along with the attendance and referral numbers for Play Café's, formal functions and the Home Visiting. Changes to participant attitude towards school community, their willingness to engage in school activities and their knowledge of available services in the community were assessed. In addition, the impact of the LEAF program on participants' sense of community was assessed.

2.1.4 Impact Measure Four: School Readiness

The core LEAF aim of fostering school readiness was evaluated with particular focus on the impact of the LEAF program on families and therefore on children entering the school system. Families were interviewed to assess the impact of the LEAF program on their understanding of children's language and cognitive development, emotional maturity, physical health and wellbeing, communication skills, general knowledge and social competence.

The extent to which LEAF has facilitated the family and child's transition into the school community was another specific focus. To this end, Parent Interviews and questionnaire protocol were used to establish the extent to which the LEAF program:

- Linked them to the school community
- Created a sense of belonging
- Increased their sense of confidence about managing the transition to school
- Increased their sense of working in partnership with the teacher and the school
- Helped them to prepare their child for school
- Increased their willingness to ask for and access, education and other support services,
- Helped them to manage difficult child behaviours
- Increased their knowledge of the importance of positive early childhood experience

Confidence and outcomes of healthier early childhood and school readiness outcomes for the children involved in LEAF were assessed through interviews with participants, coordinators and teachers. Teacher delivery of information to families and teacher sense of competence and understanding in regards to child health and development and facilitating links and greater support to families was also be assessed. Anecdotal reports from teachers, service providers and coordinators of the LEAF impact on school readiness for the cohort of children involved in the project in 2007 were the final source of data for the Impact assessment.

2.2 Measurement Tools

The Final evaluation included the evidence collated from a number of data sets: the observation and anecdotal data from the Play Café's, the quantitative data collected by teachers and professionals who are involved in home visiting or the Play Café's, and the impact evaluation from the LEAF training. Qualitative data included, but was not limited to, specific interviews with key stakeholders, discussion notes and anecdotal evidence. Interviews focussed on the efficacy of the LEAF intervention and its impact in relation to the core LEAF aim of fostering better family support in the early childhood period.

Official and private records were not accessed, participant confidentiality was assured and statement of willingness to participate was obtained from all participants involved in the evaluation. The final evaluation strategy and data collection tools was submitted for NCCPP approval in February 2007 and the evaluation was conducted in compliance with the recommended impact evaluation activities cited in Attachment B of the NCCPP Grant Schedule.

The following factors were used to evaluate the overall efficacy of the LEAF Training, Play Café's and Home Visiting. The extent to which each domain:

- Was initiated in a timely manner,
- Included all proposed program activities,
- Reached the target population,
- Was satisfactory to participants,
- Successfully facilitated information flow, and
- Facilitated school and service links for families.

2.2.1 LEAF Training

The LEAF Training was evaluated using pre- and post-training testing and a range of survey tools. The quantitative evaluation of the training consisted of the administration of structured measures related to participant knowledge and skill of child development, school readiness, family partnership approaches, Home Visiting and Play Café's. These measures were administered prior to, and at the close of, the LEAF Training sessions (Appendix D). In addition, feedback surveys were collected after each training module, observational evaluation was made of the training session and interviews were conducted with training participants after the completion of training. The data collected for LEAF training included:

- Number of participants
- Number of seminars provided
- Participant satisfaction with the training
- Impact of LEAF training on participant knowledge
- Impact of LEAF training on participant skill
- Number of links made with other service providers
- Process recording of implementation issues
- Evaluation of quality and accessibility of training materials
- Facilitator feedback

2.2.2 Home Visiting and Play Café's

Quantitative data was collated on a monthly basis via a range of survey instruments to tabulate LEAF activity levels in relation to the following measures:

- Number of teachers engaged in Home Visiting
- Number of families visited through Home Visiting
- Number of Home Visits conducted
- Number of families participating in Play Café's
- Number of Play Café sessions offered
- Number of service providers involved in Play Café's
- Number of referrals from Play Café's and Home Visiting
- Number of information sessions provided to families

Parents were given feedback forms in their Play Café' Welcome Packs; at the conclusion of home visits, during Play Café's and at parent meetings held at the various school locations. In addition LEAF coordinators set up ongoing feedback tools for parents with forms readily available and permanent drop boxes to enable parents to be able to give their feedback, perceptions and satisfaction ratings for the LEAF HomeVisiting and Play Café' programs in their area.

2.2.3 Qualitative Data and Interviews

The Final Evaluation included qualitative data collected from interviews with key stakeholders, Home Visiting and Play Café' feedback forms, discussion notes with community members, anecdotal evidence and archival data. A total of 55 parent interviews were conducted. The

interviews were focussed specifically on assessing the efficacy of the LEAF intervention in relation to the core LEAF aim of “fostering better family support in the early childhood period.”

Interviews were conducted with the following groups of participants to assess the impact of, and their satisfaction with, LEAF:

- ❖ Teachers were asked about their satisfaction with the training, the Home visiting implementation process and their suggestions for improved practice.
- ❖ Parents were interviewed in regards to their experiences of Home Visiting and the Play Café’s.
- ❖ Participants were asked for their feedback about the program, its accessibility, the materials and information they have been offered, their satisfaction with the process and their willingness to continue engaging with the process.

The combined data from these sources is reported under the three core domains of the LEAF Program: Coordinator Training, Home Visiting and Play Café’s.

Impact Measure One: Program Utilization Statistics

This measure was used to evaluate whether or not the LEAF program reached its target group. The impact summary was drawn from the quantitative and qualitative data collected over the duration of the 2007 implementation. It includes data on the number of people who participated in the program and includes the impact of the program on the following target populations:

- Number of teachers engaged in Home Visiting
- Number of families visited through Home Visiting
- Number of Home Visits conducted
- Number of families participating in Play Café's
- Number of Play Café sessions offered

3.1 LEAF Activities

The implementation of the LEAF Activities of Home Visiting and Play Café's both require, and result in, a range of linking, foundational and networking activities. There are administrative and bureaucratic protocols for safety, privacy and confidentiality which must be completed and processed in a timely manner. LEAF teachers are responsible for fulfilling all of these bureaucratic and protocol requirements and for all of the family contact, community linking, information letters, privacy forms and paperwork associated with both the Family Visits and the Play Café's. After both Home Visits and Play Café's a variety of paperwork and protocol must be completed by the LEAF teacher. At times formal Early Intervention Referrals must be made. Informal referrals and parent linking must be noted as well as activities, resources offered and any particular outcomes of that Play Café' or the Home Visit.

3.1.1 Home Visiting

The Family Visit was offered to families in the first two weeks of term, both as an introduction to the teacher and to the school community. In Term 4 a follow up visit was offered and some schools offered a third Home Visit for families who will enter the school in 2008. Parents who agreed to the Home Visit were then contacted by the teacher to arrange a mutually suitable time for the appointment. All responses to enquiries about Home Visits and appointment bookings were completed by the LEAF teachers themselves during the time allocated for LEAF activities, there was no administrative support funded for this activity.

Typically LEAF Co-ordinators reported booking a number of home visits on their LEAF day but then finding that they had quite a task to complete all of the visits within the given time frame. Some visits required quite extensive travel, particularly for the one private school which had a wide catchment area. Parents were assured that the Home Visit was not primarily an assessment visit but rather more of a resource visit for themselves and their children. They were linked to appropriate information and services if this was requested as a result of the visit and discussion outcomes. The uptake by parents who were coming into the school was significant and this high level of uptake indicates that this time of school commencement is a critical period for establishing connections with families, for enhancing their sense of efficacy in relation to their child's schooling experience and for creating a sense of community and belonging to the school.

3.1.2 Play Café's

Play Café's were offered on a weekly basis at the schools' kindergarten facilities. The Play Café's were for parents and children and/or caregivers of children in the 0-4 age group who would be entering the school in years to come and/or who lived in the catchment area of the school. Play

Café's provided an environment for parents and children to familiarize themselves with the school, to connect with other parents and children who will be a part of the school community in the future, to get to know the kindergarten teacher and to have access to a range of early development and school readiness activities and resources.

All parents who attend Play Café's were offered a Welcome Pack on their first visit. This pack was designed by the individual LEAF Coordinator for her school catchment area and contained a range of useful information on developmental stages, activities and the resources that are available for parents and children. Parents who attended Play Café' were also invited to be placed on an email listing for future Play Café's and to be linked with other parents of pre-school children who had attended the sessions. This email listing provided a networking function for parents to add to their social support structures.

Individual Play Café's structure was developed by each Teacher-Coordinator and tailored to their teaching style after the LEAF training to ensure that the Play Café' format fit with each Coordinator's teaching facility, personal teaching strengths and the specific needs of the families in their catchment area. Play Café' provides an informal activity in the school environment that parents can attend with their young children but it also has some of the structure that is present in the Kindergarten experience such as inside/outside play, a craft activity and a story.

The extent and range of activities offered in the Play Café's across the six schools was impressive. The overall structure typically included a welcome, some early childhood information, structured activities for the children such as a story and often a brief presentation from a professional guest about early development and the services offered for families. The visiting professional would typically stay for at least some of the session to be accessible to the parents for informal consultation. The teacher also remained available during the Play Café' to visit with, and provide information and resources for, both parents and children. Parents were free to have a cup of tea or coffee, to use the time to give their child focussed attention in the learning environment, to talk with the teacher or visiting professional and/or to spend time interacting with other parents at their own leisure. Parents had opportunities to give feedback during each Play Café via easily accessible and anonymous feedback forms. Each Kindergarten location had drop off boxes for feedback forms.

Over two hundred and sixty feedback forms were collected and 55 interviews were conducted with parents attending Play Café's across the catchment areas to evaluate their effectiveness. The outcomes were very strong and Play Café' was rated very highly by attendees. A reflection of the utility and popularity of the Play Café's could be seen in the attendance numbers even in the final month of November where individual teachers were reporting 68 and 72 people in attendance at a single Play Café' activity.

3.2 Statistics: Teachers

The following statistics are for program outcomes for the entire period of LEAF project implementation – February to December 2007. They include the initial round of Home Visits and all Play Café' sessions and services provided. The statistics are extremely robust. They are all the more impressive when they are considered in the context that all of these services were provided by six education staff who also maintained their teaching duties and responsibilities to the 2007 cohort of Kindergarten children. They are a reflection, not just of the robustness of the program, but of the dedication and professionalism of these professionals to the healthy development and wellbeing of children in their care.

Table 1: Home Visit Statistics

<i>Home Visit Activities</i>	
Phone Calls to Parents	286
Home Visit Appointments Made	203
Home Visits	151
Parents Visited	197
Children Visited	232
Family visit forms completed	171
Feedback forms completed	130
<i>Other</i>	
Information Distributed	4 715
Response to Enquiries	522

Table 2: Linking Statistics

<i>Professional Linking Activities</i>	
Discussions with Service Providers	256
Service Provider links made	130
Informal referrals	107
Formal Early Intervention Referrals	76
Service Provider Info Distributed	1 881
Information back to School	388
Contacts with other LEAF Providers	377

Table 3: Play Café' Statistics

<i>Play Café's</i>	
Number Conducted	150
Parent Attendances	1 740
Child Attendances	2 377
Ed. Activities Provided	577
Parent Linking	478
Professional Guests	28
Feedback Collected	261

3.3LEAF Statistics: Project Coordinator

In addition to her role as a LEAF Coordinator for her school, Ms. Fiona Farren was the Project Manager for the LEAF program. She was responsible for the design and implementation of LEAF training, mentoring new LEAF Coordinators, coordination of LEAF program implementation and for presentations about the LEAF program. The following statistics give a representation of the tasks performed in her role as Project Manager, separate and in addition to, the tasks she performed in her own role as an individual LEAF Coordinator.

Table 4: Project Manager Statistics

LEAF Project Manager Activities	
Mentoring visits or calls	114
Community member Contacts	279
Service Provider contacts	148
Principals/DETTWA Contacts	125
IIOY Contacts	172
NCCPP Contacts	11
Flyers Distributed	1 009
Email Linking/Messages	674
Publicity/Interviews	76
Conference Presentations	9
Project Expansion Visits	7

These robust statistics demonstrate significant investment-return benefit for a minimal funding outlay of 40 days of program time per teacher. Economically the program outcomes are impressive. They indicate that the program is efficacious and cost-effective in providing a range of family, school and community linking, social capital development and early education services to families with pre-school children.

3.4 Additional LEAF Professional Activities

The LEAF program achieved a solid profile in the communities in which it was implemented. There was also a good range and quantity of professional materials and community activities which were generated over and above those that were specified in the original contract. For example, each LEAF Coordinator created a Welcome Pack which was given to families on their first contact with the program (either Home Visit or Play Cafe'). These packs contained a wealth of material about child development, what to expect from the schooling experience and a range of community and home activities which could support their child's early development. The Welcome packs proved popular and resulted in the distribution of a vast amount of information to families. In addition, the LEAF program had a formal launch, was profiled in the local paper, on the radio and at a range of educational and professional conferences. Each of these activities had good impact both in terms of raising the profile of the program and in providing linking avenues for the LEAF program, service providers, community organizations and families. Ms. Farren was active in meeting and presenting to community and service groups throughout the year. Additional information on each Activity type is now provided.

3.4.1 The LEAF Launch

The official launch of the LEAF program took place at the Koombana Bay Sailing Club in Anchorage Cove, Bunbury. Service providers, community groups, health and education representatives were invited to a morning tea and presentation about the program. Official speakers included Ms. Fiona Farren (Project Manager), Professor Rhonda Oliver (Chair, Investing in our Youth), Pat Johnston (Acting Manager Community Health), Mr. Neil Milligan (District Director of the Bunbury Education District), The Hon. Geoff Prosser (MP, Member for Forrest) and Mr. Ian Harvey (Principal South Bunbury Primary). Apart from information given in official speeches attendees were also able to collect information about the LEAF Program through brochures, a visual photo story which ran during the event and a comprehensive poster presentation (See Appendix A). Over 60 people attended the event and collected material about the program.

3.4.2 Steering Group Activities: The Services Directory

The LEAF program activities were overseen by the LEAF Steering Committee for the duration of the program. Steering group members were charged with the responsibilities to provide those directly involved in the project with guidance on LEAF project activities; to give advice on the evaluation and monitoring of the project, to monitor project progress against the implementation schedule and to address any issue that had major implications for the project. The Steering Group met monthly for the duration of the project and the minutes of each meeting were monitored and maintained by Investing In Our Youth Inc. (IIOY)

Bunbury Services Directory

The Bunbury Services Directory was an initiative that was the brainchild of the LEAF steering group. The LEAF steering group had representatives from a range of sectors of education and health and the group recognized that one of the difficulties in linking families with services was getting the information to the families about service available for early childhood. It was decided that a Directory which provided information for families about the range of services which could be of use to them during their child's early years would be a benefit. The final Directory which was compiled and printed by Investing in Our Youth (IIOY) included contact details and information about Community Nurses, Parenting groups, Stress and Mental Health support services, Activities for children, health and safety links, family assistance, Support Groups, Migrant and Indigenous Services. The final published Directory was a joint venture between IIOY and LEAF together with WA Country Health Service South West, Department of Education and Training and was funded by Early Years Strategy. It was distributed to families and service providers in the region.

3.4.3 Publications: The Welcome Pack

Each LEAF Coordinator created a Welcome Pack which was given to families on their first contact with the program (either Home Visit or Play Cafe'). Packs were individualized by each teacher but usually contained information about their child's development, what to expect from LEAF and a range of flyers introducing community and home activities which could support early development. Teachers adjusted the packs as the year progressed to add new activities and relevant information. Two welcome pack contents are listed below to give some idea of contents/variety:

Table 5: Welcome Pack Content Samples

School A	School B
Welcome to Play Café Sheet	Welcome to Play Café' Sheet
Play Cafe' Pamphlet	Play Cafe' Pamphlet
Play Café Topic Survey	Play Café Topic Survey
Cup of Tea Coupons	Code of Conduct
Handout: Steps to save your sanity	Flyer: South West Parenting Services
Handout: Questions & Your Child	Flyer: Services Directory
Handout: How to happy readers grow?	Flyer: FACS Info
Booklet: Every child is important	Handout: Optimism
Flyer: Infectious Childhood Diseases	Flyer: Primary Health Services
Flyer: Play with your Child	Flyer: Milligan House

These packs proved enormously popular and resulted in the distribution of a significant amount of information to families prior to their entry into the school system.

3.4.4 Publicity

The LEAF program was advertised through a number of vehicles: School newsletters, articles in the local paper, radio interview and the wide distribution of brochures to service providers and service provider outlets throughout the region.

In March, The Bunbury Mail ran an article about the program (see Appendix) and a segment was run on ABC Regional News where the Project Manager, Ms. Farren was interviewed about the LEAF program. The LEAF launch was also featured in the Bunbury Mail. Ms. Farren attended meetings throughout the year to give short presentations of the program to relevant service and community groups. These included but were not limited to: Communities for children, Mission Australia; Child Health Nurses, Rotary, Parent Centres, Town Council, Community and Crime Prevention Early Years sub-committee. Photostory and powerpoint presentations were constructed for these purposes.

Professional Conference Presentations on “Best Practice for 0-4” were given by Ms. Farren at the Department of Education Principal’s Conference for ‘Best Practice and for Planning’ in April. An article was written for the Early Childhood Teachers Association paper.

Impact Measure Two: Social Support

4.1 Impact Measure Two: Social Support

The social support measure was focussed on documenting the number of social support links which were fostered and facilitated by the LEAF program. This measure investigated the impact of the LEAF program on the number of social connections which participants had made, their connections to service providers (formal and informal referrals and informational access) and the impact of the program on families' familiarity with and willingness to access early childhood services and interventions.

Teacher and co-ordinator records of links to service providers, families and referral partners provided to parents and children in the target group represented a core component of this measure. Qualitative measures included interviews with families and anecdotal reports which were utilized to assess the extent to which LEAF has reduced the risk factor of social isolation and enhanced the social support available to families. Participant perception of available social support and satisfaction with the social support offered to them through LEAF was assessed.

Social Support Outcomes

4.1.1 Social Connections: Parents

Overall, parents reported a significant increase in social connections as a result of the LEAF program; not just for themselves but also for their children. The increased number and depth of social connections was cited to have a range of benefits for the child's school readiness and for parent and children's sense of belonging to the school community.

A significant and repetitive theme was the value of Play Cafe' as a structured activity which occupied children and gave both parents and children more than a few minutes to be in each other's company and to talk to each other. Many mothers commented on the difficulty of getting to know other school parents in the brief time when children are dropped off or picked up from school. They stressed how long it takes get know people in the brief snatches of conversation that occur at these times.

I'm from Merredin so I didn't know any of the other Mums and when you take your kids to school it is just 10 minutes drop off and pick up so you really don't get to know other Mums. This [Play Cafe'] gives you plenty of time to talk while the kids are happy and occupied and to really get to know people. It is really good.

All parents, including those with other children and working part-time discussed the difficulty of juggling all of their commitments. They felt that they usually were in a rush to move onto after-school activities and found that at school pick-up time children often needed their attention and focus so conversation with other parents was difficult or interrupted. Women stressed how much they valued having a solid block of time to meet and talk with other parents during Play Cafe'.

It is a fantastic way to get to know the other parents because you get to stand around and talk and the kids are happy playing so you really get to know each another and you get a social network for school and that helps them with school. This space is empty on a Wednesday so it's a community resource and using it this way really helps everyone. I hope it continues. It would be terrible if it stopped –even for a term because we have a network going

Parents reported that Play Cafe' fast-tracked relationship formation with other families and with the school. In turn this was cited as leading to a better social support and social network system for their families.

I love the social aspect for my son. Just meeting a group of boys particularly because most of his cousins are girls. He has loved playing with the boys. On the social side it is great meeting most to the Mums who will be going to the same kindy. You are already starting to make that bond.

This is a significant issue in the 21st Century where increased work hours, activity demands and diminished family structures mean that many young families are time poor. Time poverty is a significant factor impeding the development of social support resources for many parents. Subsequently getting to know other parents who would be at the school in the future was cited as a significant social benefit of Play Cafe'.

