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NEW SOUTH WALES



UNDERSTANDING THE LOCAL SERVICE NETWORK PROJECT

FAMILIES FIRST SOUTH EAST SYDNEY

FINAL REPORT

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Abbreviations

| | |
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| ATSI | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander |
| CALD | Culturally and Linguistically diverse |
| DADHC | Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care |
| DET | Department of Education and Training |
| DoCS | Department of Community Services |
| ECICP | Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program |
| FOA | Fields of activity |
| LGA | Local Government Area |
| NGO | Non-government organisation |
| TCO | The Cabinet Office |

Executive Summary

Background to Families First

Families First was introduced in New South Wales in 1998. It is a State Government strategy that aims to increase the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention services. Such services provide support for families and communities in the care of their children. The broad aim of Families First is to develop a coordinated network of services for all families and to identify children and families who require further assistance. It seeks to link families to appropriate support early on, before problems become entrenched. The strategy combines universal service elements with screening for targeted services, and its operational emphases are on: service integration and networking; community outreach, especially via services such as home visiting by early childhood nurses and volunteers; and community development (The Cabinet Office, 2002).

The Social Policy and Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales and the University of Western Sydney were commissioned by Families First to conduct the Understanding the Local Service Network Project for the South East Sydney Families First Area (hereafter South East Sydney). The project aimed to examine the impact of the network of services supporting families and children in the years prior to school, and in their transition to school. The focus was on understanding how effectively the service network meets the needs of families, as well as identifying gaps or barriers in service provision. There are two elements to the research findings: factors facilitating and inhibiting transition to school; and operations of the local service network providing support to children and families.

Method

The research was conducted in four locations: Bexley/Arncliffe, Bondi, Cronulla and Malabar/Matraville. A mixed method approach using quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis was applied to triangulate the findings between the various stakeholders. The project consisted of two main components: a literature review and fieldwork activities. The fieldwork included interviews with families, K-2 teachers, early childhood services and service providers supporting children and families. In addition, surveys were conducted with school principals and service providers.

Transition to school findings

A number of factors facilitated the transition to school process for both children and parents. Social skills and independence emerged as the most important general factors in facilitating transition. Having access to early learning services such as long day care, preschools and playgroups were further key factors in facilitating successful transition to school.

Several factors emerged as detracting from successful transition to school. These include limited access to early learning services and a lack of consistent links between early learning services and schools. A particular barrier identified in the research concerns problems associated with access to information about transition to school for families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The cost associated with long day care and preschools, and a lack of available places, means

that low income families and families from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) and CALD backgrounds often find it difficult to access these services. Supported playgroups organised by some schools and non-government organisations (NGOs) provide some opportunities for children from disadvantaged families for social interaction with other children and adults.

The perceived effectiveness of transition to school programs varies across South East Sydney. Some families find schools to be daunting places, especially if it is their first child starting school or if their own experience of school was negative. Service providers commented on the importance of building a relationship with the school, and becoming familiar with the school environment and its operation prior to starting school. This is often difficult to achieve if transition to school programs are limited to orientation and information sessions conducted over a few hours. Schools offering extended transition programs over a number of days reported more opportunities for this relationship and familiarity to develop.

The links between early learning services and schools varied between sites and depended on the actions and attitudes of individual principals and teachers. Apart from information about children with disabilities or developmental delays, schools did not consistently utilise the information available from the early learning services. Communication between the two sectors is informal and limited. The lack of a 'service transition' bridge between services supporting children (especially children with special needs) prior to school and services supporting children once school begins weakened the likelihood of successful transition to school.

It is often difficult for people from CALD backgrounds to access information about the school community, the importance of making a successful transition to school, and what is involved in making a transition. Information in community languages is not freely available for parents at orientation days.

Several points in the service system emerged as key links between families, services and schools. These included early learning services, school counsellors, Child and Family School Health Nurses, and the Department of Education and Training (DET) transition to school program for children with special needs.

The research found that schools in general are only linked to the broader service system via the school counsellors and Child and Family School Health Nurses. The strongest links are to health services such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists. Individual teachers and principals also have established links to the service network.

