



# **Early Literacy and Parenting Forum**

**20 May 2009  
Campbelltown Civic Centre**

**Synopsis of Presentations**

## Our Journey, My Story






**Why the project was developed:** In recognition of the integral part that oral story telling plays in Aboriginal life and in educating children from a early age, the *Our Journey My Story* project was developed with a focus on engaging parents, extended family and community Elders in developing early literacy resources to promote the traditions of oral story telling in Aboriginal communities.

Evidence of limited participation of Aboriginal children in pre-school and/or early childhood programs provided an opportunity for the development of a culturally specific program where Aboriginal families and their children could connect through early learning experiences that integrate their own family experiences and cultural practices.








**Aim:** *Our Journey My Story* aims to work with Aboriginal parents with young children to enhance their cultural confidence through an early literacy program that focuses on increasing understanding and knowledge of family ties and Aboriginal culture with a key focus on the role that oral story telling plays in educating children about life.

### Objectives:

-  To enhance the connections of Aboriginal young children with their family's journey of where they came from to where they now live.
-  To encourage parent involvement in children's early learning experiences.
-  To provide a literacy link between early childhood services and Aboriginal families.

**Target group:** Aboriginal families with young children aged 0-5 living in South West Sydney.

### What the project involves:

-  Developing individual literacy 'Dilly-bags'
-  Developing culturally and age appropriate individual literacy resources
-  Engage Elders to share stories with participating children and their families
-  Providing Aboriginal children with early literacy experiences
-  Capturing parent-child and Elder interactions through photographs and video footage
-  Visit child care centres/playgroups to share Dilly bags
-  Produce DVD as a keepsake and a resource for early childhood services in the region.

For more information on this project contact Shareen Clayton or Anna Certoma on 9796 2931.



## Parent Support for Literacy

At **Bridges for Learning**, we recognise that early childhood development is critical in developing pre-literacy skills and this is supported in much research. As an early childhood intervention service in the Southern Highlands, we wanted to respond to the need in this community for specific parent support for literacy, hence the project name: Parent Support for Literacy. This project is all the more relevant as more children with disabilities are included in mainstream settings for school.

Our aim with this project is to provide parents of children 0-6 years old with disabilities (developmental delays or additional needs) with support, education and resources to:

- actively engage their child in pre-literacy skills,
- support their child with developmental tasks that will underpin literacy tasks, and
- learn advocacy skills for their child, including with preschools and schools – for the Wingecarribee area.

Some of the issues identified in the Wingecarribee Shire are:

- It is a large shire, at 2700 square kilometres.
- There is a lack of support options for younger people with disabilities in the Shire.
- Its rural nature results in family isolation and the need for additional emotional and personal support services.
- There is often poorly resourced and fragmented community support services for both families and young people.

We also recognised that parents of children with disabilities need extra support, particularly in preparing their children for school and literacy skills. These parents need extra support because they deal with:

- a high degree of stress,
- less capacity to cope with day to day activities,
- less ability to engage with their child on several levels,
- challenges for the whole family including siblings, which contributes to
- all the family feeling stressed and less ability to concentrate on learning, literacy and even normal play (which in very young children builds literacy skills).

This program has so far demonstrated a real need for this type of program, in this community, for this target group of families. We have evaluated the program thus far with parent surveys. One parent wrote on the bottom of her survey:

*“This programme has given me a deeper understanding of my child’s areas of need. It makes me feel that I am doing all I can for him and I’m on the right track.”*

The presentation of the Parent Support for Literacy Program will be given by: Stephanie Isvik, Manager of Bridges for Learning. Phone 4861 4054.

## Creating Links Singing Books

***Singing Books*** is an early literacy initiative that immerses parents and children in an interactive learning experience. Designed to engage parents and children in a series of one hour sessions over eight weeks, children with their parents actively participate in stimulating reading and musical programming.

Divided into two distinct 30 minute sessions, parents and children engage as outlined in the following:

1. 20-30 minute session: Songs that encourage movement and stimulate development of gross motor skills, while introducing children to early concepts and recognition of animals, alphabet, and numeracy.
2. 20-30 minute session: Delivery of targeted kid focused literature, with stories presented utilizing hand puppets and other related tools. Parents are thus encouraged to actively participate in the presentation of materials. Additionally use of both story and picture only books within facilitation model value of story creation and telling, demonstrating significance of oral tradition paired with pictures to achieve increased interest in literacy.