The Home Visit was also cited by parents as a great social support resource and a service that they valued greatly in the face of their own high work demands and time pressures. They reported that the Home Visit gave them an opportunity to really get to know the teacher and to immediately feel a sense of relational connection to her and to the school community. They further stressed that meeting the teacher in the familiar context of their own home helped them to feel comfortable approaching her with questions, queries and concerns and helped them to feel that both the teacher and the school were an accessible social support system.

Significantly, a number of parents were initially anxious about the offer of a Home Visit and expressed concerns about the monitoring and bureaucratic function of the school and whether or not the visit was to assess their capability as parents. In this sense, the Home Visit can be seen as an important tool in reducing wariness and distrust of the school as a bureaucratic system and increasing parents' sense of the school as a support resource for their family. For this reason it was critical that all confidentiality protocols were adhered to and that the focus of Home Visits was on relationship building. It was critical that Home Visiting was deeply grounded in the respectful principles of the partnership approach rather than on assessment, criticism and leverage to force services onto families. It must be concluded that the respectful partnership approach is a core reason for the successful implementation of Home Visiting activities.

4.1.2 Social Connections: Children

Increased social connections for children was cited not just as an enjoyable experience for children but as helping them to feel comfortable with school and helping them to develop a sense of positive expectancy about the school experience ahead of them.

My boy is going into Kindy next year. He has thoroughly enjoyed himself – getting to meet kids his own age and their Mums too. X has really, really enjoyed it and it has made him settle a bit. He knows the environment so its not so daunting. I've had 3 kids and for the first Kindy was really daunting. Play Cafe' is good because they get to socialize in the environment they are going to be in and Jake is actually looking forward to kindy next year!

It is really good....Teacher X makes everyone feel welcome. I like how there are activities that I don't have for them at home. He is really looking forward to school now. They get a whole range of activities they wouldn't get otherwise. He has made some little friends and he knows some in his age group.

In addition, Play Cafe' was cited as developing social links for the child and helping them to garner a range of essential social skills for the years of schooling ahead. This is of particular significance for children with developmental delay whose lack of social skills may inhibit their comfort in the school environment and impede their educational experience. One parent was able

to contrast her experience with an older child to illustrate the social benefit of Play Cafe' and the value of professionals getting to know the family over a period of time.

Biggest impact on my oldest son was the social interaction at school – he doesn't know how to relate emotionally and socially to people and something like this would have helped tremendously and he would have been in an environment with lots of friends and learning about interacting and sharing. Being here (at Play Cafe') I know that I won't go down that path again because it was a very tough time; especially being told that, you know, "It is coming from home." If people had met us and taken the time to meet us and see how our family is they would have known that wasn't the case at all. I love Play Cafe'. I come every week.

Teachers commented that Play Cafe' gave them the opportunity to work in tandem with the parents to address skill deficit and that this was only possible in the Play Cafe' format where their focus was not divided between 20 or 30 children.

Case Study 1: Play Café' Social Skills Impact

Jackson

Jackson is an example of a child with no diagnosed health condition which would alert Community Health or result in formal service intervention, but who has developmental delay which, if not addressed, would seriously impact on his school readiness. Jackson has experienced a constellation of factors which have caused him to be quite developmentally delayed in his social skills. His Mum is a young parent who is quite socially isolated and he is the youngest of 4 children. He has had ongoing health issues including having grommets inserted last year. Prior to the grommets he had very little speech. His speech is still poor. His self and social confidence were extremely low and as a result Jackson was reluctant to interact with others and lacked a solid range of social skills.

At the first play cafe Jackson would not come in the door, but played totally by himself outside for the entire session. He would not even venture in the door when Mum came inside to talk with the other Mums. At the second Play cafe he came inside but clung to Mum and ducked his head and turned away whenever anyone tried to interact with him – child or adult. It was clear that Jackson was very uncomfortable with social interaction with anyone other than Mum. After lots of discussion with Mum we tried several strategies to help Jackson become more comfortable in the surroundings and with socializing with others. I spent a lot of individual time talking with him and we even organized for him to come to Play Cafe' with another family so that he would identify with the environment as part of his own comfort zone.

Gradually Jackson "came out of his shell" and eventually he began to respond verbally when spoken to, and to participate in the Play Cafe' activities. Jackson now comes through the door confidently and whilst not outgoing he will initiate interaction with myself. He has also begun, on occasion, to initiate interaction with another child. It would have been very difficult for Jackson to acclimatize to the school environment and for his social confidence to be nurtured in the Kindergarten context where I, as the teacher, was one of only two adults present and was having to respond to all of the needs of the children. In addition, his social needs would have needed to be addressed at the same time as his introduction to a range of structured learning activities which would have made the task more difficult. Jackson's increased level of social skill and self-confidence will make kindergarten next year easier for all involved, and most notably for Jackson. Play Café has provided an environment where his social skills and school readiness could be nurtured in a graduated way through supported and repeated exposure to the school environment with Mum present. He is now at a skill level where he will be able to related socially to myself as teacher and to the other children in order to gain maximum benefit from his kindergarten experience.

Significantly, this preventative work conducted through Play Cafe' may well have prevented unnecessary trauma for Jackson in his first year of schooling and reduced the probability that his first experience of school would be negative. The mother was supported in a respectful way and

there was adequate time for the child's developmental needs to be addressed in a sequential and sustainable manner.

Home visiting was also cited as building social support for children as they came to perceive the teacher as part of their social circle and therefore someone they could trust and depend upon.

I have a couple of cases of extremely shy kids in my kindy whose confidence has increased DRAMATICALLY and now they talk to me because [in home visiting] they see you in a different role as a caring person who cares about them.

The increased sense of safety facilitated for the child by knowing and having met the teacher on their "own territory" would be difficult to duplicate and should not be under-estimated in its impact as a tool to lower the child's anxiety related to school. In turn, the increased sense of social support and lowered anxiety for the child frees them up to focus on the educational aspects of their schooling experience.

4.1.3 Linking Hard to Reach Populations

People who didn't live in the immediate environment of the school commented that Play Cafe' offered a unique opportunity for them to meet other parents who would be at the school with their children. People who were new to the area commented on the efficacy of Play Cafe' for helping them to swiftly form new bonds and connections and making them feel a part of the school community. For children who have lost their social network in a move Play Cafe' is a unique opportunity to make new friends and to develop some sense of familiarity and belonging for the year to come. This enables a child who may be unsettled by a move and feeling anxious to regain some sense of predictability and control over his or her environment.

Play Cafe' has been of definite benefit to us because we are new to Bunbury. We moved this year and he felt unsettled because he left all of his friends. It has been great for him to meet all of the friends he will be with next year. We don't live in the Bunbury area and it is a unique way to meet them because we don't have much other contact. I have a friend who is a Kindy teacher in Perth and I said, "Get into LEAF! It's fabulous!"

At Risk children:

The Department for Child Protection was one of the service providers who utilized the LEAF program on behalf of children in care. One DCP carer would bring a child regularly from daycare so that he would have the opportunity to get to know his future class peers. At-risk children have typically been exposed to high levels of change and unpredictability and Play Cafe' is one way to give them some sense of familiarity and predictability in relation to the school environment. The DCP carer commented:

Otherwise it is really scary for them (kids in care) because they are constantly changing environments anyway and this at least lets them get to know others and the school they will be at.

The one school area with lower uptake of Home Visiting was cited as a low SES, higher single parent and higher transience community. It was more difficult to engage parents in this area in either the Home Visit or the Play Cafe' activities – particularly as they were introduced as new activities this year. Extreme care would need to be taken in such a community to ensure that the Home Visit was experienced as supportive and respectful and not as invasive or threatening. Many poorer families were facing long hours and unpredictable work schedules and single parents in particular are under great time pressure. Respectful and flexible approaches such as Home Visiting are critical to increasing the engagement of such families and their sense of trust in educational and other service provision systems.

4.2 Early Childhood Services: Social Support Impact

4.2.1 Ease of Service Access for Parents

Parents commented on the ease of access to professionals that was facilitated by the Play Café' format. Again, women commented on the time pressures they face and that this was one of the main barriers to them accessing professional services.

They have lots of professionals coming in - OT, CHN, Dentist – optional if you're available and interested. It makes it easier when you are a busy Mum. OT information – people from places you wouldn't necessarily get to.

Respondents emphasized the value of the respectful, non-pressuring approach when professionals presented at Play Café' and the value of then having the information and choice they needed to be able to care for their child. Many mothers commented on the value of having professionals available in a relaxed environment and engaged in a range of more casual conversations as a preliminary to service questions. This was cited as increasing service access and parents' willingness to engage with early intervention services.

Case Study 2: Play Café' Ease of Service Access for Parents

Anita

One Mum came along to Play Café' even though her daughter is only a year old. English is her second language and she was quite socially isolated. She said that the Play Café' was one of the few chances she had had to meet other Mums with young children in the area and she was pleased that her daughter was able to mix with the other children. She feels that this has given her the basis of a support network where she knows some of the other parents in her area. She feels that it was much easier for her to get to know people at Play Café' where the atmosphere is very relaxed and informal and that it was easier to introduce yourself when children were playing together.

After she had been coming a while she raised a few concerns about her daughter's language development so when the speech therapist attended one of the Play Cafe sessions I mentioned it to the therapist and she made a point of talking to the Mum. It meant the Mum was able to meet and raise her concerns with a professional in a relaxed, informal way. The speech therapist invited her to bring her daughter along to a "Lets Talk" group at the local community health centre, which she subsequently did. Without the Play Café' it is highly unlikely that this Mum would have known about Speech Therapy or known how to contact a Speech Therapist. She didn't have any idea about the services that might help her daughter's speech development or how to access them.

Because of the Mum's social isolation, any developmental delay in her daughter's speech probably wouldn't have been picked up until school commencement. She definitely wouldn't have known about the Speech group which was being offered at the Health Centre so this is a good example of the kind of service linking which can happen very smoothly because we (teachers) get to know the Mums through Play Café'; because they get comfortable with us and because of the professionals who visit Play Café's.

4.2.2 Ease of Parent Access for Service Providers

Reciprocally, service providers commented on how Play Café' gave them access to parents and facilitated a relaxed space in which services could be offered or an assessment made.

The general consensus amongst the Child Health Nurses involved with Playcafe's is that attending them has been worthwhile- particularly in reaching clients that do not always attend the clinic.... I have personally found the Playcafe's great for informal health and parenting education. I would frequently speak to 8 or 10 parents each session incorporating a theme and giving a brief presentation(such as sleep or mealtimes) as the session opened up discussion amongst the parents about issues for them. I also provided

current recourses related to the topics covered. I think a combination of mingling with the parents and a small talk or discussion is a useful format for us.

Play Cafe' provided an atmosphere where parents could 'feel out' service providers and find a socially acceptable route to obtaining the information and services that were needed or reconnecting with service providers. Early detection of developmental difficulty was cited as a benefit for both parents and service providers. One parent whose oldest child had speech difficulties described the difference that Play Cafe' made in facilitating service access;

But with our next child I have been to the Play Cafe' s so I had someone to talk to about any developmental concerns. So I have spoken to Mrs X. about her speech and she said, "No worries," and gave me a sheet of people I could call and then one week the speech pathologist visited the Play Cafe' and that help was there right then and there and I didn't have to go searching for it and J listened and observed E. straight away and said, "O, yes, we can deal with that," and she could jump on it right away because she saw it rather than me not being believed. That was the biggest issue [with my oldest son] that no-one would believe me and no-one would listen.

Again, the respectful partnership adopted by the LEAF program is a critical component of the ease of service connection that was fostered by the Play Cafe' s.

Something like this (Play Cafe') because Mrs. X is very supportive & you get listened to & she is there to offer support & watch what the child is doing and help you out. It is good to be able to talk to a professional & to someone else...

In the case study below the service provider comments on the opportunity that Play Cafe' provided for informal connection with parents, unobtrusive observation and assessment of children for developmental delay and a pathway for parents to access services with privacy. In Case 3 a parent approached the professional ostensibly for support with left-handedness but went on to access services for enuresis – a much less socially acceptable development issue.

Case 3: Ease of Access to Parents for Service Professionals

Jenny

I was invited by X to the Play Cafe' as a guest. It was a great opportunity for me to meet parents and observe children of various ages within their play environment. [In my first visit] I managed to catch-up with a mum [who] had not accessed our community allied health services for some time and she requested our contact details so that she could make contact with us again, which was very positive. Following on from this, the Mum we had lost contact with reconnected with [our] Community Health Services. We made an appointment and she brought her child in to see us and is now linked in to our Social Worker, receiving support from her, and her child is also on the waitlist for Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy and Physio.

[At another Play Cafe' in the district] I was asked to do an informal presentation to the parents. I briefly explained about Therapy, Fine Motor Co-ordination and play and had lots of time for questions. The parents were very keen to discuss their queries. One Mum had a number of concerns about her child and raised the issues of her left-handedness. I suggested that she bring her in for assessment. The Mum had not realized that she could self-refer to Community Health Services. She thought a doctor or teacher had to refer. She subsequently made contact and her daughter is now seeing the enuresis nurse regarding a bed wetting programme. She has had a full OT assessment and is following up with a home programme and further review. The Mum has expressed her relief to be addressing these concerns [early on] before they had the chance to become bigger problems.

4.2.3 Ease of Parent Access for Teachers

An interesting outcome of the program in terms of social support was the increased sense of partnership with parents reported by some Teacher-Coordination involved in program delivery. They reported that the LEAF training and program gave them increased skills for connecting with parents; greater confidence in creating this connection and an increased sense of connection of working collaboratively with parents.

Case 4: Increased Ease of Access to Parents for Teachers

LEAF: The Experience of Teacher Coordinators

When first approached to become involved with the L.E.A.F. program I was hesitant as I didn't want to increase my work hours. However, I have often considered building relationships with parents not to be one of my strengths. Indeed, I often admired my Assistant's ability to strike up a conversation with parents when they entered the kindergarten and been impressed by the information they offer to her as a result of this skill. I am very confident in my teaching skills and was always more involved with the children during the kindergarten sessions so the decision to participate in the L.E.A.F. program was primarily to improve my contact opportunities and rapport with a greater number of parents.

The initial training was very motivating and reassuring. After many years of teaching and many changes of curriculum format I appreciated the time to network with other professionals working in the same area and to reflect together as much as the opportunity to access new information. In particular the recent research and information about brain functions and critical learning periods was of interest as I have read several articles but had never had time to follow up on these studies. The protocol for home visits and play cafes was comprehensive and although the paperwork was daunting it was well organised and easy to access when required.

I approached the first home visits with trepidation (of the unknown), then guilt (that I was being paid to socialise), then a great sense of satisfaction.

I have a rapport with the families I have visited that would never have been possible in the school environment.

To be able to discuss a child's progress and possible need for intervention in a relaxed environment for the parent is wonderful.

My cultural awareness has been extended and the visits gave me the opportunity to observe and question customs I may not have considered otherwise.

The increase in confidence at school for both parents and children after a home visit was very clear. The networking between parents is so positive when they experience their child's teacher as a "person" in their home rather than a "figure" in the classroom.

The Play Cafe's cafes were also daunting at first, particularly due to the large numbers at the first couple. I was much more comfortable when the number reduced a little as this allowed me to spend time with each family. I was particularly pleased when the speech therapist visited and identified a child for speech therapy intervention that I would not have been concerned about. I have gained satisfaction from sourcing information to pass onto Play Cafe families through the welcome packs and will use some of these resources for next year's Kindy families. The children who have attended regularly have developed confidence and social skills which is wonderful for their personal growth and invaluable for when their formal schooling begins. My own confidence has grown and I know I will be more motivated to get to know my kindergarten parents in the future.

4.3 LEAF Social Support Impact Summary

The quantitative social support measure was designed to document the number of service links, formal and informal referrals which were facilitated by the LEAF program. At best it is a one-sided estimate because it uses teacher records exclusively. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to track which service interventions occurring at service agencies were a result of information distributed by LEAF however it was evident that participants were clear that the LEAF program increased the number and depth of their social connections and gave them a sense of having an expanded support system. Of note is the fact that respondents included not just

school families but also school and service provider personnel in their definition of support system. This demonstrates the benefit of using a respectful, non-invasive partnership approach when engaging with, and assisting, families. Some Teacher-Coordination involved in program delivery reported that the LEAF training and program gave them increased skills for connecting with parents; greater confidence in creating this connection and an increased sense of connection of working collaboratively with parents.

It was clear that the informal, relaxed and supportive approach fostered by Co-ordinators in both the Home Visits and the Play Cafe's was experienced as positive by participants and empowered them to further seek services and professional support for their families. Both their willingness to access services and their actual uptake of services were increased by their exposure to the LEAF program.

Impact Measure Three: Community Participation

5.1 Impact Measure Three: Community Participation

The Community Participation measure was assessed by examining the impact of the LEAF program on parents' attitude to the school community, their willingness to participate in school preparation through the vehicles of home visiting, play café's and other school community activities, and by the changes to their patterns of community participation that were facilitated by participant exposure to LEAF.

Anecdotal and interview evidence was the primary component of this measure along with the attendance and referral numbers for Play Café's, formal functions and the Home Visiting. Changes to participant attitude towards school community, their willingness to engage in school activities and their knowledge of available services in the community were assessed. In addition, the impact of the LEAF program on participants' sense of community was assessed.

5.1.1 Impact on Childrens' Sense of Belonging to the School Community

Typically only adult benefits are assessed in evaluations but a clear outcome from the LEAF evaluation was the finding that it provided significant benefit to children in terms of increasing their sense of belonging to the school community and therefore their willingness to participate in the educational experience.

So many benefits for the community it [Play Cafe'] really should be here anyway. He loves it. We had to come late today because I had to go pick up a girlfriend's little girl because she is sick and he was crying and saying, "No, no, I want to go to MY school." And I had to tell him that we were coming back!

Parents reported that their child's sense of identification with the school increased dramatically as a result of the Play Cafe' and that they developed a strong sense of belonging as a result of their interactions with the teacher, their peers and the school environment.

3 year old: We love it. He loves coming and sees it as HIS school!

First it is just so convenient. Just across from the pre-primary! My daughter already identifies it as "her school." It is a fantastic way to get to know the other parents because you get to stand around and talk and the kids are happy playing so you really get to know each another and you get a social network for school and that helps them with school.

Parents with older children were able to contrast the sense of belonging and familiarity fostered by LEAF with not having had access to this service with their older child and this cohort was adamant that it gave their younger child an advantage in terms of adjustment to school.

He loves to be going to "his" school. He will look forward to Kindy next year. It warms them up and gives them an idea and some familiarity. It would have been great with my oldest child. Kindy was a real shock and took a lot of getting used to.

Respondents said that the positive relationships and experiences the child associated with school as a result of LEAF activities gave the child a generalised sense of positive expectancy about school.

It is good that it is attached to the school and your child is getting to know playmates and peers....Ella loves it and she feels very comfortable and she will be happy going to school there next year.

5.1.2 Impact on Adults' Sense of Belonging to the School Community

Play Café' parents said they found it helpful to know a group of parents themselves before their child entered the school system and commented that this made them feel that the school was their environment rather than a 'strange place.' The fact that their child already knew some peers was cited as increasing both their sense of belonging, safety and confidence in relation to school life .

It has been good for me to get to know other parents and to get to know the area. Without this I wouldn't have known anyone. Now he knows kids and the teacher it will make it easier for him to come next year by himself. He will know other kids in his year. He knows the environment so it is not like leaving him in a strange place. He hasn't been to daycare so it makes a big difference to helping him feel safe.

LEAF was described as performing a welcoming function for people who were new to the catchment area and making them feel a part of the school community.

I am new to Bunbury and without the Play Cafe' I wouldn't know any of the kids or parents. My kids don't go to daycare so school would be really scary without this introduction and fun way of easing into school life.

Some people noted that the Play Cafe' format expedited their belonging to the school community and contrasted this with the time it took in their experience of entering networks without the LEAF assistance.

Play Cafe's are absolutely of benefit. An unqualified YES!!Brilliant when you are new to the area. We just moved here. It has taken a lot longer to get linked into the networks with my older daughter whereas the kindy class will be great we already know the people in the class. It makes it a lot quicker.

5.1.3 Increasing Participation of Hard-to-Reach Populations

The Play Cafe's and Home Visits functioned in tandem as a way to extend the hand of welcome and increase the resources and participation of hard-to-reach populations. The Home Visit was an unobtrusive way for teachers to become aware of the needs of families and children in their classroom. The social milieu of the Play Cafe' made it possible for teachers to link isolated parents and children with others who had more social resources or were more socially confident, thus reducing their isolation in a friendly and non-invasive manner. The case of Brandon (Case 5) highlights the amount of time that may be required to engage children with communication difficulties and the reality that developing a sense of comfort and belonging to the school community may happen in very small increments. Given that Brandon took almost four full school terms to come to the point of being able to benefit from the social aspects of school it is highly unlikely that he would have benefited from Kindergarten without the preparatory and welcoming experience of Play Cafe'.

In addition, the provision of ongoing support to Brandon's Mum over the year has developed a positive relationship and a partnership approach for family, service providers and school to work together to support Brandon in his transition to school. As a result of her Play Cafe' experience Brandon's mother clearly feels comfortable in the school community. Play Cafe' has also meant that Brandon's developmental delay has been identified early enough to give him the support he needs for the school year ahead.

Case 5: Increasing the Participation of Children with Communication Difficulty**Brandon**

Brandon first came along and did not want or initiate any contact with other people. He wanted solitary play only which consisted of the play dough (no sharing or communication) and Home Corner (no communication/language with other children). It was clear that he had definite language/ communication problems. He didn't have much speech or sentence structure and no eye contact. He had a number of behaviour problems and has been having therapy

For all of Term 2 and most of Term 3 Play Café Brandon played by himself and resisted contact or encouragement to join other. He did not respond to me when spoken to and did not want to participate in stories or music sessions.

By the end of Term 3 Brandon would say Hello and Bye when spoken to. When he was encouraged to do so he started to branch out into other activities ie rice trolley and would sit and let me share his play dough. In Term 4 Brandon still preferred to play alone but would now come to an activity table ie: cooking/stamping without my prompting and have a go on his own initiative. Mum reported that Brandon is now having a go at singing songs at home!

Brandon will be in Kindergarten in 2008 and I feel that Play Cafe' has provided him with a friendly and familiar place to go which can only help with his transition to Kindy and has given me the opportunity to make a connection with mum which I would otherwise been unable to do. This should be of benefit next year if the need for formal referral etc happen. I think the Play Cafe has also given mum the chance to interact with other mums and and has allowed her to become familiar with the school environment.

The case of Maria provides an excellent example of a Teacher-Coordinator utilizing her professional skill, capacity and resources as well as the LEAF format to provide assistance to a family in need who would have been extremely unlikely to approach community or other health services. It is also a good example of a multi-disciplinary team working together, linked through LEAF intervention, on behalf of the family. As a direct result of these activities the family have been welcomed and included in the school community in a manner that would have been very difficult to facilitate without this intervention. It appears that LEAF may be of particular assistance to new, migrant and otherwise socially isolated families in introducing and welcoming them to the school community.

Case 6: Developing Sense of School Community for Hard to Reach Populations**Maria**

The family I have in mind is from West Africa and come from a poor background. They arrived in Australia 4 months before school began. They have two children, one in Pre-Primary and the other 4 years old. Dad is a machinist, works full time and speaks good English but Mum speaks limited English. I visited the family in the first round of Home Visits and, understandably, their home was very basic and there were no books in the home that I could see. I got the impression that Mum was very socially isolated as she does not drive. I felt quite concerned about the family and about their social isolation. As a result of the visit and concerns raised I organised for our school to make a bulk library loan of children's books suitable for both the children, which I change each week. It is my hope that reading these books to the children will improve Mum's English as well as provide all the benefits of reading books for the children. When the Play Café started I made a special point of encouraging Mum to come and asked a couple of other mothers to invite the Mum along too. She came and continues to be the most regular attendee. I have had a quiet word to one mother in particular who I noticed reaching out to the mum and offering, lifts, general information and other things of help. The African Mum keeps coming and has told our school nurse she thinks it is very important for her younger child.

The child in PP was developmentally behind the rest of the children in the class, even though he is a year older (should be in Year One). Initially, we wondered whether this was associated with his difficulty with English however it became obvious that there was something amiss when I noticed that the younger child, who had even less English, was more competent (eg jigsaws, pretend play) at Play Café' It turned out that the older child has a neurological disorder which had been diagnosed in Africa but the parents understood the child had been "cured" and hence he

was no longer being treated. Home Visiting provided an unexpected benefit to the family when, on one occasion when I was off school grounds on a DOTT day I got a call from the school to say that the PP child had collapsed and they couldn't reach the Mum on the phone. Because of Home Visiting I knew the location of the home so was able to go straight there, contact Mum and take her to the school to be with her child. That's the day we found out there had been a diagnosis in the past. I feel that the Mum trusts me and certainly, my extra contact with the family has meant better information flow and understanding on all of these issues for the school.

There have been all kinds of difficulties for the family - for example, the local Primary Health system knocked back my referral because the family had no Medicare number. However, because the Child Health Nurses have visited Play Café' I was able to speak with them about the situation and they, in turn, were able to talk to the Mum in a friendly, informal environment. The nurse explained the process of getting an appointment with a paediatrician via a GP and was able to help the Mum get an appointment as she found out that the family had private health insurance. The difficulties faced by this family are ongoing. We (my Assistant and I) have done a lot of little extra things however I feel sure that the relationship I have been able to build with them has been helped to a large extent by the LEAF project. The health of the older child has definitely benefited and when the older child goes to the Primary next year, all of the knowledge built by relationship through the LEAF contacts will be very useful for the school. Furthermore the relationship I have built with the younger child is much stronger than it would have been otherwise and this will make her transition to school as a migrant child from a NESB much easier. The increased exposure to books and spoken English should also help her transition and help make her educational experience a positive one.

5.1.3 Increasing Participation in Service and Other Community Activities

The comment was made that Play Cafe' provides a community building environment and this seems to encapsulate its impact in terms of fostering the willingness of families to be involved in other community activities. The social connections created through Play Cafe' in particular create a social network who are more likely to contact, invite each other and be willing to participate in other school community activities.

It was a great opportunity for me to meet parents and observe children of various ages within their play environment. Talking to the mums, it was clear how much they valued the opportunity to attend the Play Cafe' both for its networking potential and the stimulating environment that the children enjoy. Bunbury has a constant flow of new arrivals and the one new mum I spoke to said the Play Cafe' was a valuable link in to the social network for her. The Play Cafe' seems to me, to be the ideal environment for parents to be in contact with other parents, with children of similar ages, within their community. The variety of toys and art media in the Kindy environment makes this the perfect venue for the meeting and sharing to take place. In terms of community capacity building, the Play Cafe' concept is fantastic.

Play Cafe's were also cited as increasing the partnerships between teachers and other health providers with Allied Health providers reporting increasing engagement and involvement in the school community (See Case 7).

Case 7: Increased Involvement of Allied Health in the School Community**Child Health Nurse:**

Last week, I participated in a new activity which is a direct outgrowth of the LEAF program – attending and working with one of the teachers in their 2008 kindergarten group orientation session. We had two sessions well attended- the great thing is that we had dads come to both the evening and daytime session, and ask questions. We used a brief parent completed questionnaire about their child's development and to ask them about any health concerns they had for their child. We followed this up with a talk about getting ready for Kindergarten where we covered nutrition, health and developmental issues.

At the moment I am seeing very few 3 year olds for developmental screening- so seeing them in a captive situation, and at a time where the parents are keen to see that their kids are ready for kindergarten worked well. As a direct result of this intervention we have so far been able to identify several children who need speech referrals, some vision checking, and some assistance with behaviour issues. One family will need home visits from a Child Health Nurse over the summer. All of these service interventions will occur before the children start kindergarten next year which ensures their needs are addressed and they are ready to learn.

5.2 Summary of Community Participation Impact

The LEAF program clearly provides an opportunity for parents and children to develop social connections and a sense of belonging to the school community in their early engagement with the school. This sense of belonging was described as having an overwhelmingly positive impact in increasing sense of ownership and willingness to identify with and participate in school activities for parents and children. Parents reported that their child's sense of identification with the school increased dramatically as a result of the Play Cafe' and that they developed a strong sense of belonging as a result of their interactions with the teacher, their peers and the school environment.

The fact that children already knew some peers and felt comfortable with their cohort was cited as increasing children's sense of belonging, safety and confidence in relation to school life ahead. LEAF is also providing a valuable welcoming and inclusion function for hard-to-reach and isolated populations. Play Cafe's were also cited as increasing the partnerships between teachers and other health providers with Allied Health providers reporting increasing engagement and involvement in the school community.

Impact Measure Four: School Readiness

6.1 Impact Measure Four: School Readiness

The core LEAF aim of fostering school readiness was evaluated with particular focus on the impact of the LEAF program on families and therefore on children entering the school system. Families were interviewed to assess the impact of the LEAF program on their understanding of children's language and cognitive development, emotional maturity, physical health and wellbeing, communication skills, general knowledge and social competence.

The extent to which LEAF has facilitated the family and child's transition into the school community was another specific focus. To this end, Parent Interviews and questionnaire protocol were used to establish the extent to which the LEAF program linked them to the school community, created a sense of belonging, increased their sense of confidence about managing the transition to school, increased their sense of working in partnership with the teacher and the school, helped them to prepare their child for school, increased their willingness to ask for and access, education and other support services, helped them to manage difficult child behaviours and increased their knowledge of the importance of positive early childhood experience.

6.1.1 School Readiness: Parental Confidence about Managing School Transition

Increasing and fostering school readiness was found to be one of the most significant impacts of the LEAF program. Parents almost unanimously reported that the LEAF activities of Home Visiting and Play Cafe' had increased their child's readiness for school and their own confidence that they could support their child in managing the transition for schooling. Parents pointed out a number of aspects of the LEAF program which they felt assisted their child in attaining school readiness. The first was familiarizing the child to the environment in a relaxed context so that they could simply focus on learning the new structure in the year to come. Parents commented on the excellent preparation for school provided by LEAF:

She has her birthday in July so will have to wait another year for school so this is brilliant because she's learning to share and they all learn how to get on together. Its such a good preparation for school. Kids find it so daunting to come into the environment of school that they spend a long time just getting used to the environment and then they miss what the teacher is saying. They are on overload! This way they're already comfortable so they can just leap in right away and learn.

Some parents felt that the most significant contribution of LEAF to fostering school readiness was the way in which it lowered their child's anxiety about school and introduced them gradually to a range of aspects of school life so that they could assimilate the change gradually and without unhealthy levels of arousal, anxiety or stress.

Play Cafe' for Liliana has made her familiar with the place. I would hate to take her to the Kindy on the first day and just drop her off at a strange building with a strange person. Now she is familiar with the building, the teacher and the other kids and she's not going to be scared....She's used to the routine and the activity.....It's been fantastic. I wish there was something like this for my first son who had never been to daycare. Kindy was a huge shock for him. A very RUDE shock. This is like babysteps because she got used to it while Mum was there.

Many parents reported that not only did Play Cafe' lower their child's anxiety about school but that it actually fostered enthusiasm and excitement about beginning school and a positive expectancy for the year ahead. Some parents reported that the experience was so positive that children saw Play Cafe' as a treat and were very disappointed to miss a session.

Play Cafe's have been fantastic. They are a great introduction to being at school and being able to point as you walk past and say, "That's your school." ...He is very excited about school and every Monday wants to know if Kindy is starting this week! It is a great introduction to school life.

He really looks forward to it. He loves it and when we can't go he is really disappointed. "Sorry love," and I feel guilty.

Play Cafe's are fantastic! She loves it and has made so many friends. She is totally comfortable with the environment and I know she will have no problems with kindy next year. She is itching to come and would come every day if she could. She is like, "Is it Wednesday? I want to go to Play Cafe'!"

6.1.2 School Readiness: Working in Partnership with Teacher and School

LEAF was clearly demonstrated to be increasing parents' sense of working in partnership with the teacher and the school. This was cited as particularly important for those parents who had not put their children into daycare and who wanted to be sure that their child's first school experience would be with a caring and skilled professional.

"I like the fact that you can get to know the teacher because I don't put my kids into daycare. Getting to know the teacher before they go is really important to me because usually you don't know anything about them. You think, "Who are my children going to?" It really helps to know that person and have some idea about how they will care for your child. It really helps with the school transition. My 9 year old and 6 year old had a hard time getting used to school. They were like, "Someone different is going to look after me. What is going on?" A lot of uncertainty for them. You can chat to the teacher because she has TIME. There is no time like that when kids are older.

The Home Visiting gave families an increased sense of connection with the teacher and gave children increased positive expectancy about their relationship with their teacher.

One child was sitting on the step with a flower in hand and when I pulled up in the driveway ran over and said, "I'm so excited I've been waiting all morning!"

6.1.3 School Readiness: Helped them Prepare their Child for School

Parents reported a number of other ways that LEAF helped prepare their child for school. One way was by familiarizing the child with school structure and beginning to gradually build a range of skills that would be helpful and increase their capacity to benefit from the educational experience.

I find its great because he gets to see other kids not just his siblings. He does things he doesn't do at home – playdough etc. and he even sits and listens to a story on the odd occasion (which is very unusual for him). It is increasing his concentration.

It is great to have a little bit of structure for kids of that age. They are getting the idea of how it happens.

Familiarity with the school environment was cited as a positive that would help their child feel comfortable at school and confident in the learning environment.

I am involved with a lot of groups and Play Cafe' is a brilliant thing. The best thing is that it is on the same site as the Kindy so it is brilliant to introduce the child to school. I love the idea. I love the fact that it is free. I love the intro to the teacher. She is brilliant and goes 1-1 with the kids and you get to see that because you are there.

He's going to the school next year so I know he'll be familiar and I won't have tears because he has gotten used to his surroundings

6.1.4 Increased Willingness to Ask for & Access Education and Other Support Services

Parents reported that LEAF was such a positive experience of interacting with professionals that it definitely increased their willingness to engage with other service providers. Again, it is critical to note the importance and centrality of the respectful partnership approach in fostering this willingness.

Case 8: Contrasting Experiences of Service Access

Janice

I am the mother of a nine year old boy and a three year old girl. My three year old is currently going to Play Cafe' and it is her absolute favourite thing to do. It overwhelms me to watch her running around, interacting with other children and having such a positive time. Unfortunately this was not the case for my 9 year old son. When he was young there were no facilities like Play Cafe'. My 9 year old struggled with playing with other children I noticed that he couldn't interact with other children properly. There was no support for me and I felt uncomfortable around other parents as they too noticed something different with my child.

I stopped taking him to play with other kids as I became embarrassed about his behaviour. Anyone that I tried to talk to about it told me that he would grow out of it. Then I started getting comments about my parenting abilities. When he hit school age things got a lot worse – even to the point where the school made remarks about issues coming from home. I felt a complete failure as a parent in every way. Six months ago at age 8 and a half years old my son was finally diagnosed with high functioning autism. I wonder if I had had the support I have now with my 3 year old if it would of stopped all of the years of self blame. He may have already got an earlier diagnosis.

At Play Cafe' I have people to talk to and advice and facilities at my fingertips. I also have a three year old that is so excited about going that she is dressed before I even wake up in the morning. I am very excited about how confident she is going into Kindergarten, as she already knows her teacher and some of the children she will be going to school with. Next year is a very exciting year for us thanks to Play Cafe'

6.1.4 Helped them to Manage Difficult Child Behaviours

Parents were clear that LEAF had been a resource for them in getting access to a range of ideas and supports that could help them with difficult child behaviours.

Jonathon has had trouble with sharing so it has been good to be here and get some help in managing that and some different ideas for it.

Service professionals were also clear that LEAF gave them an excellent vehicle for providing resources to parents who were struggling with difficult child behaviours. (See Case 9)

Case 9: LEAF as a Service Provision Vehicle with Difficult Child Behaviours

Experience of Child Health Nurse

Some important points in relation to my role and experience with Playcafes include that they have provided me with an opportunity to promote immunisation and give parents details regarding access to immunisation clinics provided through Community Health; to discuss sleep issues with families and then to have follow up support and appointments at the Child Health Clinic; to discuss toilet training with families and provide information (Triple P program tip sheets and HDWA brochure); to discuss development with regards to nocturnal enuresis and my involvement with the Enuresis Program "Happiness is a Dry Bed". Entry age discussed and how parents can manage in the meantime; to discuss language delay and to refer to Child Health clinic to provide screening and referral to Speech Pathologist for further assessment. I have been able to discuss behavioural issues with parents of children in 1-5 year age group and access to support with Child Health Nurse and/or parenting programs such as Parenting Your Toddler or Triple P Positive parenting Program.

As I see many families with children in the 0-4 year age group i am able to encourage them to access Playcafes which not only assists their child's development and social interaction, it also reduces the mother's isolation and has assisted with issues such as depression and post natal stress.

The families I have been involved with enjoy Playcafe and have found it so be a most supportive and positive service. I hope to continue my involvement and feel it provides an opportunity for Child Health Nurses to access and support clients who may benefit from our expertise with health issues.

6.2 Increased Knowledge of the Importance of Positive Early Childhood Experience

6.2.1 Understanding of Developmental Issues

Families were interviewed to assess the impact of the LEAF program on their understanding of children's language and cognitive development, emotional maturity, physical health and wellbeing, communication skills, general knowledge and social competence. Parents were unanimous in their report that their exposure to LEAF had given them much greater understanding of the developmental issues of their child and of the importance of their early experience. Again, some parents were able to contrast the benefit of having access to this information with not having had similar access with an older child.

The differences were absolute! With my youngest daughter coming to Play Cafe' she gets to know lots of good children, she is having a good time and the teacher tells us a million different things about her development – gives us suggestions about things we can do to help her and support her development and we didn't have any of that with my 9 year old.

Awareness of developmental stages and support with those stages was reported as extremely beneficial.

This (Play Cafe') is a great thing for parents to meet other people, to have someone listen to them about how their child's development is, and a great place to get together and where you can see your child in an environment where they are interacting with other people and I saw how my daughter crashed from not having that.

Play Cafe' was cited as particularly helpful in giving parents a range of ideas they could implement at home in order to support and foster their child's development.

Ms. X is wonderful. She sets up simple activities and the kids seem to thrive on simple things you forget to do at home and you remember that they don't need complicated things to be OK and happy.

This awareness of developmental stages was embedded in the language and the points raised quite independently by parents in the interviews. This suggests that LEAF is giving parents heightened awareness of developmental needs as reflected in the quote below:

It also gives me special focussed time with AnnaLiese. Its harder for the second child and this gives me time to focus on her development and help her with her skills. At home there's always some housework to do and it will always be there and this helps me to focus on her rather than on the chores that I have to do.

Parents expressed appreciation for the age appropriate activities and structure of the Play Cafe's with some parents contrasting the Play Cafe' structure with other experiences they had had. This quote also illustrates the importance of the relaxed format of the Play Cafe' for this age cohort.

Kids were too young and there was no flexibility. Used to be a parents day at X but it wasn't as good as this. Kind of like it was just Kindy for the younger kid and the younger sibling had to do what the older sibling did. Too much like school and it didn't work. Nowhere near as successful as this one.

Increased their knowledge of the importance of positive early childhood experience

A significant outcome of the program was parents' heightened awareness of the importance of the early childhood period; the idea of developmental stages and awareness that they had a role and could foster their child's healthy development. It enabled parents to normalize the developmental experiences of their child.

It is a great way to meet some other parents and chat about what stages you are at and what troubles you are having...Facilities are great...I have really enjoyed it and will be VERY disappointed if they don't have it next year.

A great opportunity and great to see where your child was as you looked around the room...just to see what other kids were doing and whether he was age appropriate. You don't get to be with them at Kindy so you don't know.