To date, over 60 parents and children have taken part in the program with the over 50% of those being from CALD backgrounds.

The program provides literacy based programming in areas easily accessible to at risk families. Thus the proposed program recognizes the many needs of the diverse community and endeavors to engage all parents. This is achieved by presenting materials that are child centered and adult friendly regardless of level of literacy. Parents participating can expect the facilitated program to utilize a mix of resources to demonstrate multiple methods of engaging children in literacy based activities regardless of reading ability. (These include use of music, picture books, and puppets).

1. Improved Access/Connection with Community Resources: Participants in Singing Books are actively informed of community services and programs increasing knowledge of programs related to early childhood, education, and health as the proposed is further utilized as an entry point to other Families NSW projects.
2. Increased Awareness of Early Childhood Literacy: Through multiple engagement methods, the families are encouraged through cognitive and creative learning. Promoting an atmosphere where children can further develop language and with exposure to aspects of early literacy.
3. Improved Parent/Child Interaction: Facilitation of stimulating activities in an environment that encourages parent and child active involvement, through use of activities that enhance: gross motor skills, Cognitive, and Language development.

Creating Links – phone 8713 7700.

# **UnitingCare Burnside Cabramatta Centre**

## **Tales of Magic Project**

This project aims to enhance and expand the current early learning activities that we provide for children 0-5 years old at the Multicultural Supported Playgroups run at Cabramatta, Chester Hill, Villawood, Liverpool, Casula and Heckenberg areas.

The Tales of Magic project invited families and children to create their own magical storybook using diverse creative and artistic approaches and materials following the guidance of an art facilitator. The art activities were designed in accordance with children's developmental stages, focusing on the enhancement of their curiosity and exploration of new tools, colours and the understanding of new words and phrases. Also, these activities gave children the opportunity to play and share with their parents and to feel supported by them.

Parents were actively involved in the activities, guiding and helping their children to express their ideas and co-creating the stories in their home language and/or English. Importantly, many mothers continued the work at home and this gave the opportunity to fathers and grandparents to be included in the creative process.

Parents and children felt rewarded and satisfied when they finished their work. Parents indicated that working together with their children gave the book a great significance and that it would be a treasured memory for the future.

UnitingCare Burnside - phone 9781 3306.

# Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre

## Learn with me Project



The aims of the Learn with me Project are to enhance co-learning and language development; build opportunities for children to explore various mediums of language and numeracy at home and at playgroup; and to provide resources which reflect their personal experiences.

The Learn with me Project consists of 'Resource Kits' that incorporate pre-literacy and pre-numeracy early childhood materials. The materials used in the Resource Kits include readily available household materials, handmade resources and resources from early childhood suppliers. Each Resource Kit has simple instructions that explain how to use the Kit, a check list detailing the contents and an evaluation form.

Resource Kits are borrowed on a loan system for a period of a week, with priority given to children who will attend school the following year. The Project supports children and their families who participate in the Cultural Connect Project/Playgroups. Families are from emerging communities, CALD and Refugee Backgrounds.

The development of the Learn with me Project was driven by Playgroup staff who became aware that many of the children in the playgroups are behind in their development, some of them did not access any form of child care. Their first formalised learning experience is playgroup and their next transition is to school.

The activities and concepts used in the Resource Kits were developed based on the needs we identified during playgroup sessions. There are children who have delays in their receptive and expressive language, We have also found that our children are not confident in speaking out in group situations and their experiences in early literacy and numeracy are often shaped by their families experiences. Some of the families who participate in the playgroup have experienced hardship, have had their education interrupted due to war and some have lived in refugee camps. Their settlement into a new country takes time and therefore they may not have the same opportunities, time or confidence to support their children in their development.

The Resource Kits were made with CALD/Refugee families in mind. They have been developed into three languages - English, Arabic and Vietnamese. They require families that are willing, ready to participate and self motivated, so may not always be suitable for families who are vulnerable/disadvantaged. Staff work with the families initially, before the kits are taken home. The concepts of the Project are transferable and easy to use once staff have taught families how to use the Resource Kits.

Resource Kits are evaluated each time they are lent, with an updated register/summary of evaluations kept. A pre-questionnaire is given to families and service providers at the commencement of the project

Reproducing the Resource Kits in English, Arabic and Vietnamese should not be difficult as the concepts and steps have already been developed. Therefore costs may be slightly reduced. However it must be remembered that this is a time consuming project, as handmade resources are the essence of the project.

LMRC – phone 9601 3788.



## **A Western Sydney Early Literacy project, from birth – 5 years.**

### **Rationale and research base**

Competent literacy skills are critical in maximizing a person's potential and self-esteem.

More research is now focusing on the foundation for this development occurring in the early years, from birth.

Although parents are the main 'teachers' for their children, they can gain support from their local community.

In line with current research, Early Words encourages families to not only read to their children, but to facilitate the broader fundamental early literacy skills that prepare children for reading and writing in the school context.

Early Words have based their resources on research and projects conducted and/or promoted by organisations and individuals including Fraser Mustard, The National Centre for Early Literacy (US), and the National Literacy Trust (UK), Reach out and Read, Bookstart, the Centre for Community Child Health and Australian researchers such as Bob Perry and Sue Dockett, Laurie Makin and Frank Oberklaid.

### **Project Structure**

Families are encouraged to build on their strengths with further support from trusted links within their local community.

The resources are developed in non-jargonistic language, with photos of local families and then distributed where further early literacy support is available.

Early Words resources are offered to families covering the Antenatal, birth, 2 months, 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, and 3-5 years stages.

This occurs first from the Antenatal booking in appointment, to the hospital birth unit, GP/AMS immunization visits, Community nurse visits, local libraries, Child care centres, Migrant Resource centres, Playgroup NSW contact officers, SACCs, and other support groups.

All tipsheets and magnets can be also downloaded from the web.

Training sessions, support, advice and community links are provided for professionals involved with the project.

### **Accessible Resources**

Print materials are translated into Aboriginal English, Arabic, Turkish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tamil, Dari, Urdu, Hindi and Korean. DVDs are currently voiced in Aboriginal English, and English.

A linked project with the local Aboriginal community has adapted the original resources to meet local Aboriginal family needs.

Resources include tipsheets, posters, fridge magnets, book bags, DVDs, and where sponsorship allows, a book at 6 months.

For people living outside the Auburn, Blacktown, Baulkham Hills, Holroyd and Parramatta local Government areas of Western Sydney, purchase of resources may be available via the Early Words website or by phone.

[www.earlywords.info](http://www.earlywords.info)

### **Project Progress**

Under the auspice of the Children First Management Committee, the team is supported and directed by a Families NSW Reference Group including local Aboriginal and CALD communities, the 5 Local Government Areas Local Councils and their Libraries, Depts. of Health and Education and Playgroup NSW.

The project has evaluated impact in the community through focus groups, workshop evaluations, website evaluation, data return and consultation with partners. An evaluation from the University of Newcastle Family Action Centre on the 0-2 years resources has been completed.

By mid 2009, costings and feasibility of duplicating the project in other areas will be provided to Families NSW.

### **Contact Details**

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Early Words is a project of Children First Inc, funded by Families NSW, a NSW State Government Initiative.

## Paint the Town Read

Research said it – we spread it!

( See Rima Shore's 'Rethinking the Brain)

This is one town's story of awareness-raising re the vital importance of a language-rich environment right from birth and the role of families and communities in promoting optimal brain development.

From hopeful beginnings in 1996, the Birth to Kindergarten - Spread the Word project (aka Paint the Town Read), has grown to encompass many towns and to address more issues than literacy. The project has significant potential to build social capacity and make community connections and emotional bank deposits.

The aims of the project are to:

- saturate the town with 'the message'
- engage the whole community to assist in 'spreading the word'
- raise the value of literacy in homes (celebration of something gives value to it)
- provide a vehicle for interagency collaboration.

Paint the Town Read (Birth to Kindergarten) has awareness raising and fun activities that are:

- ongoing - since 1996
- periodical - eg messages in shopping parcels
- one off - eg messages in helium balloons
- annual - Community Reading Day

The presentation will elaborate on the activities, the procedure and the outcomes.

The Governor, Marie Bashir has given vice regal patronage to the project, commenting, 'You have it right, you know!'

Mem Fox visited and said, 'Well I don't know why I'm here. You're already doing it'.

The Regional Director said, 'I can't believe this Rhonda – so many people celebrating – in Australia, and it's not sport, it's literacy'.

Rhonda Brain

Rhonda Brain's contact details are:

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