6.2 Summary: School Readiness Impact

Parents reported a number of other ways that LEAF helped prepare their child for school. One way was by familiarizing the child with school structure and beginning to gradually build a range of skills that would be helpful and increase their capacity to benefit from the educational experience. Parents reported that LEAF was such a positive experience of interacting with professionals that it definitely increased their willingness to engage with other service providers. Again, it is critical to note the importance and centrality of the respectful partnership approach in fostering this willingness (Appendix B).

Families were interviewed to assess the impact of the LEAF program on their understanding of children's language and cognitive development, emotional maturity, physical health and wellbeing, communication skills, general knowledge and social competence. Parents were unanimous in their report that their exposure to LEAF had given them much greater understanding of the developmental issues of their child and of the importance of the pre-school experience.

Again, some parents were able to contrast the benefit of having access to this information with not having had similar access with an older child.

A significant outcome of the program was parents' heightened awareness of the importance of the early childhood period; the idea of developmental stages and awareness that they had a role and could foster their child's healthy development. LEAF also enabled parents to normalize the developmental experiences of their child. School readiness is a significant positive impact of the LEAF program.

LEAF Training Outcomes

7.0 LEAF Training Aims

The stated aims of the LEAF 2007 training were to enable staff to:

1. Develop skills to engage parents and develop supportive and effective relationships with them.
2. Have a clear understanding of the qualities and skills of effective helpers.
3. Have the skills and some tools required to manage the programme effectively.
4. Have a clear model for developing home school partnerships that is backed by substantial research.

7.1 Evaluation Domains

The LEAF Training program scored highly across all domains of evaluation. The training was evaluated for its quality and performance in timeliness of training implementation, scope and appropriateness of training offered, programme compliance with agreed training goals, the impact on participants' skills, capacity and efficacy and, finally, participant satisfaction with the training.

The training was evaluated using a number of measures:

1. Quantitative pre- and post-training testing of participant knowledge and efficacy across the core training domains;
2. Feedback surveys administered at the close of each training session.
3. External evaluator attendance for observation and evaluation of training,
4. Review of the training materials, and,
5. Post-training interviews with Training Participants.

7.2 Timeliness

The Training was conducted in a timely manner and in adherence with the implementation schedule which was provided to NCCPP and as outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: LEAF Implementation Schedule

<i>L.E.A.F. IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE 2007</i>	
Milestones	<i>Proposed - - Achieved</i>
Steering committee established	<i>Nov 2007 - Nov 2007</i>
Reference Group confirmed	<i>Nov 2007 - Nov 2007</i>
Contract Signing	<i>Dec 2007 - Dec 2007</i>
Evaluator appointed	
Provision Of Insurance Certificates	
MOU Principals	
Steering Group (Reference) Terms Of Reference	
LEAF Coordinators First Meeting	<i>Feb 2007 - Feb 2007</i>
Principal's Meeting to finalise Report format for DET and NCCP	<i>Feb 2007 - Feb 2007</i>
1. Participating kindergarten teachers selected and Training organised	<i>Feb 2007 - Feb 2007</i>
2. Dates and times set for monthly Co-ordinator Meetings	<i>Feb 2007 - Feb 2007</i>
3. Dates and times set for Steering Committee Meetings	<i>Feb 2007 - Feb 2007</i>
LEAF Coordinator Training complete and Home Visiting for each school protocols set	<i>Mar 07 - Mar 07</i>
Home visits begins & Play Café's schedule set for year Schedules distributed to Reference group members & early inter service providers	<i>Apr 07- Apr 07</i>

7.3 Training Overview

The 2007 training modules were conducted over five half day sessions in the first six weeks of Term One and were structured to provide information in the following order and domains:

Module One: Family Visiting Training, Family Centred Practice, Partnership Models

- The objectives of visiting, core skills of family visiting, safety, protocols and procedures.
- The qualities of effective parent helpers.
- School protocols for managing the Family Visiting and practical issues – record keeping and confidentiality.
- The rationale for family centred practice. Best practice for partnership.
- The challenges to using family centred approaches and the implications for professional practice and LEAF implementation.

Module Two: Factors influencing Child health and Development and Family Functioning

- The Developmental Milestones of 0-4 year olds – identifying the important milestones in the 0-4 year group.
- Topics covered: Brain Development, Attachment, Social Development, Fine and Gross Motor Development, Emotional Development, Importance of Play.
- Early intervention: What it is, when it is appropriate, the agencies in the community and how a child should be referred.

Oral language – The links from Birth to Literacy

- Review of relevant materials to assist families: background reading on development, developmental guidelines, stimulus discussion questions for Play Café's and Family Handouts, language games and activities for parents.
- How parents can support language development. Activities for Play Café's that can inform parents and model the supporting process.

Module Three: Diversity and Inclusive Practice

- The rationale and principles of inclusive practice in mainstream services.
- Target families, information resources and facilities, key community people.
- Documentation for referrals and follow through. Referral to Community Health Nurse.
- Understanding the Benefits of Early Identification and Intervention. The rationale for early intervention and how to meet child and family needs effectively.

Module Four: Community Centred Practice

- Emphasis on the importance of services that are responsive to the collective needs of families and young children.
- The definition, advantages and tools of using a partnership model for work with families. Best practice for partnership.
- The challenges to using community centred approaches and the implications for professional practice and LEAF implementation.

Module Five: Play Café and Practical Points for Implementation:

- An interactive session for Coordinators to discuss and network.
- Planning Play Café's – inviting families, informing the school community, planning activities
- Evaluation: Data collection procedures and coordinators responsibilities. Data collection procedures and the Coordinators responsibilities; the final report and what is needed, forms and record keeping.
- Project timeline, Principals' responsibilities and Coordinators' responsibilities.

7.4 Training Outcomes

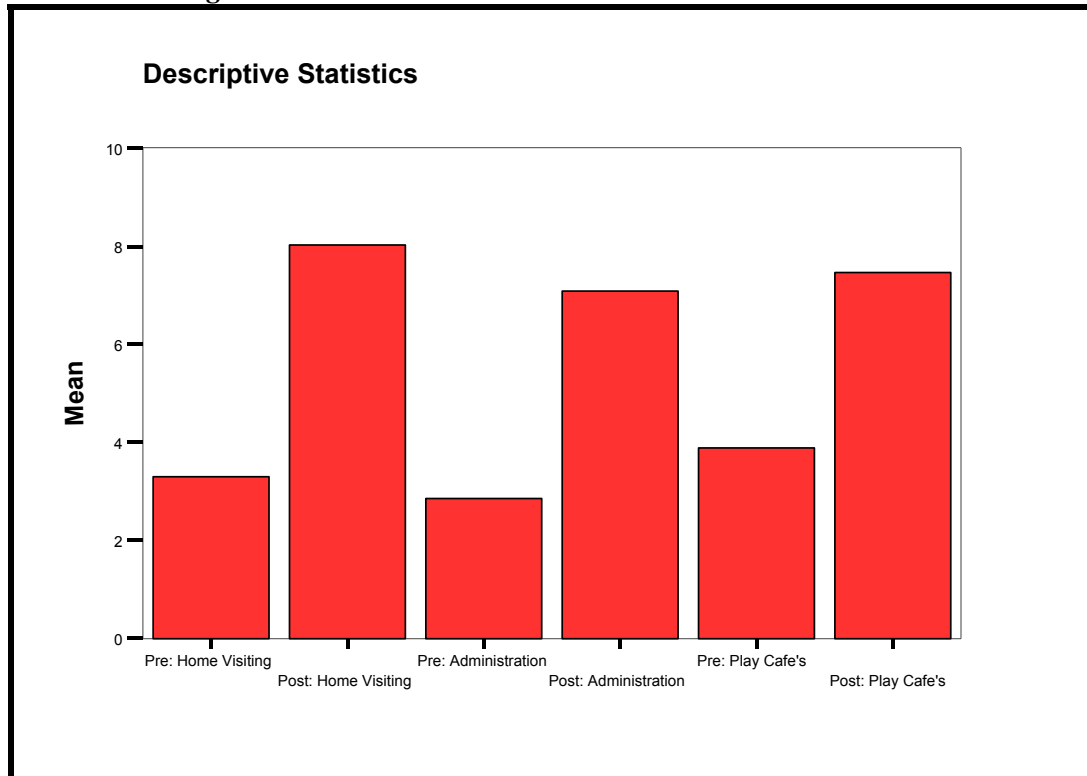
All designated kindergarten teachers attended the five sessions of LEAF training. All training sessions were rated positively with 100% of participants rating 100% of sessions as either helpful or extremely helpful. There were no negative ratings (ie: ratings of sessions as “unhelpful”) for any of the training sessions.

The pre and post testings found that participants increased their knowledge across all domains by 100 to 200% with most sub-items showing a doubling of knowledge and confidence from the original baseline score (See Table 2). The average pre-score of knowledge across participants in relation to Home Visiting was 3.3 (where 0 represented little or no knowledge of the domain in question and 10 represented complete knowledge of the domain). After LEAF training the average participant knowledge score for Home Visiting had moved from 3.3 to 8.1. With Play Café's the average knowledge pre-training score was 3.9 with an average post training score of 7.4.

The knowledge increase was most significant in the training provided specifically for Home Visiting. This shift may simply reflect the focus on Home Visiting as the first activity for timed implementation for the LEAF program or may be the result of other factors. Participant knowledge more than tripled in the pre and post test scores for items related to their understanding of the Home Visiting and Family Partnership approaches and how to initiate them. For example the average pre-test score for knowledge of how to establish family partnerships in family visiting was 2.2 while the average post-test score was 8.4.

Knowledge also tripled in participant understanding of how to identify family and child needs through a Home Visit and how to assist the family in addressing those needs. At the close of the Home Visit training participants demonstrated good knowledge of all domains of Home Visiting including the safety principles, school protocols, administration and paperwork and evaluation activities.

Table 7: Training Outcomes



At the end of the training sessions participant average reflected a strong knowledge base (Rating 7 or above) for all of the training domains. The general knowledge increase across all scales for all five Training sessions is particularly impressive when you consider that, in the pre-test, participants reported some sub-items as already being areas of high knowledge and confidence. That is participants recorded a pre test score of 8 or 9 for the knowledge domain and therefore could only shift by 1 or 2 points as a result of training. Therefore, in order to produce an average increase of 100% to 200% in participant knowledge across the five training domains, the training had to increase participant knowledge very significantly in the domains where expertise and confidence were weaker at course initiation.

General comments from the teachers completing the training included the opinion that all teachers should have access to this information. All participants reported that, as a direct result of the LEAF training, they were optimistic about, and looking forward to, implementing the LEAF activities.

There was strong indication from the quantitative data and the feedback interviews that a particular LEAF training outcome is an increased sense of teacher efficacy (skill and expectation of competence) in relation to forming family-school-community partnerships. This is a significant outcome in terms of strengthening the skill base and social capital of the school community.

7.5 Project Compliance with Agreed Training Goals

The 2007 LEAF training proposal listed four primary objectives. These were to enable staff to:

1. Develop skills to engage parents and develop supportive and effective relationships with them.
2. Have a clear understanding of the qualities and skills of effective helpers.
3. Have the skills and some tools required to manage the LEAF programme implementation effectively within their schools.
4. Have a clear model for developing home school partnerships that is backed by substantial research.

Five days of training modules were delivered in term one. The following is a review of the training objectives, participants' feedback on the extent to which these were achieved and their suggestions for future practice

Objective One: Develop skills to engage parents and develop supportive and effective relationships with them.

Feedback on Achievements:

Participants reported that, as a result of the training, they had clearer understanding of the importance of collaborative practice in working with families and how to do this. They also felt they had better skills and understanding of how to approach parents and children within their own homes and how to use the home visit effectively.

Feedback across the sessions identified the "Diversity and Inclusive Practice" module as a module that participants found particularly helpful because of the skills and information given about how to engage people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Participants also cited the modules discussing child friendly communities and child centred approaches as extremely helpful in facilitating their own development of partnership practice. At the end of training participants generally reported good knowledge of parenting partnership practice – knowledge of how to engage parents and develop effective relationships with them (Average knowledge score of 8.4) and good knowledge in how to assist with family needs (Average knowledge score of 7.2).

Suggestions for Future Practice:

Participants suggested that more emphasis and time could be devoted to the partnership model micro-skills of reflective, attentive and empathic listening – perhaps through role play and partner work in order to build their own personal skills within a safe practice environment. Teachers also expressed a desire to do some practical exercises of types of communication that could be used to engage hard-to-reach or at-risk families. Both of these suggestions were cited as extensions of the positive training received rather than as replacement activities.

Objective Two: Have a clear understanding of the qualities and skills of effective helpers.

Feedback on Achievements:

Similar feedback was obtained as for Objective One. Participants reported that, as a result of training, they had a clear understanding of the core qualities of effective helpers (Pre training average score of 5.2 and post-training average score of 8) and of effective listening skills (Pre training average score of 5.6 and post-training score of 7.8).

Suggestions for Future Practice:

Participants expressed the desire for visual examples of the skills in practice. Some participants suggested that they would like to see a video of a Family Visit and of a Play Café' functioning to be able to see the partnership skills modelled in situ and to get an overview of how the LEAF activity might progress and be facilitated. They suggested that, in addition to this visual modelling, a series of practical exercises and role plays in Home Visiting could also be helpful as part of the Training program.

Objective Three: Have the skills and some tools required to manage the program effectively.

Feedback on Achievements:

At the close of the training program participants were confident that they had the skills and tools to handle Family Visiting effectively using the family partnership model. This included their perception that they had good understanding of the rationale and frameworks for LEAF activities, skills for initiating Home Visiting and parenting partnerships, and understanding of how to assist families through the Home Visiting activity. Participants were less sure about their command of the skills for Play Café – partly because these had not yet been implemented. Overall participants reported strong satisfaction with the skills and tools they received in training for their role as LEAF program coordinators.

Suggestions for Future Practice:

Again, participants expressed the desire to see a video of a Play Café’ functioning or to see a Play Café’ in operation. One suggestion was to have the Lead Coordinator run a Play Café’ during the training weeks which trainees could attend as part of their training sessions. Participants were also interested to find out more about how Child Health Nurse partnerships could be negotiated and formally integrated into the Play Café’ conduct and referral system. They were also enthusiastic about forming ongoing peer support and networking system for LEAF coordinators.

Objective Four: Have a clear model for developing home school partnerships that is backed by substantial research.

Feedback on Achievements:

Participants reported good satisfaction with the research base and the sound developmental principles of the program as encapsulated by the following quotes:

I thought this was very well put together and had a sound research base.

Excellent. Most helpful was refreshing knowledge of child development and needs and broadening perspective.

Evaluation Outcome: The 2007 LEAF training program was found to be compliant with the training goals as cited in the original agreement. Participants reported strong satisfaction with the information provided to address each of the four training objectives.

7.6 Scope and Appropriateness of Training

Participants expressed satisfaction with the scope of the training and felt that it was appropriate preparation for their role as LEAF coordinators and for their duties in initiating Home Visiting and Play Café’s within their schools. In addition, they cited particular aspects of each module that they found most interesting and of most use to them. The most useful aspects of each module, cited in order, as articulated by participants were:

- Module 1: Gaining an insight into the benefits and advantages of Home Visiting.
- Module 2: Understanding the factors affecting brain development.
Understanding the interplay of nature and nurture on child development.
Participant comment, “Great to realize....better understanding of this so I can share with parents.”
- Module 3: Services available for children and families with exceptional needs.
- Module 4: Mapping community links and RAINmakers.
- Module 5: Play Café Leaflets and Ideas

Participants commented on the appropriateness of the training and module structure:

The program had structure but was not rigid allowing for a variety of home visit situations.

And on their satisfaction with the scope of the program,
[It was] really good. All the information was there...Having the others there was a good support network.

the diversity training,
All teachers need to know and do this.

the interactive nature of the program,
Most helpful was hearing Fiona talking about her experiences and responding to others about their experiences. Really practical stuff – things to take, where to sit etc. Talking to others about their experiences.

and the appropriateness and best practice of having training which also integrated peer support for LEAF coordinators into the structure:

The best part was networking with 5 other teachers doing the same job as you and getting their input and ideas on your philosophy. ECE teachers are isolated, not in the staff room every day and having the chance to talk with peers in the same role was a really wonderful experience.

7.7 Impact on Participants' Skills, Capacity and Efficacy

The impact on participant skills, capacity and efficacy was reflected in the enthusiasm which was expressed about the commencement of the LEAF program. Participants commonly reported that they couldn't wait to begin and that they were really looking forward to the experiences of Home Visiting and to implementing Play Café's within their schools. Participant skill level was reflected in significantly increased scores across all knowledge domains. Increase in sense of efficacy in relation to partnership practice and early development was expressed through increased participant enthusiasm to continue professional development in this domain. For example, after the workshop on brain development one participant noted:

This workshop has motivated me to continue some professional reading on brain development that I commenced last year and never completed.

Participants' desire for extended learning was reflected in some comments where participants wanted to know more about facilitating social capital growth or reaching isolated populations. This was expressed as increased enthusiasm for the domain of partnership approaches rather than a deficit in the training program.

7.8 Participant Satisfaction with Training

Five days of training modules were all conducted in Term 1 by Fiona Farren, LEAF Project Coordinator, with 100% attendance for all modules. At the end of each training day participants were given a feedback sheet. All modules were rated as extremely helpful (66%) or helpful (34%) and there were no modules given a negative 'unhelpful' rating by any of the participants. All participants rated themselves as satisfied with the training sessions.

Specific comments from participants about the training included the following:

Informative, relaxed, integrated, well presented visually and delivered well.

Most interesting project that I have been involved in and [most] beneficial.

I am looking forward to more of the same as everything is thought out and presented well.

Well presented. Thorough and concise.

One module had a guest speaker on language development. This section of the module received lower ratings than the other five. This could be seen to partially be a reflection of participants' prior knowledgeability in the domain of early childhood language development but seemed also to be related to the delivery style and methodological approach of the session itself. Participant comments were:

Some of the ideas were a bit too direct[ive] for parents ie: blank questions for very young children.

....a very developmental approach to children's learning....is something to be cautious of.

7.9 Evaluation Recommendations:LEAF Training

Participants expressed the desire for more training time for LEAF preparation and for continued training, networking and interaction between LEAF Coordinators throughout the year.

More time to learn from each other and to observe it being put into practice.

Ongoing peer support network to pick each other's brains, access Fiona and do resource linking.

The compacted time for training delivery left some teachers feeling the need for more reflection time:

We need more time to absorb. To sit and take it in a bit.

For some participants the time limits caused a sense of "information overload" and for some, recycling of knowledge they already had. Pre-testing of teachers before the training on their levels of child development knowledge could free up some of the training time and ensure that training is focussed on those domains where participants have more limited knowledge. Integration of information provision with a range of practical exercises, peer discussion and video sessions was also a strong desire of participants. To facilitate this LEAF should be funded to enable ongoing training, mentoring, activity preparation and peer feedback sessions over the time that LEAF activities are operational. This includes both the Home Visiting and the Play Café's.

Implementation Challenges:

The biggest hurdles to LEAF implementation were bureaucratic rather than programmatic. The schools that were nominated or expressed a desire to participate in the project were each allocated funding for 40 teacher relief days for the year. This funding was to release their ECE teacher from teaching but the teacher could not commence until DETWA deployed a co-teacher so they could be released for their work on the LEAF project.

Identified Issue:

In some instances both the notification of teachers and the deployment of co-teachers was not timely. These delays were primarily caused by the nature of the bureaucratic requirements of DETWA but they were unfortunate in that they prevented incoming LEAF teachers from having adequate time to prepare for their LEAF involvement and to spend time preparing their co-teachers for their working partnership.

Principals were given some early notification of LEAF selection however some teachers were given extremely short notice of their school's selection for the program. Several teachers did not know who their relief co-teacher would be until the week of LEAF program commencement. Leaving the allocation and notification of co-teachers to the last minute is less than ideal, not only

in the extra stress it places on the ECE teacher at the critical starting point of the educational year but also for the uncertainty it places on the initiation of programs.

Recommendation:

Notification of ECE teachers and allocation of co-teachers needs to occur in the final term of the year prior to LEAF program initiation for a school in order to enable enough time for individual and whole-of-school planning. This length of notification is critical to enable the incoming ECE teacher to incorporate LEAF into her whole of year planning and curriculum, to formulate effective collaborative work patterns and communication with her co-teacher and to be able to initiate LEAF training and program without undue stress and pressure at school commencement.

Principals need to notify ECE teachers at the earliest possible juncture and to ensure that paperwork is completed promptly to ensure an early allocation of co-teacher to the LEAF coordinators. In addition, DETWA needs to prioritize the allocation of LEAF co-teachers so that LEAF training can be implemented in a timely manner.

Home Visiting Specific Outcomes

8.0 Home Visiting: Summary Data

The number and quality of activity outcomes for Home Visiting was impressive. In the 2007 program 151 Home Visits were conducted with a total of 197 parents and 232 children. Over four and a half thousand pieces of information about early development and early development services were distributed through the LEAF program. One hundred and seventy one feedback forms were completed with parents and fifty five one-to one interviews were completed with participants to evaluate service satisfaction. Both parents and teachers reported extremely high satisfaction with the Home Visiting program and the benefits of this family-centred activity was clearly demonstrated in the feedback data. Positive outcomes were reported for all groups involved: parents, teachers and children but the positive outcomes for children were overwhelming rated highest.

The following issues are of note:

1. Children are extremely enthusiastic about the home visit and it seems to help them to psychologically and emotionally link their home and school environments. Beneficial effects include teachers' reports that children often display new positive behaviours during the visit which they are then able to bring into the school environment and to their learning tasks. Parents describe this in slightly different terms such as, *"It was good for him to interact where he is most comfortable"* and note that their children become *"more confident"* about school after the visit.
2. A keyword through all of the reports is the excitement of the child. To children this visit where they are the sole focus of the teacher's time is a highlight of their year and a highly valued event. Parents and teachers report that this seems to result subsequently in children having more enthusiasm for school after the visit.
3. It is interesting that teacher and parent comments about the visits and their outcomes are quite similar.
4. Parents report more comfort with talking with the teacher in their "own territory" and also report more ease with approaching the teacher after the home visit. Parents describe this effect commonly as, *"It [the home visit] makes the teacher more approachable."*
5. Some parents were anxious about the purpose of the visit and reported that they needed more detailed information about the purpose, "the why" of the visit, before it happened.
6. Teachers report high utility from seeing the child in his or her home environment and from gaining greater understanding of the child's out-of-school context. For example, one teacher reported her shock at finding that a child's parent had a serious illness and was convalescent at home. Teachers report that the information they garner from the home visit is extremely helpful in giving them greater understanding of individual children and therefore assists them to be able to respond accurately and appropriately to the child's learning needs.

8.1 Home Visiting: Teacher Evaluations

Teacher Evaluation:

Five of the six teachers involved in Home Visiting when asked to rate Home Visiting as “no benefit”, “some benefit” or “highly beneficial” felt that it was highly beneficial with only one teacher stating “some benefit” because the Home Visiting programme benefit had been limited by poor parent uptake in her school district.

The following Impacts were reported by the teachers:

8.1.1 Impact on the Child:

It is clear that home visiting is a child centred intervention which has a major impact on the child. Teachers reported that by far the biggest impact of home visiting was on the child and that the greatest benefits of the home visit are seen in the childrens’ emotional development, school readiness, and increased level of engagement with the teacher and the learning environment after the visit occurs. These factors all enhance childrens’ learning capacity and positive experience in their critical first schooling year.

8.1.2 Specific Impacts:

Teachers reported the following specific impacts on children who had been home visited:

1. An increase in childrens’ confidence and social and language capacity. The home visit seems to result in the child having decreased anxiety, which is a learning inhibitor, in the school environment.

The highlight for me is the children who were lacking confidence come back [after the home visit] with a different attitude next session – more relaxed.

2. Increase in childrens’ ability to relate to the teacher. A dramatically increased sense of the child’s sense of efficacy about their capacity to relate socially and emotionally to the teacher.

They come back the next day and they see you as human. Special, because you have visited them. They look at you different [and give you a] bigger smile. It is like they think, “You’re a real person now.” They say proudly, “You have been to MY house.”

[Home visiting] fast tracks the relationship with the teacher. It provides you with a common world. It is intangible but we both know that we know more about each other. They know that I know that.

Children find it easier to relate to you and are more confident relating to you.

3. Teachers report that the increased positive expectancy (excitement and enthusiasm) about the home visit gets carried over by children into the school context. They routinely find children displaying a happier and more relaxed attitude within the school environment after the home visit.

[You get] shy children announcing publicly: “You came to MY house!” and then others ask, “When are you coming to mine?”

8.1.3 Impact on the Parents:

Teachers reported that parents enjoyed the home visit and that it had the impact of causing increasing parental engagement with the teacher and school.

People were rapt. Just spending time talking about them and their family – getting to know them, individually and personally

This is partially because the visit seems to cause a decrease in parent anxiety about relating to teachers and in turn, their anxiety may be lowered because the home visit allows parents to raise anxiety provoking issues in a more private context than the school environment:

Parents are more comfortable coming to see you. You have a more positive relationship. More productive, more personal.

The fact they can discuss issues they might not otherwise feel comfortable bringing up.

Teachers reported that the Home Visit seemed to fast track the Parent-Teacher relationship and that there was a marked improvement in relationship after the home visit had occurred:

I had at least a month of contact with parents before the home visits were started, the atmosphere felt very different before and after the visits. Instead of taking nearly a year for them to feel part of the classroom and demonstrate a relaxed comfortable manner it was nearly instantaneous.

They warm up immediately afterwards [home visit].

Home visits were demonstrated to foster a better relationship with parents by increasing and opening lines of communication. Teachers reported that parents seem to perceive the visit as an act of goodwill and a demonstration of genuine concern about the wellbeing of their child:

Parents have embraced it and have better feelings towards me. I feel I'm doing a better job. It has enhanced our relationship; a bit more on personal terms, people are less wary of you. They feel better towards you because you are doing something special that will benefit their child. Benefits all round.

She is a single Mum –[and was] more relaxed and eager to talk at her home.

Teachers reported that just having the time to talk with parents begins to foster a better relationship with them. At school teachers have a number of duties to perform and limited time to engage in relaxed conversation with parents. Teachers reported that parents value the personal time with the teacher which is afforded by the Home visit & often take time off work for the visit.

8.1.4 Impact on Teachers:

Teachers reported positive benefits for their own teaching practice as a result of the Home Visit. One was an increased ability to identify and respond accurately to the learning needs of individual children and to have greater compassion in relation to learning and behavioural difficulties:

Makes you more aware and compassionate towards the child. You think, "OK, I can deal with this because I think it is to do with this."....It feels good to be more understanding. You feel more human in your work – a good feeling... a personal bond. I am able to attend to child behaviour better because I am more aware of where they are coming from.

Teachers found it very helpful to gain a greater understanding of the impact of socio-economic class on children's home lives:

You get to see where the child is coming from: physically, emotionally, academically. You see the whole child and you can understand them better. You can get to know them and can then better cater for their needs.

This insight ranged not only from the impact of poverty to the impact of immense wealth. One teacher commented :

Very interesting for me. This school is much more affluent than I realized. I was quite taken aback at the level of wealth. I realize I'm lucky to be working with such privilege. I've fed this back to the school and the Principal said it is great to get this insight because they didn't know it either.

This insight enabled the teacher to be more authoritative when reassuring parents that they are doing enough.

It increased my confidence in the parents' competence. A lot of parents beat themselves up when they are doing a great job.

Teachers reported that Home Visiting gave them a better understanding of individual children and the conditions they face at home on a daily basis. In some cases this caused an entire paradigm shift for teachers in relation to some children.

Insight into their world. [The Home Visit was]Enlightening as I had no idea father was ill.

The Home Visit also enabled teachers to pick up children's learning problems earlier and to identify skills and capacities which the child had not yet presented in the school environment.

Child very confident and verbal at home (but not at kindy).

Child demonstrated extensive use of language which she hadn't at Pre Primary.

Overall teachers felt that Home Visiting enabled them to forge a stronger relationship with parents.

Getting to know families in our school at a different level - Even though I have taught in the same school for many years, and in many cases have taught other children in the family previously, the home visits to the children made so much difference to the degree to which I now "know" that family. I got an insight into family values that I would otherwise never had.

Table 8: Teacher Experience of Home Visiting

ARTICLE ON FAMILY VISITING FOR BUNBURY MAIL

Fiona Farren Kindy teacher South Bunbury Primary School

In the late 1930's my Father boarded with a family in the south west and travelled each day in a horse and buggy with them to the school where he taught. He was part of their lives until he went away to WW2. 70 years later in 2005 I started visiting the families of my kindy students.

This is what it's like

There is a big red bow on the letter box because an enthusiastic Tim can't find the balloon I sent to tie on the box so I can easily find the house. At another house there were 4 balloons and as soon as I got to the front door Liam grabbed my hand and raced me down the hallway to see his bedroom that he and his Dad had finished painting. Lacey showed me how she could ride her two wheeler bike while I watched admiringly with her Mum and Grandmother. Casey made special biscuits and for my visit. Kayla showed me her most precious possessions. Luke's Mum gave me a sandwich when I forgot to schedule a lunch break. Jasper sprayed me (accidentally) with the hose. Georgia played her Wiggles guitar. Ruby hid with my shoes and there are many other moments I treasure. Each visit was a joy and a privilege, our scattered community felt closer and kindy came home.

8.1.5 Impact on the Community:

Teachers reported that Home Visiting breaks down the sense of, or illusion of, alienation between parents and school.

Gives parents a better relationship with the school. Reduces problems further down the track – just giving the parents the confidence to come and talk to us [teachers].

Teachers commented that the ease of implementation was different in different communities according to the socio-economic status. Generally Home Visiting was welcomed and easy to implement in areas where there was relatively high SES:

There are lots of professional, well educated parents who are not afraid of teachers so there was no problem getting visits.

But more difficult in lower SES districts:

Needs to be a standardized part of all school procedures for vulnerable groups to be comfortable and sure you are not targeting them.

8.1.6 LIMITATIONS: Challenges for Home Visiting

Low SES – Hard to reach populations

The impact of poverty, de-regulation of work conditions and subsequent increased work hours in Australia has hit lower socio-economic groups with particular force. Teachers working in poorer suburbs often find that both parents are working long hours and that they never see a child's parent. A kindergarten child may be brought in by older siblings, caregivers or daycare workers. Poorer parents are under higher work pressure and the new Industrial Relations Laws make it harder for them to take time off work for parenting duties. The frequent third party drop-off and collection arrangements for some families means that there is no direct or personal communication link between teacher and parent. This makes organizing Home Visiting difficult.

Hard when both parents work full time and the child is in daycare. Hard to organize a time when the parents don't have time.

This is compounded by the fact that parents from lower socio economic groups are often less comfortable with contact with professionals and may visit the home visit with suspicion. There are some lower socio-economic and marginalized groups who may not have positive perceptions of the home visiting they may have experienced through mandated and community services.

The ones you would most like to get to are the ones you will least get to. The initial approach is confronting for people...as it becomes normalized and seen more as standard practice it will be easier to access the hard to reach [families].

Parental Misperceptions and Anxiety about Home Visiting

In some cases parents misinterpreted the intent of the visit and were fearful and anxious that some kind of assessment of their parenting capacity was involved. This is a particular risk and concern in lower SES districts. Some teachers found that they had to reassure parents that it really was a social visit and not an assessment.

Short Visit Time:

A number of parents and teachers found the half hour of time allocated for each family visit to be inadequate and cited short visit time as a program limitation:

Half an hour per family wasn't enough. Some parents needed 45 minutes just to get over their nervousness and say what they wanted to say. I couldn't do as many in a day as I thought. Five in a day was too many and too exhausting.

People want more time than half an hour.

Some teachers found the time consuming nature of the visits difficult and the limitations of funded hours for the LEAF program constrained what they could do within the Home Visit. Distances to be travelled and disruption to the continuity of the teaching week for teachers were also cited as time issues. Some teachers completed visits in their own time after school hours and expressed that there needed to be more funding to enable visit completion during work.

Recommendations: Home visiting needs to be standardized across schools and normalized as part of school transition procedure in order to address the concerns about a home visit which can be generated if parents perceive it as 'out of the ordinary' or targeted to them personally. This is a critical issue for parents from marginalized or lower SES communities. Alternative procedures may be needed for supporting and connecting with over-worked parents. Information about home visiting should be included in school enrolment introductory paperwork and procedures. In addition, LEAF coordinators reported that adequate funding needs to be allocated to ensure that the time devoted to Home Visits is paid time, even if conducted after normal work hours.

8.2 Home Visiting: Parent Feedback and Evaluation

8.2.1 Evaluation Tools:

The Parent Interviews and questionnaire protocol were designed to establish the extent to which the LEAF program had:

- Linked them to the school community
- Created a sense of belonging
- Increased their sense of confidence about managing the transition to school
- Increased their sense of working in partnership with the teacher and the school
- Helped them to prepare their child for school
- Increased their willingness to ask for and access, education and other support services,
- Helped them to manage difficult child behaviours
- Increased their knowledge of the importance of positive early childhood experience

8.2.2 Benefits

Parents unanimously reported that the impact of the Home Visit on their child was highly beneficial. When asked for a recommendation about Home Visiting continuing on a scale of 0-10 where zero represented discontinuation of the program and 10 represented strongest recommendation for Home Visiting to continue the parent recommendation across interviews averaged 9.6. This was an extremely affirming evaluation of the program.

Parents reported that the excitement about the visit increased their child's positive associations about school and their willingness to attend school. Parents unanimously reported that their child or children were highly excited before, during and after the teacher's visit and that this excitement and positive expectancy transferred into increased enthusiasm for school in the days and weeks following the visit. The visit was cited as a high point in the life of the child and as a critical incident in terms of the formation of the child's attitudes towards the teacher and school. "Excited" was the most frequent descriptor used by parents in discussing childrens' reactions to home visits.

The following home visit comments give some flavour of this expectancy:

- *My child loved it! She was so excited and felt very special.*
- *She's very excited you're here.*

- *He's been looking for you all day.*
- *She's been talking about it all day.*
- *She has asked and asked when you're coming.*
- *He has been looking out the window for you.*
- *She has tidied her room for you*
- *They've been planning what to show you.*
- *She's been very keen all day to see you get here.*
- *She's been jumping up and down!*
- *So excited! Kept asking when you would arrive.*

Parent Perception of Benefit for Children

1. Reduction in Child's Anxiety about School:

Parents reported that the Home Visit reduced their child's anxiety about school and their perception of the teacher as a 'stranger.'

Makes the journey to school a safe journey for the child. "She can be trusted because she [the teacher] has been to my house."

A great way to commence school life in that it helps the child to feel secure with their teacher who is somebody they will now spend more and more time with.

Gets to trust the teacher. Becomes someone the family knows so the child feels comfortable. The teacher becomes a trusted person.

It helps them trust. Rather special that the teacher comes to their house.

My child was very quiet. He's very shy but when he got to school he told everyone, "My teacher visited me!" It made him feel special.

2. Opportunity for the child to interact with the teacher in a context where they are confident:

It was a great opportunity for my son to interact with his teacher in a setting where he is comfortable and confident.

Making the child relax and feel more comfortable with this person.

3. Increased Personal Associations between Child and Teacher:

Parents felt that the Home Visit was an opportunity for the Child is able to share their 'world' with the teacher so that the teacher knows more about his or her home environment and therefore about him or herself:

She was able to show all her special things...things she could never take to kindy and to show her life up to kindy.

Makes him feel more comfortable because the teacher saw him at home and saw his things.

Great opportunity for X to show their teacher their home. Delightful to watch the children excitedly explain all the important things about home.

Good for my child as she was excited about her teacher coming to her home.

4 Facilitation of Cognitive and Emotional Links between Home and School:

Parents noted that the visit enabled children to link their home & school world in a new way.

It puts a link between home and kindy. We noticed that our kids didn't notice their carers from daycare in the supermarket. It [the Home Visit] helps them to recognize them[teachers] in other contexts.

Great idea and good for the child to see their teacher out of the workplace because basically they think they live there. They feel special that the teacher is making the effort to visit them and see their home environment.

Parent Perception of Benefits for Teachers

Parents saw the Home Visit as an opportunity for teachers to gain greater perspective on their child and more understanding of their individuality. Parents believed that this encounter would facilitate greater empathy and responsiveness to children in the school environment:

She gets to see where the kids have come from. The house and how they're living. The circumstances the child is coming from so the teacher can figure out why.

Gives the teacher a look at the dynamics in the home and she sees the child in their family. Gives an insight into the real child. You see the other side.

Parent Perception of Benefit for Parents:

Parents reported that Home Visiting lowered their own personal anxiety in regards to their child's school readiness and the critical time of transition to schooling.

Bringing teachers in to home makes the parents feel they care and 'its going to be alright'. Sometimes the parents need reassuring more than the children! The teacher cares enough to come and meet them.

Reassurance that it isn't going to be a stressful first few weeks and days.

They also appreciated that the visit provided them with the opportunity to get specific, tailored information about what to expect of School and to get their individual questions answered:

It helped us to understand what to expect....we could ask questions specific for us beyond broad information Asking about details... It took us a while to understand the nature of kindy.

Benefit to the Parent-Teacher Relationship

Parents felt that the Home Visit helped them to develop a more personal relationship with their child's teacher:

I found out more things having a chat on a more personal level – getting to know a bit of background on teachers as well. She's a parent too!

Good. Much easier to talk in the comfort of your own home.

They expressed gratitude for having the time to talk with teachers one-on-one:

Thank goodness! I don't know how else we could chat. (Parent working full time)

Parents felt that the fact that they were in a neutral (non-educational) environment and were on 'home territory' provided them with the sense of a 'safe space' in which they could feel more comfortable approaching and talking with teachers.

The home visit was also a great opportunity for myself as a parent to voice any concerns I might have about how my sons is going at school. Sometimes it can be scary as a parent to approach teachers with their concerns. In this case it was easy!

A little bit of one on one time in a safe environment. You don't always know how to approach them in their work environment.

A chance to talk and have a conversation without other things happening. Teachers are busy at kindly working so you can't talk.

I enjoyed the teacher visit. It was very friendly and the children liked having their teacher visit in their familiar environment

Home was described as a private environment which fosters conversation and relationship and enables deeper disclosure than might otherwise occur.

Good chance to explain some family circumstances directly with the teacher.

Benefits for the Community

1. Increased Parental Engagement with the School

Parents described Home Visiting as giving them an increased sense of connection to the school and a greater sense of school community:

I think LEAF is a wonderful initiative, it helps parents to feel welcomed by the school which I think is important as we walk hand-in-hand to bring up the next generation.

Starts to build sense of community early on in the education process.

A fantastic idea that is especially food for new families for them to feel part of the school community and that school cares. They are not just a number. It fosters a good relationship from the beginning.

The partnership approach was described as one of the best aspects of the visit and as much appreciated by the parents:

The way it was casual, relaxed and easy – the best way.

2. Increased Sense of Community for the School

Parents described the creation of a sense of community linked to schooling which the LEAF program fostered:

I grew up in a small town in the wheatbelt so you knew the teachers prior to school (in the community). It starts to create community – not just an isolated thing you send your kids too. You get that old fashioned community again instead of the 'drop and run' of daycare. Community can then carry on through the rest of school.

I recommend the school to friends. I say, "Why don't you come to X primary? Because at this school you can have Play cafes and home visits and your child gets to know the teacher and the school and gets comfortable with it all and gets comfortable."

Hopefully it will get parents more involved with the school because they feel included.

8.2.3 General Feedback:

Parents very positive about the visit and this seemed to transfer to a generally positive sense about the school and the school community which can be noted in their comments about HOW they found the visit:

Excellent.
Excellently comfortable and informing.
Very rewarding, informative and reassuring.
Fantastic – good effort. Good for the children to settle in and associate the teachers out of school.
Great fun.
Informative, informal and pleasant.
Friendly, positive and exciting (for the 4 year old).
Interesting and a fun interaction.

...by the positive comments when asked about how the school could support them in helping their child to have the best possible education experience:

All has been and is being done.

And in open feedback and suggestions:

Teachers and teachers' aides need a raise.

[I hope] that all of my child's teachers will be as enthusiastic and interested in my child's education as the pre-primary teacher. Its great to see! Well done.

Any school would be pleased to gain this type of positive parent perception and feedback. It is clear that the Home Visiting as conducted through the LEAF program results in increased positive connections and perceptions of teaching staff which, in turn, increases the positive relationship and sense of community fostered in the school community during the Early Childhood period.

8.2.4 Home Visiting Challenges Identified by Parents:

The main challenge identified by parents was the fact that Home Visiting was a rare event. Commonly parents expressed the opinion that Home Visiting should continue for all critical schooling transition periods:

It would be really good before Grade 1. I hope it will be there to aid their transition from a common area to the big school. Us as well not knowing how primary school works. Whats expected of us.

I do suggest that the home visits be more of a regular thing ie: once every 4 weeks or so. This way it would be more productive (but only if the visitor has enough time.)

A couple of parents felt that the visit was a bit early in the year and that they would have liked it to have occurred later in the year so that they could talk with the teacher and ask her specific questions about their child's progress and development. Some parents were a little apprehensive about the visit and would have liked even more information about the purpose of the visit and the LEAF program before the visit occurred. Parents also expressed the opinion that half an hour was a very short period of time and that they would have liked to have seen this time extended.

8.3 Summary of Home Visit Evaluation Outcomes

The Home Visits have had excellent outcomes for parents, children and teachers. The impact of the Home Visit on children's sense of comfort and security in the school environment is significant. As a result of the Home Visit children express more enthusiasm, less anxiety and greater belonging and sense of connectivity to the school environment. The impact of this on their readiness to engage in learning activities and within the learning environment is critical. The Home Visit also helps children to become more comfortable with the teacher and to see the teacher as part of their intimate circle of trusted relationships. One consequence of this is that children become more relaxed at school, more confident and less inhibited in their expression.

Parents also reported a greater sense of connection to the school and a greater sense of belonging to the school community as a result of the home visit. Parents reported feeling more relaxed with the teacher and a greater willingness to approach teachers after their home visit experience. The personal one-on-one interaction in the home visit was highly valued by parents. Teachers found the Home Visits gave them a greater understanding of the environment of the child and a better understanding of children's learning and emotional needs. The home visit fast-tracked teacher-parent relationship with significantly positive relationship benefits and increased teacher-parent communication flow.

Recommendations:

Home Visiting needs to be a standardized procedure for school transition if it is to have maximum effectiveness. This is particularly critical in poorer, ethnically diverse and lower socio-economic neighbourhoods where parents are wary of institutionalized services and may feel less comfortable with professionals. This is a critical issue for parents from marginalized or lower SES communities. Information about home visiting should be included in school enrolment introductory paperwork and procedures. Training of teachers in a partnership approach is critical to ensure cultural and familial sensitivity and positive outcomes of the visit.

Adequate time needs to be given for teachers to prepare for Home Visiting and this includes the allocation of co-teachers and sufficient time for travelling and meeting with all families in their class allocations.

Play Café Specific Outcomes

LEAF Training subsumed the first five weeks of Term 1 with the remaining five weeks devoted to completion of initial Home Visits. Play Café's commenced in Term 2 (Appendix C). The Play Café's were operational from this point until December with each school offering a weekly Play Café to September and some schools continuing after this date. During this period 150 Play Café's with 1740 parent and 2377 child attendances were recorded. There were 28 professional guest presentations, 577 educational activities and 1881 pieces of service provider information distributed through Play Café's in the six designated catchment areas.

9.0 Parent Feedback

Parents have expressed the two greatest benefits of the Play Café's as being able to meet with other parents from the school community and as their child having the opportunity to get to know their future school mates. Both of these outcomes involve the development of a sense of community for parents and children attending the school and the development of a sense of belonging to the school community.

When asked to rate Play Café's as Little or no benefit, some benefit, beneficial or highly beneficial, [Table 9] 100% of parents rated the Café's as Highly Beneficial or Beneficial with zero ratings of "Little or No Benefit." (See Appendix D for Evaluation Tool). When asked to give a Satisfaction rating (where 0 represents Very Dissatisfied with Play Café's, 5 represents Satisfied and 10 represents Highly Satisfied) there were zero ratings in the Dissatisfied range (from 0-5) and over 94% of participants recording ratings of very High Satisfaction (8-10).

Table 9: Parent Ratings of Satisfaction with Play Café'

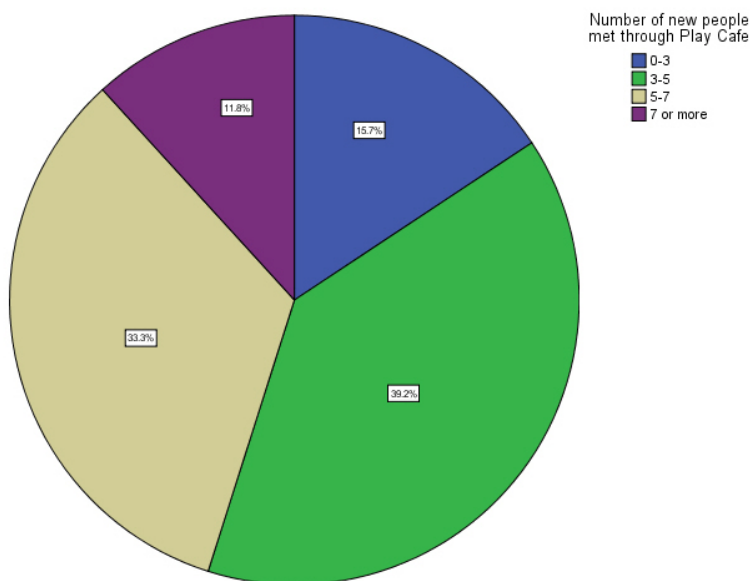
Level of satisfaction with Play Cafe this year					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	6	2	3.9	3.9	3.9
	7	1	2.0	2.0	5.9
	8	7	13.7	13.7	19.6
	9	10	19.6	19.6	39.2
	Highly satisfied	31	60.8	60.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

When asked to give their recommendation of whether or not Play Café's should continue [Table 10], where 0 represented: Little value – Discontinue, 5 represented Some Value and 10 represented High Value – Continue) there were no ratings in the "Little to Some Value" area (0-5) with over 95% of responses as 9-10 ("High Value" – Definitely Continue).

Table 10: Parent Recommendation for Play Café' Continuance

Recommendation for Play cafe to continue					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	7	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	8	1	2.0	2.0	3.9
	9	6	11.8	11.8	15.7
	Definitely continue	43	84.3	84.3	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

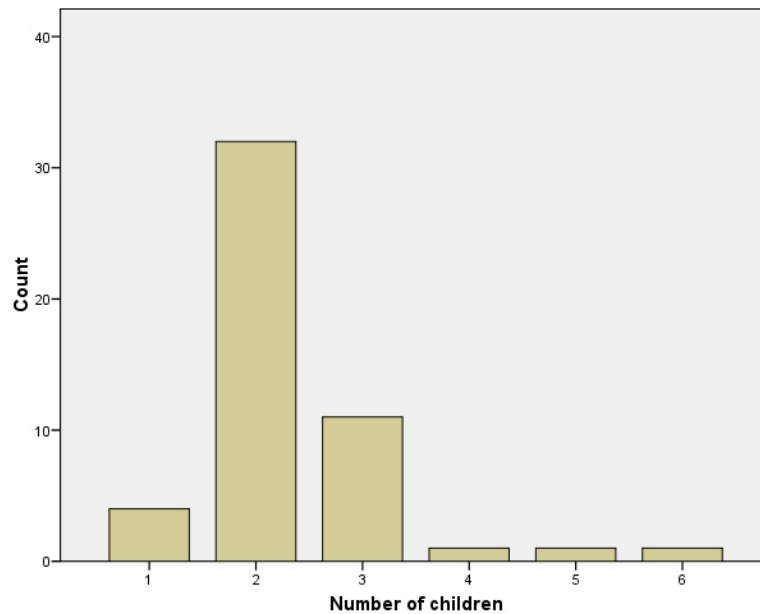
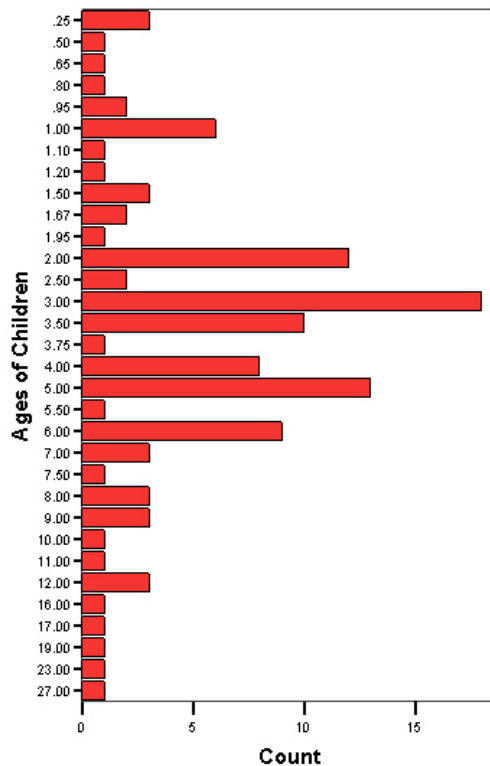
Social Capital – Networking and Social Resources [Figure: When asked how many new people they had met as a result of the Play Café's parents cited the categories of 3-5 and 5-7 most frequently (52% of responses). Mental health studies recommend that families need at least 5 social support resources for healthy functioning.

Figure 1: Social Capital Fostered through PlayCafé'

9.1 Primary Benefit

Parents presenting to Play Café' in these first sessions have cited the benefit of the Café's as their child getting to know their future school mates. This is also listed as the primary benefit they initially sought from the Play Café's, followed closely by the opportunity for them to meet with other parents, the benefit of their child getting to know the Kindy teacher and being exposed to a range of activities. Initially parents were less aware of the educational and service provision aspects of the Café' but parents expressed that the information offered was interesting and helpful.

Parents particularly expressed appreciation for the physical closeness and accessibility of the LEAF Café' facility for parents with small children (Figure 2) and most attendees had more than one child and two or more children of pre-school age (Figure 3). The fact that the Play Café' was in the same location where parents are having to drop older children at school was cited as an extra convenience and time saving for busy parents.

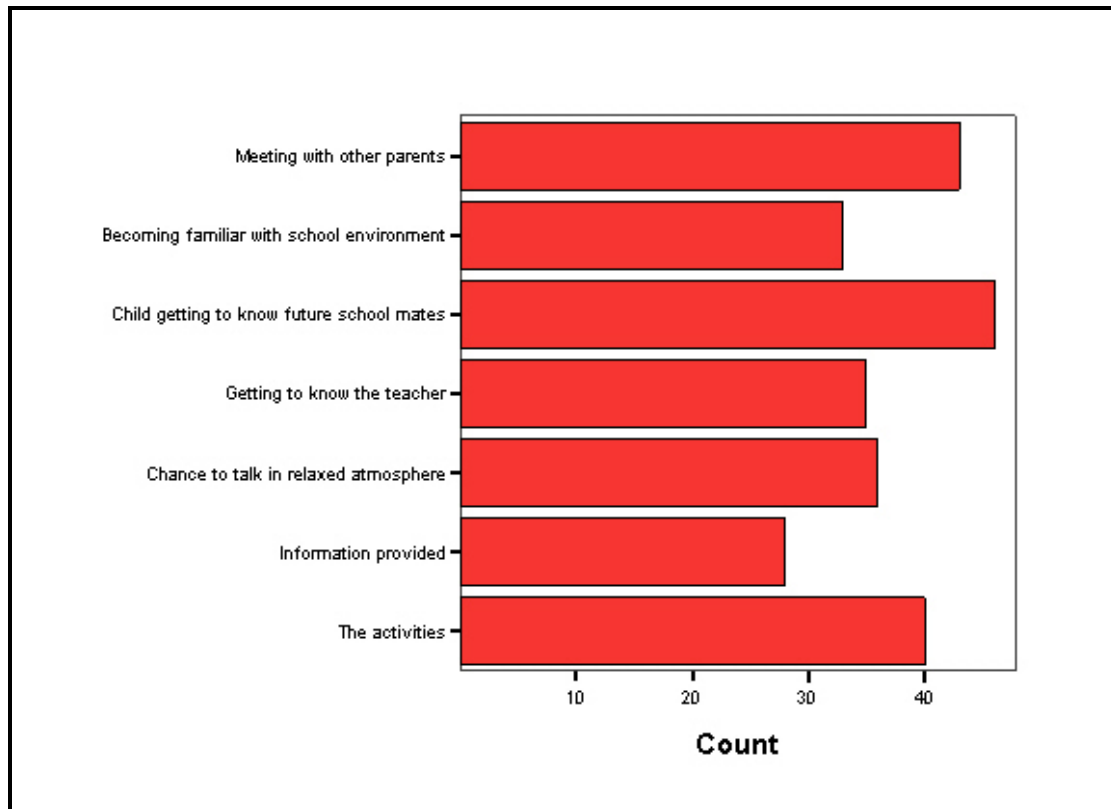
Figure 2: Attendance Demographic -Number of Children**Figure 3: Attendance Demographic –Ages of Children**

I am happy with the set up. Its close, friendly, stimulating and fun. Kids have a ball. There are lots of activities not normally done at home and social interaction with children of a similar age.

Closeness to where I live, children love it, great for their social and play skills, no cost, awesome facility. Its perfect.

Parents cited most of the functions of Play Cafe' as being of benefit to them and as being reasons they had chosen to attend (Figure 4) this LEAF activity:

Figure 4: Important Aspects of Play Cafe' for Parent Attendees



In interviews parents noted the value of being able to observe and note how their child interacted with others of their own age and for them as parents to learn more about the benefits of social interaction. The development of their child's social skills was cited frequently as a benefit that parents noted as a result of attendance at Play Café's.

Most useful? Interaction with other Mums. Developing the social skills of my children and exposing them to the school environment.

I [saw] a different side of my child and how he interacts with others and how others interact with him.

I [observed] the social skills of my daughter and how she would fit into the school environment.

It appears that the Play Café's raise parents' consciousness of early childhood development issues and their awareness that they can be active agents in fostering their child school readiness and educational skills. The Café's expose parents to a range of activities they can use at home to continue the nurturing process with their child.

I learned the value of group play. [A] more stimulating environment makes for happier children.

Parents with younger children were enthusiastic about the opportunity to give their child exposure to the school environment. They felt that this would help their child to become comfortable with the school surroundings and hence would ease their transition to formal schooling in the year to come:

The environment is similar to really going to kindy which is great for my 3 and a half year old. [Benefits as] building confidence in Kindy environment and building independence.

[Most like to get out of Play Café'] For my boys to learn and feel comfortable in the school environment.

Getting used to kids that will be going to Kindy next year, familiar with environment and teacher.

Getting my child ready for kindy next year, familiar with surroundings so hopefully “no tears!”

Parents also noted that the Play Café’ enables their children to acquire a range of skills that prepare them for learning in the school environment.

[Benefit as] concentration increased and child adapting to ‘structured program.’

My daughter loves it very much – getting comfortable and ready for Kindy.

Good idea for kids sitting and concentrating on a story at the end of play. Taking instruction from others/teachers.

[Johnnie] wanted to go to school with a bag and lunch just like his sister...[Johnniegets to] play with children (interact) in the school environment.

As the primary target group of the LEAF intervention is the families who have children who will be entering kindergarten in the near future this is an excellent outcome.

The enthusiasm about Play Café’s can be noted in the section in the attendance register where parents can give a one line comment about the day’s activities. A selection of typical comments is provided below:

- ✓ *Think this is a great idea.*
- ✓ *Nice and relaxing atmosphere.*
- ✓ *Relaxing and happy.*
- ✓ *STEVIE LOVES IT!*
- ✓ *Awesome time.*
- ✓ *Great fun.*
- ✓ *Enjoyed it.*
- ✓ *Thank you very much. Its great.*
- ✓ *Its good to get out of the house.*
- ✓ *Great fun.*
- ✓ *This is just what I was looking for.*
- ✓ *Interesting. Good to know these things.*

9.2 Activities Offered:

A range of activities, presentations and discussion topics have already been offered through the Play Café's. These include the following –

- Literacy and the Alphabet in early childhood.
- Community Nurse Services
- Early Years Networks and Services
- Speech and Language Coordinator: Oral Language Development
- Separation and Divorce and Children
- Gifted and Talented Childrearing Issues.
- Building Safe Environments for Children.

Activities for Children have included – among others: Play dough, paints, songs, water patterns, bubbles, shakers, stamps, dinosaur garden, crowns, sand farm, hand prints, threading, construction, leaf rubbing, glued collage, music and stories.

Parent Suggestions:

Parents would like the Play Café' time to be longer “*more time to complete all of the great activities*”, to facilitate more interaction with the teacher and the structured activities provided by the teacher.

9.2 Service Interventions:

As described earlier in the Impact analysis of the social support function of the LEAF program the Play Café's provided an excellent contact point and vehicle for service providers to connect with parents of children in the period before school commencement. The relaxed atmosphere of Play Café' also expedited the connection and referral process between parent and professional.

Case 8:Service Provider Experience

Professional Feedback

I have just attended Playcafe at X Primary School- about 15 mums and one dad and two grannies with about double the children. All ages- babes in arms up to 4yo's. Some I know already as they have been clients of mine, others are new. I was there for 1.5 hours. In that time, I did an informal talk/discussion on mealtimes and fussy eaters for about 8 mums- with lots of input from them. I also discussed individual problems re meals with one mum, using triple P tip sheet. I made appt for another for an individual Triple P consult re behaviour (3yo) and another for toilet training/behaviour (3yo). Another 4yo will require follow up for possible speech issues. It is good also just to network with the mums, a couple of whom are pregnant. I think it would be good for the kindy teachers to be in serviced as to what types of services we can provide, especially individual Triple P consults.

9.4 Summary

The overall feedback from parents about the benefits of Play Café' for themselves and their children was almost unanimously positive with the school readiness, information and social support benefits of the Café's rated very highly. Parents currently cite the Café's as highly beneficial and strongly recommend that they continue.

Professional Linking Activities:

LEAF peer support is being fostered through frequent contact with other coordinators and mentoring (377 contacts). The LEAF program achieved excellent outcomes in linking families to community services and early intervention providers. As a result of the program 256 discussions were held with Service Providers which in turn facilitated 107 informal referrals (parent given recommendation, information and service provider contact) for children in the early childhood period. Although it was beyond the scope of the evaluation to track all service approaches in the

six districts and whether information had been garnered from the LEAF program at least 76 formal Early Interventions were made for children as a result of parental engagement with the LEAF program. These children will enter the school system better equipped to learn and without the added disadvantage of a period of their schooling being conducted with some form of learning or developmental delay. In addition LEAF program activities resulted in the distribution of 1881 pieces of service provider information and in the provision of 388 pieces of information regarding early childhood progress and development to the Primary Schools involved to assist them in helping children with school transition and learning readiness.

Challenges, Recommendations and Conclusions

10.0 Program Challenges and Recommendations

Program implementation occurred smoothly with few intra-program challenges. Feedback from the community and service providers identified some challenges which would need to be considered in further implementations of the project:

10.1 Adequate Time Allocation for Program Implementation

LEAF Co-ordinators highlighted how important the paid time allocation was to the success of LEAF program implementation:

Time, time, time! Having the time to do things I know is good practice (eg: visit families and participate in the play group) was the key thing about LEAF for me. The time allowance was suitably generous and gave me time to attend to "extra" things that came up as well.

The initial grant allocation was unexpected as it was 12 months later than the application indicated so there was a sudden catalyst into a frenzy of activity at a time when the Project Manager was working full time as a teacher and winding up the school year. There had been a change of personnel at IIOY since the application had been written and there was considerable time pressure as Principals, teachers and District Office staff were all leaving for the Christmas break. There was the added pressure of having no precedent for the collaboration between IIOY and DETWA and the appropriate authorities had to be identified, and engaged with, the project prior to Christmas. This is an ongoing issue with obtaining authorization for short term projects which need permission to be implemented within a larger public bureaucratic structure which has its own complexity of procedures. Some modifications had to be made to the program (such as to the training schedule) as there wasn't time to notify, authorize and train teachers before the year ended. Gaining the support of all of the Principals was key to program success and this had to occur quickly as teachers needed to be supported so that they could implement the LEAF activities in their teaching environment as soon as the year began.

Additionally, the Education department has a moratorium (and justifiably so) on requiring teachers to perform any additional duties above and beyond what their current, significant workload. This means that program funding is essential and that teachers must be allocated sufficient time by their Principals and other Managers to enable them to complete all program duties. Sustainability of workload was a critical issue to be managed. This model utilises the expertise of the Early Childhood specialists within the school who need to be supported in their workload in order to achieve the kinds of outputs achieved through LEAF.

In contrast, while Allied Health providers found the program really useful and were very personally willing to get more involved with the schools they highlighted the reality that this task needed to be included in their work brief and workload allocation if it was to be sustainable over time.

The general consensus amongst the [professionals] involved with Playcafe's is that attending them has been worthwhile- particularly in reaching clients that do not always attend the clinic. The hard part has been that we have been short staffed for a large proportion of the year- so there has not been the time to put into the program. I think

there also needs to be formal recognition of the program by our senior management in terms of time allocation for us.

A challenge that was completely unexpected was the large numbers of people who came to some school Play Café's (over 70 in some attendances). The problems of managing large numbers of families, was stressful to some teachers at the start and was eased as routines and relationships developed but teachers need to be prepared for the possibility of large attendances.

10.2 Allowing Autonomy and Flexibility in Program Implementation

While the Coordinators were unanimous about the positive impact of LEAF not all teachers may be comfortable with either a job-share option or having a relief teacher work with the children while they do Home Visiting.

Negative? Being out of my classroom. I believe that young children are better off when there is consistency of teaching staff (I don't agree with specialist teaching or tandem teaching for this age group). While everyone survived/coped, I believe that the children in my class were disadvantaged by me being out of the class for a day a week, on top of my half day's DOTT.

While the Home Visits were mainly administered in a block in Semester One there may be other options for teachers who prefer not to use relief staff such as allocating one afternoon a week during first term as Home Visit time. This would also make it easier on teachers to have a mutually suitable time when they know parents will be available.

10.3 Hard to Reach Populations

It was significant that some of the poorer school areas had lower Play Café' and Home Visit allocation. The children of parents who are working full time are less likely to gain access to the program. Lower SES families are likely to be working erratic shifts and long hours and may be more wary of school services. Workload of poor families is a social rather than a program issue. For parents who are working full time and won't be accessing Play Café' activities the Home Visit is a crucial link and those families from traditionally marginalised background need to receive extra assurance and flexibility in relation to the Home Visit.

10.4 Maintaining Family Partnership Principles while Attaining Program Flexibility

The program Manager, Ms. Fiona Farren is an experienced Level 3 Teacher who put a lot of energy, enthusiasm and extra hours into the program this year. She is very well grounded in the Family Partnership approach and has emphasized its core principles of respect for families and non-invasive and co-operative approaches at every level of implementation. This emphasis was a core element of LEAF program success in 2007.

The themes of respect and collaboration were evident throughout the interviews and parents emphasized how the whole approach of the LEAF program and Coordinators had lowered their anxiety, given them information and resources and made them feel both relaxed and competent about enabling their child's school readiness and interacting with school professionals.

Any program implementation which did not emphasize the high level of interpersonal skill and protocols which respect and empower families, ensure confidentiality and actively prevent invasion and disruption to family coping would not achieve the same positive outcomes.

Coordinators clearly understood the importance of the flexible and respectful approach as it related to themselves ie: in Ms. Farren's approach to implementation (Appendix B). In training and implementation the strengths and capacities of individual teachers was respected and they were given the autonomy to tailor the program in ways that would work in their region.

Over-regimentation in a roll-out could miss the critical centrality of the respectful Partnership approach to all levels of the program and to its success.

I think we need to guard against the possibility of a formulaic approach. The strength of LEAF is its flexibility and 'grass-roots-ness.' At most, there might be some broad "fuzzy" outcomes for the program and perhaps some suggested ways to achieve those outcomes, such as the home visits, and play groups. But it must also allow for other ideas to emerge. I think a broad statement of philosophy and some guiding principles that underpin this philosophy is what is needed. In this age of accountability/blame/risk averseness I think there is a danger of (with the best of intentions of course) of so-called accountability ending up taking up time that could be spent so much more effectively.

10.5 Other Community Groups

Some Playgroups were concerned that Play Cafe's could professionalize and thereby deplete the parent based Playgroups in the area. The goals of LEAF are quite specific and relate to ensuring school readiness and fostering early child development. Given the paucity of social support for some families it is more likely that LEAF could work in partnership and collaboration with other groups to ensure that families have access to a range of social resources and networking opportunities that can benefit themselves and their child. One teacher found that her attendance appeared to be critical because once the Play Cafe' returned to a Playgroup format in the final month of the year numbers dropped dramatically. There are clearly unique elements to the Play Cafe' which are distinct to other formats.

10.6 Information and Publicity

Gaining information and linking services was a major challenge to the program:

One of the challenges for the coordinators (including myself) was that we were not well informed about the community resources available to families in our area. I gathered as much as I could with the assistance of the Community Nurses as part of the Training component. We all developed an Information Pack that was handed to new parents at Play Cafes. These were individual to each Coordinator.

As a result of identifying this issue and discussions during Steering Committee meetings IIOY applied for funding to produce a two sided laminated A4 Community Resources for Families sheet. This has been extremely useful and distributed widely. The email network of the Bunbury Early Years Network which involves local professionals and families working with 0 to 4 year olds also became a primary source of information for the LEAF program.

The Program Manager commented on the importance of publicity for program success:

*Our primary issue has always been, **who are the families with 0 to 4 year olds and how can we contact them to let them know about Play Cafes?** I participated in radio interviews, newspaper articles and photos with the other coordinators. We wrote articles for the school newsletters and looked at the school population and younger siblings and put. Posters on community information boards and in local shops. In the end we have found that once we started, word of mouth is the primary way that people found out about us. The local parenting centre and the Community nurses were the other sources that appeared most effective. One of our local papers the Bunbury Mail has been very supportive.*

Publicity is a key issue, particularly for engaging hard-to-reach populations and ensuring they are aware of the program as a resource in their area. The September function at the local Sailing Club to invite stakeholders to come to a presentation of the LEAF program helped to inform a wide range of professionals of the program objectives, practices and availability.

10.2 Evaluation Summary

A core program goal for LEAF is to fostering home-school partnerships and greater social connectivity for families in order to decrease the specific risk factor for families of social isolation. In addition LEAF aims to provide a range of resources to support parents in nurturing their children during the early childhood period. LEAF programs aim to ensure early identification of learning and developmental delays in pre-school children and to ensure appropriate linking to services that can support parents and children prior to, and in their initial engagement with, school. It also aims to foster positive relationships between parents, health and educational staff to ensure they can work in partnership for the benefit of the child.

Home Visits were enormously popular with both parents and children who stressed that having the teacher in their home helped them to feel comfortable approaching her with questions, queries and concerns and helped them to feel that both the teacher and the school were part of a system of social support they could access. In this sense, the Home Visit can be seen as an important tool in reducing wariness and distrust of the school as a bureaucratic system and increasing parents' sense of the school as a support resource for parent and child. The focus of Home Visits on relationship building, respecting confidentiality and people's homes and adhering to the partnership approach was a critical element of the success of LEAF Home Visiting.

Participants were clear that the LEAF program increased the number and depth of their social connections and gave them a sense of having an expanded support system. Respondents included not just school families but also school and service provider personnel in their expanded definition of support system. Again, this highlights the centrality and benefit of using a respectful, non-invasive partnership approach when professionals are assisting families. The Home Visiting gave families an increased sense of connection with the teacher and gave children increased positive expectancy about their relationship with the teacher and school.

It was clear that the informal, relaxed and supportive approach fostered by Co-ordinators in both the Home Visits and the Play Cafe's was experienced as positive by participants and also that it empowered them to further seek services and professional support for their families. Family willingness to access services and uptake of services were positively influenced by the LEAF program. Parents reported that LEAF was such a positive experience of interacting with professionals that it definitely increased their willingness to engage with other service providers. Again, it is critical to note the importance and centrality of the respectful partnership approach in fostering this willingness. Play Cafe's were also cited as increasing the partnerships between teachers and other health providers. Allied Health providers reported increased involvement in the school community as a result of the LEAF program.

One of the most significant impacts of the LEAF program was found to be its impact on fostering school readiness. Parents almost unanimously reported that the LEAF activities of Home Visiting and Play Cafe' had increased their child's readiness for school as well as their own confidence that they could support their child in managing the transition for schooling. Parents pointed out a number of aspects of the LEAF program which they felt assisted their child in attaining school readiness. Key aspects included familiarizing the child to the school environment in a relaxed manner so that their energy could be focussed on learning other aspects of school structure in the year to come and introducing them gradually to a range of aspects of school life so that they could assimilate the change gradually and without unhealthy levels of arousal, anxiety or stress. Many parents reported that not only did Play Cafe' lower their child's anxiety about school but that it actually fostered enthusiasm and excitement about beginning school and a positive expectancy in relation to educational experience.

Parents reported a number of other ways that LEAF helped prepare their child for school. One way was by familiarizing the child with school structure and by building a range of skills that would be helpful and increase their capacity to benefit from the educational experience. A

significant outcome of the program was parents' heightened awareness of the importance of the early childhood period; the idea of developmental stages and awareness that they had a role and could foster their child's healthy development. Some parents were contrasted the benefit of having access to this information with not having had similar access with an older child and reported that LEAF enabled them to understand the normal developmental experiences of their child.

The program statistics were robust and demonstrated an enormous investment-return benefit for a funding outlay of 40 days of program time per teacher. The LEAF program was found to be initiated in a timely manner, to include all proposed program activities, to reach the target population, to be satisfactory to participants, to successfully facilitate information flow, and school and service links for families. The program was clearly efficacious and cost-effective in providing a range of family, school and community linking, social capital development and early education services to families with pre-school children.

The LEAF program achieved its core goal of fostering home-school partnerships and greater social connectivity for families thereby decreasing the specific risk factor for families of social isolation. In addition LEAF provided a range of resources – social, informational and educational – during the 2007 implementation that supported parents in nurturing their children during the early childhood period. The program was highly successful in increasing parent access to, and comfort with, a range of early intervention services and ensured non-invasive early identification of learning and developmental delays in pre-school children engaged with the program. It was clearly successful in fostering positive relationships between parents, health and educational staff, creating an environment where everyone could work together in partnership for the benefit of the child.

Clearly the LEAF program is helping link parents to the school and helping to create a sense of belonging to the school community. It is increasing parents' sense of confidence about managing their child's transition to school, increasing their sense of working in partnership with the teacher and the school and increasing their willingness to ask for and access, education and other support services. In addition it is clearly helping parents to nurture their children educationally, socially and emotionally and thereby prepare their child for a positive education and schooling experience and hence for better employment, health and life outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Linking Education And Families

WELCOME

Thank you for taking the time to join us

On arrival, please have some morning tea

There will be a photo story running at this time. It is made from photos at the Play Cafés that have been running this year at the six pilot schools.

Speakers

Ian Harvey , Principal
South Bunbury Primary School

The Hon Geoff Prosser MP Member for Forrest

Neil Milligan, District Director
Bunbury Education District

Pat Johnston (Acting Manager Community Health)

Professor Rhonda Oliver (Chair, Investing In Our Youth)

Fiona Farren – a short presentation and closing comments
(LEAF Project Manager)



LEAF is funded in 2007 by



Linking Education And Families (LEAF)

The program was initiated at South Bunbury Primary School in 2005 with a grant from the local district office. The grant released the Kindergarten teacher, Fiona Farren, one day a week for 12 months to develop strategies to connect with local families with children under 4 years old. We wanted to support families with young children in developing networks with each other and the school and other community resources. The expansion of the program from a school based initiative to a district pilot program has resulted from the strong response at a school and district level.

After reflection and research two main strategies were decided:

- The Kindy teacher would visit each Kindy child at home (**Family Visiting**)
- The kindy teacher would facilitate an opportunity for parents and children of the pre kindy age (0 to 3 years) to come to the kindy on a morning when there were no kindy children there (non contact day). These sessions became known as **Play Café's**.

The funding is from a federal body through a community based organization. The facilities and staff are provided by public and private schools. This is an innovative and exciting model for the management of resources that benefits our children in the vital early years and supports their families. We believe that collaboration between service providers is the most effective way to share resources, assist families and give them information and support when it is required. We continue to actively seek partnerships within the community that will benefit the families we come into contact with through our school activities.

The LEAF program was initiated in 2005 and maintained during 2006. In 2006 the same funding was given to 3 schools, Harvey PS, Brunswick Junction PS and Yarloop PS to initiate the model as appropriate in each school community.

During this time Investing In Our Youth, a local non profit body developed to promote local initiatives suggested a collaborative grant application to initiate the LEAF activities in 5 local schools. The grant application was sent to the National Community Crime Prevention Program (Federal) and was successful in September 2006. These funds have released an early childhood teacher from six local schools one day a week to develop the community support structures within their school for 0 to 4 year olds.

The funds are administered by Investing in Our Youth. The responsibility for report deadlines is also with them. DET is supplying the expertise and knowledge through the Program Manager Fiona Farren and the LEAF Coordinators.

As a consequence 6 schools (including South Bunbury) are implementing the LEAF program in 2007. Five Kindergarten and one Pre primary teacher have been appointed as coordinators in their school. They attend 5 days training in the first term (including Protocols and Safety for Family Visiting). The Coordinators have implemented Play Cafes in their school in Term 2 and 3 on a weekly basis. Term 1 was allocated for Training and Family Visiting. A further opportunity for Family Visiting will be made in Terms 3 and 4 as appropriate in each school.

The schools in 2007 are:

- South Bunbury Primary School
- Bunbury Primary School
- Cooina Primary School
- Carey Park primary School
- St Marys Catholic Primary School
- Withers Primary School

A professional Evaluator Dr Katie Thomas, has been appointed to evaluate the impact of the LEAF activities and the process of training and implementation.

An interim report will be submitted to NCCPP in June and a final report in January 2008. The Principals' (or Deputy Principal) meet several times. They have been assisted by Jean Rice an experienced Early Childhood Consultant who has agreed to advise them on how the LEAF Program fits with current best practice and their School Development Plans. A Steering Committee with established Terms Of Reference meets each month. This group monitors the progress of the activities for 2007 and is composed of Community, Department of Health, Department Of Community, and Education (DET) representatives.

The LEAF Program is based on principles of Family and Community Centered practice. The coordinators are trained to work in partnership with the families involved in the program. We plan and work collaboratively with our local Community Health team and are active in the Bunbury Early Years Network. The effectiveness of our approach is reflected in the mid year evaluation report, as the program is based on solid, evidence based research within Australia and internationally. The response from our community has been positive and has demonstrated the need for this type of program. This is an example of what is possible when the community works together.

Contacts

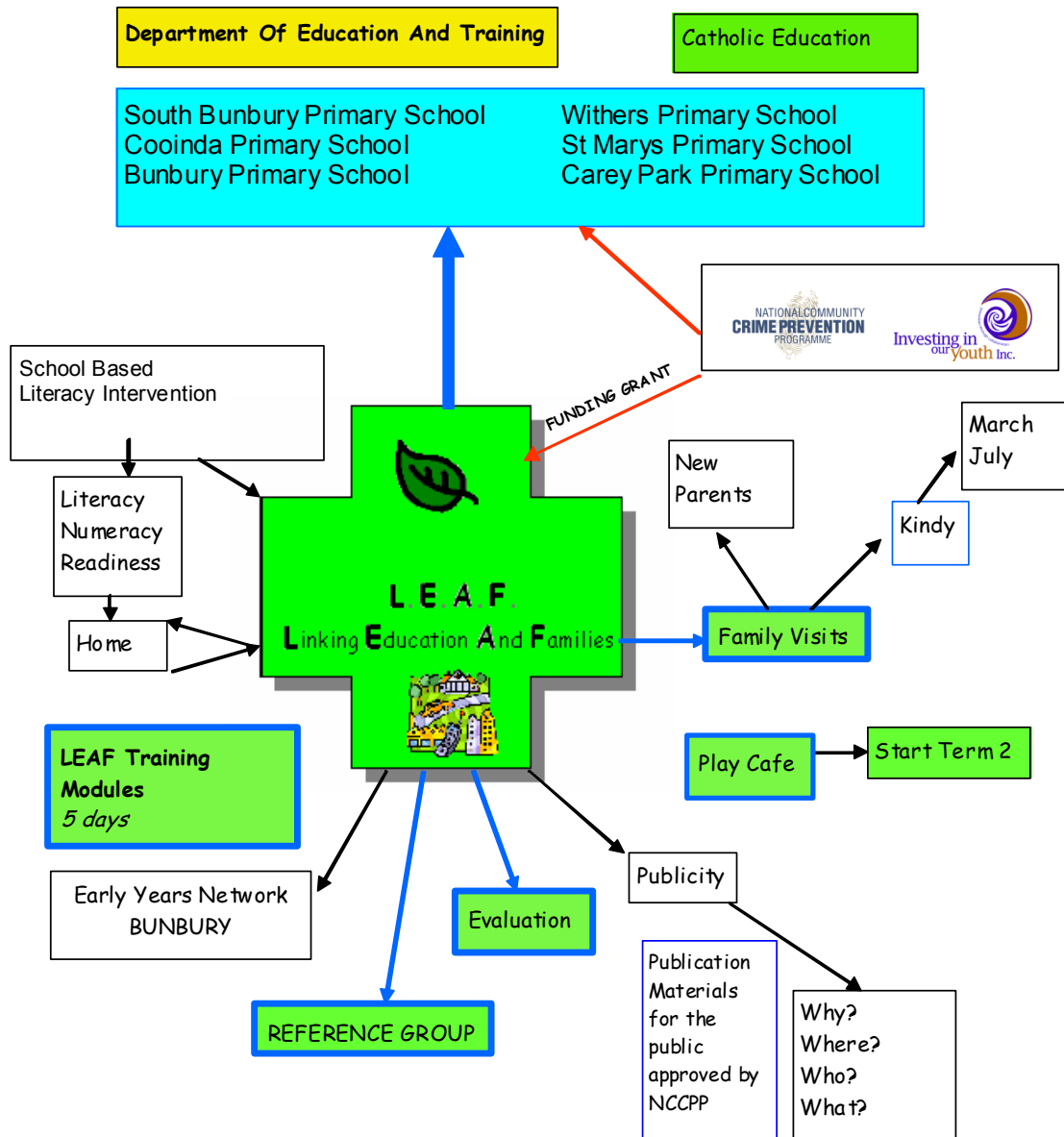
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Program Manager

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Carmen Gregg
Investing In Our Youth, Bunbury
Project officer

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LINKING EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PROGRAMME 2007



The LEAF model is adaptable to meet the needs of different school communities. The Partnership Model is the foundation. The development of mutually respectful partnerships will provide a standard for relationships between families and the school community. Research shows that quality time invested in universal programs for families that assist and encourage them as the decision makers and planners for their child's needs are far more effective long term, than intervening on a child by child basis. This is a universal model which is inclusive of every family in our school and 'prior to school' community. Our strategies seek to provide friendly connections for families or our school community resources and the many resources available in our wider community that can be accessed by parents for enrichment or support in crisis.

Appendix B

PARTNERSHIP

A Nautical Model



The 'expert' model is the model most educational and health professionals are familiar with. This expects us to be experts with the heavy responsibility of informing families of best practice.

If you imagine us all in boats on a wide river, each family has a boat and we as educators are on one of the larger boats. We hand out many books and pamphlets and lectures explaining how to improve the boat and upgrade the facilities and retrain the captain and crew. These are available in many colourful formats, all intended to enhance the lives of the families who live on the boats. It is mainly excellent advice, well intended, unfortunately, much of it falls unread into the water and floats away. The family boats' started their journeys from a wide variety of places and some look very different. Some began in Holland and some unexpectedly found themselves there. The family boats come in many shapes and sizes and some run better than others and some have severe maintenance and management problems.

Some of the boats are far away and have other pressing problems and find our big boat impersonal and intimidating. In the past pirates have come from big boats and hurt or damaged members of the family boat crew.

It was suggested that the large boats build some smaller vessels we will call Partnership craft, these moor along side the bigger vessel. One of these boats may pull alongside a family boat and ask if it would be alright if a crew member stopped in for a coffee and a chat? A crew member listens reflectively to the personal story of the family on that boat, they take no bags or files. They ask if it would be helpful if they worked alongside the family for part of the journey. The Family Captain makes the decision and continues to take responsibility for steering the boat, the partner works along side in a friendly respectful relationship. He may know some people who have been on a similar journey and have better maps.

Like most travellers they will follow the advice of people they think they can trust who have taken the time to listen. When trust and empathy are developed the Family Boats are increasingly found moored near the large boats on occasion. They are likely to visit and listen to others stories and contribute their own skills and abilities to the journey. They are often willing to share with others who have recently arrived. I have found that the smooth running boats also value the partnership opportunities and respond with pleasure to the contact we have. They do not have specified problems but they are also in need of a safe community in which to raise their young.



Appendix C



Linking Education And Families

South Bunbury Kindergarten
Prosser Street
South Bunbury
Western Australia 6230
School Phone 97213299 Fax 97213445
Mobile 0401548071



Dear Parents

Welcome to our school year 2007. I look forward to getting to know you and your children.

If you have any queries regarding the start of the year, please feel to contact me. I am available on the mobile any time or at the school number when term starts. It is my desire to make this year a rewarding and enjoyable experience for your family and your child. If there are any issues you would like to discuss regarding your child please let me know soon so we can be sure to meet and talk as early as possible.

Each year I ask the kindy families if I may visit you at home in first term. I have found it a valuable way to get to know each child in a place that is familiar for them. They then feel more comfortable with me and that eases the transition to the kindy. It also gives you and I the opportunity to talk without other distractions.

My plan is to make a time with you at the start of the year so I can visit some time over the next few weeks.

I have enclosed a welcome letter for your child and also a balloon to tie on your letter box to help me find you when I visit.

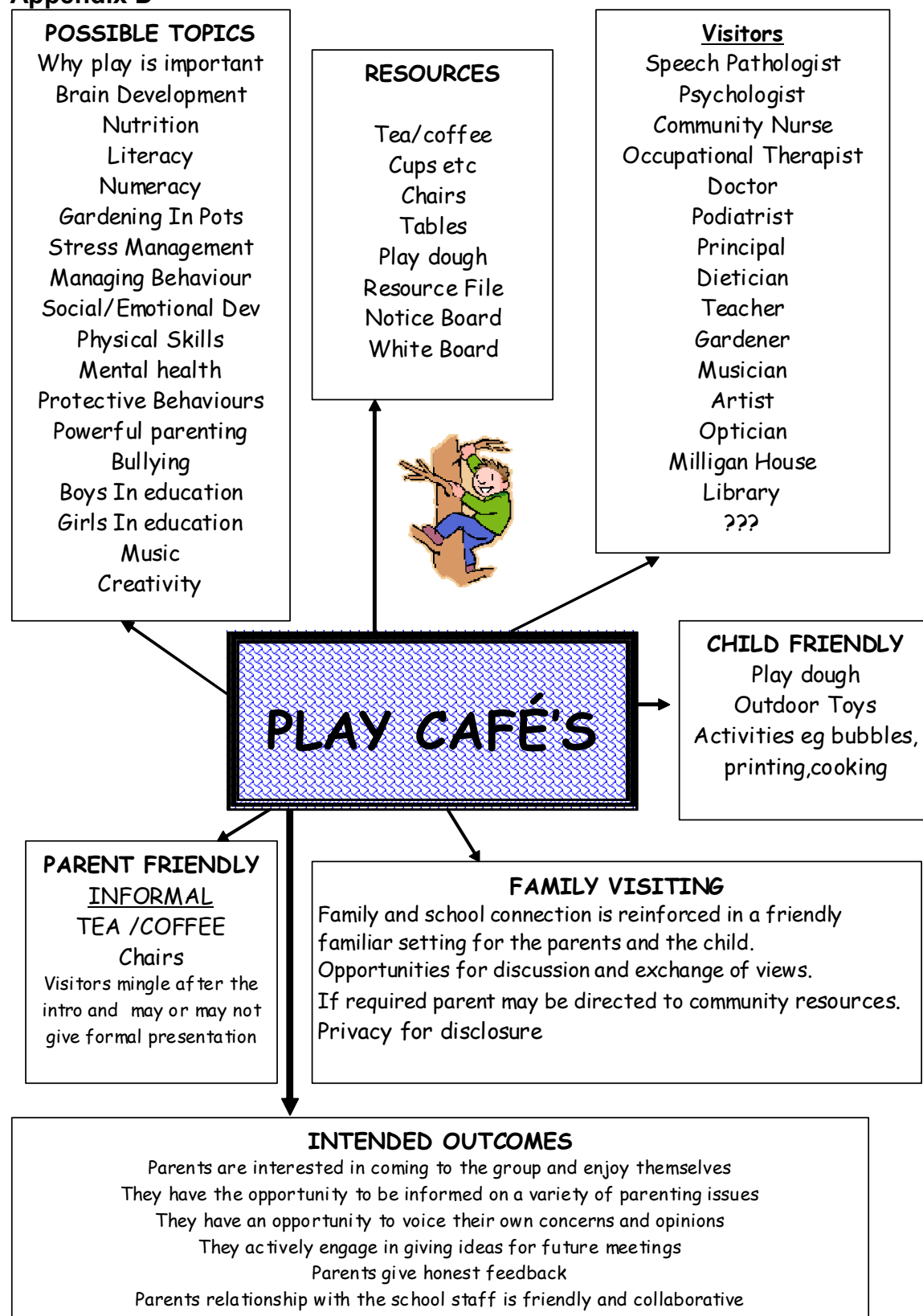
See you soon

Fiona Farren

Fiona Farren
B.Ed Early Childhood Education



Appendix D



LEAF WEEKLY RECORD

Number of:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	TOTAL
Phone Calls to Parents						
Discussions with Service Providers						
Home Visit Appointments Made						
Home Visits						
Meetings Attended as LEAF Rep.						
Home Visit Information Distributed *						
Responses to Enquiries						
Informal Referrals						
Parent Linking						
Formal Early Intervention Referrals						
Other Service Provider Info Distributed						
Parents Visited						
Children Visited						
Family Visit forms completed						
Information provided back to School						
Contacts with other LEAF Providers						
Feedback Forms Collected						
Service Provider Links Made						
Other (Please Specify)						

Sheet for the Week Commencing: Teacher:

Please make a photocopy of these sheets and mail them at the end of each month to: Carmen Gregg, Investing in our Youth, PO Box 6103, Bunbury South WA 6231.

Appendix D

Home Visit Number:	Teacher:	Date:
Y/N		Brief Description
Bonding or Positive Partnership Activities?		
Comments Made by Parent or Child About the Visit?		
Welcome Package		
Parent Vulnerabilities Identified?		
Linking to Appropriate Resources?		
Child Developmental Issues Identified?		
Linking to Appropriate Resources?		
Formal Referral Needed?		
Information provided about School?		
Discussion of School Readiness Issues?		
Discussion of Developmental Stages?		
# children under 5?		
Social Support?		
Other Positive Outcomes?		
Other Information/Support Provided?		
One sentence description of visit		

Only fill in the columns which are relevant for the visit. Make a copy of this sheet to keep securely with your own record and one copy (with no name – visit number only) to be mailed at the end of each month to: Carmen Gregg, Investing in our Youth, PO Box 6103, Bunbury South WA 6231.

Linking Education And Families

The LEAF project began in 2004 as a school based decision to look for ways to connect with families of 0-4 year olds in our community.

"There is mounting evidence that early experiences can dramatically alter

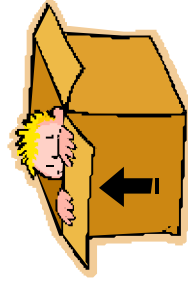
the way genes are expressed in the developing brain.

Good experiences help any brain to develop (Lally 1998)

We are seeking ways to work in partnership with parents and caregivers to be a resource and support. Raising children is the hardest job there is and as educators we seek to enable children to arrive at kindergarten in our school with the best start in life possible.

The organizations in our community can form partnerships with each other and the families in our community to assist our young children to the access assistance at the earliest possible time when it is required.

It is in the first three years while the brain is making the connections that intervention is most effective.



Babies arrive with no language, lots of needs and no dials to tell you when they are full or empty!

What do developing brains need?

Interactions with caring people are as necessary for good brain growth as food and drink.

Touch sends signals to the brain telling it to grow. Touch is how an infant knows they are loved.

Stable Relationships create a safe secure attachment for the infant. The first year has critical periods for emotional attachments.

Safe, healthy environments free from toxic materials such as lead and smoke, and nutritious food.

Self Esteem is absorbed from the environment around a child. They need calm, nurturing and predictable caregivers.

Quality Care is an area that is vitally important. A child's level of stress will vitally affect their optimal growth.

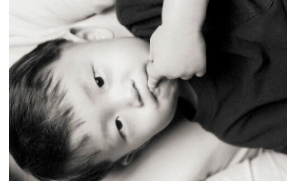
Communication begins at birth. All the circuits are in place, they just need to be connected. The child learns by hearing many words and interacting with people every day, all day.

Play is the way children make sense of the world around them. Play is the way their brains connect loving adults are vital aides in this process. Play is vital for good development.

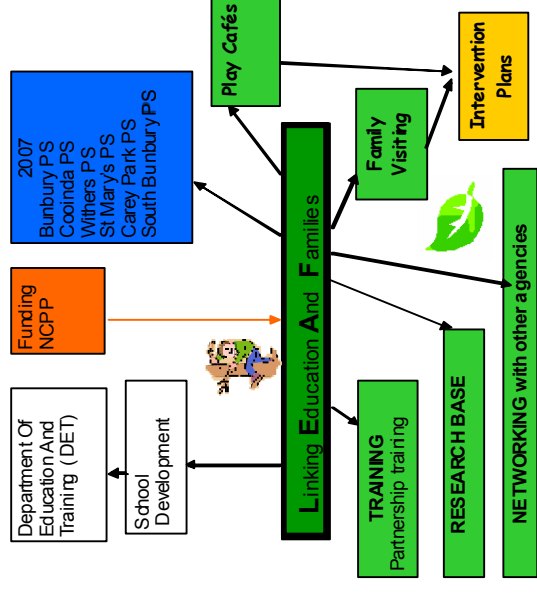
Music is an affinity children have from before birth. It has many benefits both pleasurable and educational.

Reading its not just the story and the pictures, it's the touch and the caring and conversation and talk that go with reading together. They send messages to the brain and connections are made.

<http://www.zerotothree.org>



Feeling safe, loving touch, talk, music, movement, sound, colour...



What are our aims?

To encourage and strengthen community networks available to parents

To assist parents to support their child's development.

To identify developmental delays early and access appropriate assistance for the family.

To strengthen positive home/school links.

To provide opportunities for parents to share their own knowledge and encourage each other.

To develop partnerships and network with, other community bodies to enhance the opportunities for young children



L.E.A.F.

An initiative of
South Bunbury Primary School
Prosser Street
Bunbury 6230
Western Australia

Co-ordinator Fiona Farren

08 97213299 school phone
0401548071 mobile
08 97213445 fax

'...if governments were to smoothen their paths and spend quite modest sums on encouraging partnerships, the results of mobilising parental energy could raise educational achievement among both the children and adults – and make the teachers task easier. [OECD 1997



Linking Education And Families

L.E.A.F.



Who are we?

Why are we?

What do we want to achieve ?



The Linking Education and Families project is aimed at providing opportunities and support to families and children in six school catchment areas in Bunbury.

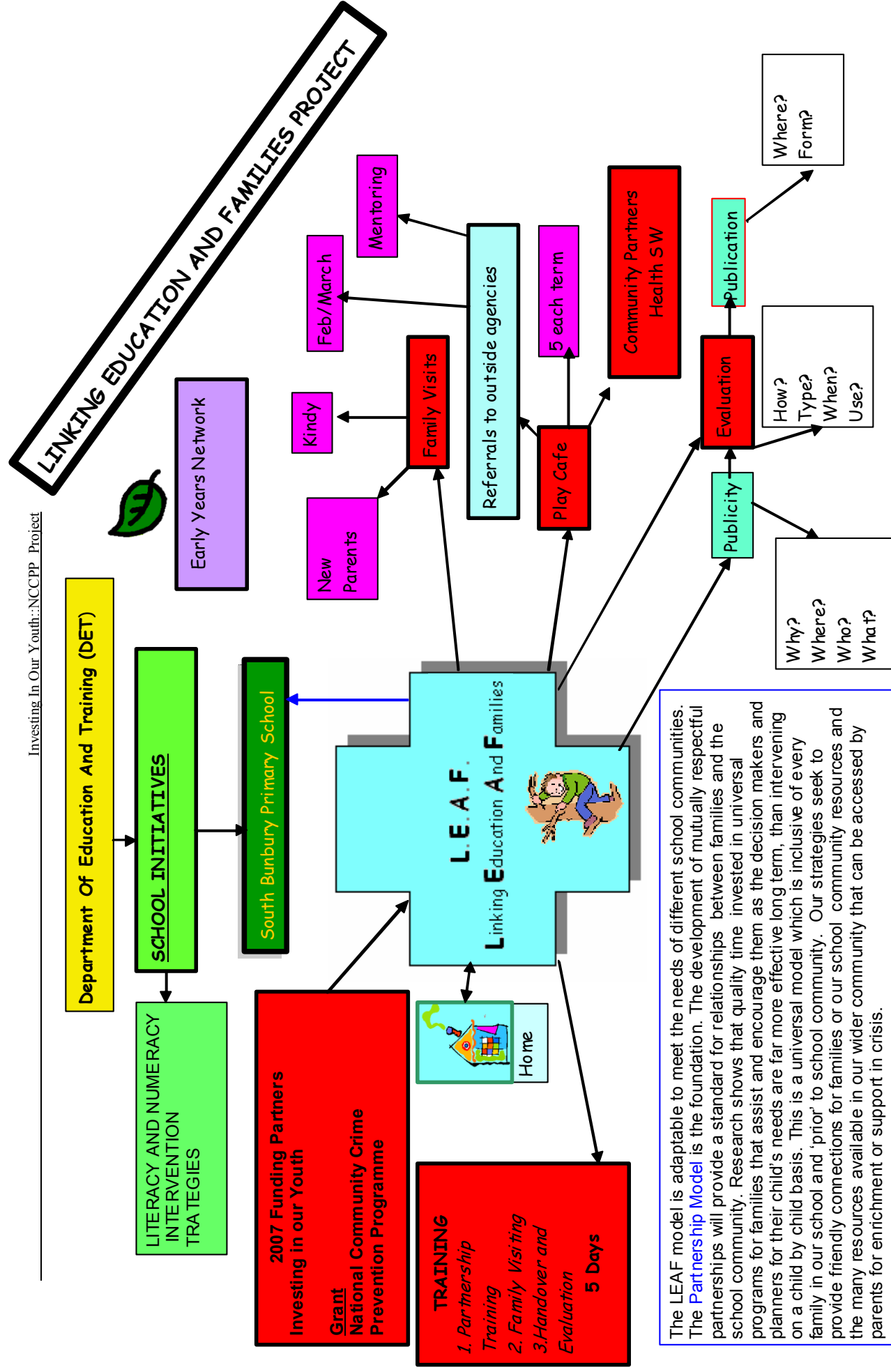
The aims of the program are to support families in recognising that early child development is a priority for future well being; to connect families to appropriate early intervention services, and to work with families and children in their homes and communities to ensure children are ready for school.

The program involves a positive engagement framework based on Partnership and includes Family Visiting for Kindergarten and Pre- primary students and a Play Café for parents of 0- 4 year olds held at the local Kindergarten.

NCPP FUNDED 2007



Linking Education And Families
An initiative of South Bunbury Primary School



Linking Education And Families 2007/2008 Funding Outline Project Facilitator—Fiona Farren South Bunbury Primary School 0401548071



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Early Years Network Group
South West Area Health Service
Department Of Education and Training
City Of Bunbury Shire Council
Greater Bunbury Division Of General Practice
Department for Community Development
Investing In Our Youth (auspices the funding)

SCHOOLS 2006

Harvey Primary School
Brunswick Junction Primary School
Yarloop Primary School
Fairview Primary School

*South Bunbury Primary School is the
initiating school model in collaboration
with Investing In Our Youth*

FOCUS' SCHOOLS 2007

Carey Park Primary School
St Mary's Primary School
Cooinda Primary School
Bunbury Primary School
Withers Primary School

Funded by the Grant from
NCPP

*Participating schools represent the diversity of families living in this region
demonstrated by the findings of the Australian Early Development Index.*

Play Café's

Provide:

- ☺ Regular opportunities for parents and caregivers to meet and network
- ☺ Provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to interact with local health and community sector providers in a relaxed atmosphere that includes children.
- ☺ A referral point for early intervention services for families before children commence formal schooling
- ☺ Opportunity for families to develop familiarity with the school and staff prior to child's a formal attendance

Family Visiting

- ☺ Kindergarten students will be given the opportunity of home visiting by the LEAF co-ordinator (usually Kindergarten of Pre primary teacher)
- ☺ The first visit in the first half of the year and a second visit in the latter part of the year.
- ☺ Training for the LEAF co-ordinators will be required before this can commence in schools

South Bunbury Primary School teacher and program manager Fiona Farren, St Mary's Catholic Primary's Jane Merewether, Bunbury Primary's Sharnie Scott Greig, Withers Primary's Lisa Whitby, Coinda Primary's Rosemary Smith and Carey Park's Jill Miller will start a new program in six Bunbury schools to help link parents with the community. They are pictured with South Bunbury Primary School students Kayla Mosina, Lachlan Kelly, Kai Horsley and Taymus Farnsworth.



Linking families with schools

By MIRANDA HOLKER

LOCAL families with young children will be able to enjoy closer links to schools and the community with the help of a new program that started at six Bunbury primary schools last week.

Home visits from kindergarten teachers and special play cafes are among the features of Linking Education and Families (LEAF), a pilot program aiming to forge links between the community and parents with children under four years old.

South Bunbury teacher and program manager Fiona Farren said the program would help make the transition to school easier as well

as provide easier access to resources for parents.

"It's about community and giving people an opportunity to create relationships with other parents," she said.

The program will include visits with local families so early childhood teachers get to know families and Play Cafes where parents and pre-kindergarten age children could meet with each other and local services like nurses, physiotherapists and speech therapists.

Investing In Our Youth project officer Carmen Gregg the project worked on many levels.

"On a broad level it brings attention to the very important work

that parents do and the importance of childhood development in the early years before school," she said.

"On another level, the project encourages links between families and schools and the existing supports for families in the community.

The LEAF program, which is funded by the National Community Crime Prevention Program, also includes Cooida, Bunbury, Withers, St Mary's Catholic and Carey Park primary schools.

For more information contact Fiona Farren on 9721 3299. Investing in our Youth on 9721 6951 or individual schools.