A number of information and support gaps emerged consistently from the interviews, focus groups and the surveys. These included gaps in support for transition to school for children with special needs without a definitive diagnosis and children from CALD and ATSI backgrounds; information about when a child should start school; the place of schools in the broader system; and a lack of supported playgroups.

Local service network findings

In addition to the specific focus on transition to school, the research analysed the operations of the broader service system for families with children aged 3-5. The two

sets of findings provide an overview of the operation of the service network for families during the significant experience of a child starting school.

A number of factors affect families' use of services and support. Strong links with the local community facilitated use of a service. These links were established in various ways, including length of time in an area; location in a visible, accessible centre; or community-based management structures. Services designed for and delivered to a specific community, through a trusted individual or organisation, addressed gaps in service integration and access for families isolated from mainstream services. Multiple services delivered from a single site or through a single program enhanced the accessibility of services and addressed the very high needs for some services in short supply.

A range of factors limits access to services. Schools and other services are not accessible to some population groups for reasons of language, cultural competence, social isolation and institutional cultures. High demand is not met by supply of some services, including allied health and early learning services. Cost, social and geographic isolation of families, and limited access to transport also affect service use.

The capacity of agencies to operate using the principles of early intervention and prevention is limited by the unmet demand for existing services, especially for diagnostic, assessment, treatment and respite services. Workers are often reluctant to add pressure to existing waiting lists or refer families to already overstretched services. Eligibility criteria for services limit the number of children and families who receive support. Community resources to support families are stretched in most areas and this limits their capacity to provide early intervention and prevention services.

A number of points in the service system work well to identify and address support needs. Interagency groups and specific positions help address the needs of children with identified global delays and diagnosed disabilities. These children are supported well by Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), and by the relationship between DADHC and DET. The Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program (ECICP), coordinated by DADHC with the participation of early learning services, health and disability services, operates well in South East Sydney and represents a potential base for building links across the service network.

Interagency groups exist in some areas with varying degrees of effectiveness. Communication between schools, early learning services and families works well in some areas, but this largely depends on individuals rather than organisational links. Similarly, formal and informal links between services vary between and within areas and are often dependent on individual efforts and relationships.

A number of factors limit the capacity of agencies to develop stronger partnerships. Important amongst these is a lack of staff time and organisational capacity. This is particularly evident in smaller organisations that are often unable to release staff to attend key meetings. The formation and maintenance of new partnerships requires resources, including funding, staff training and time.

Planning Options

Planning options for transition to school and network development arising from the literature review and the main findings of the research are listed in terms of examples of what was working well, service and network gaps and areas that could be built on. Options are listed for each of the findings for both transition to school and the local service network.

Factors Facilitating and Limiting Successful Transition to School

Working well:

Access to high quality early learning services such as long day care, preschools and playgroups, provides an environment where social skills and independence are fostered. Parents, teachers and early learning service workers regarded the development of these skills as important to successful transition to school.

Gaps in the network:

Starting school can be a daunting time for both children and their families. It is especially difficult for children with special needs as they move to a different system of support and funding. Often this occurs without a transitional bridge between the two systems of support. The transition to school process for these children would be facilitated if services supporting them prior to starting school could continue to be involved once school begins.

Lack of availability, cost, or pressing demands such as lack of stable housing or domestic violence, limit many vulnerable families' access to early learning. Children from ATSI and CALD backgrounds often do not access support services due to isolation, language background, expectations or experiences of discrimination. Providing increased access to low cost quality early learning services such as supported playgroups gives opportunities for children in vulnerable families to develop skills to facilitate their transition to school. For example, the supported playgroup operating within a school and culturally specific playgroups in the Bexley/Arncliffe area have been set up in response to the locally-identified need to provide structured, supported support to particular population groups.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Examples of good links between teachers and some early learning services were evident but depend largely on individual efforts and professional attitudes. Some teachers regard early learning workers as a useful source of information when planning for the needs of children starting school. For example some teachers visit children in their early learning settings if they are identified as potentially having difficulty transitioning to school. Development of protocols to enhance information exchange could enhance links between these sectors.

Transition to school programs vary from school to school but were found to be useful in the transition process for those families attending. Greater access to programs running over an extended period of time, rather than short information/orientation sessions, would assist more children and parents to build a relationship with the school prior to starting kindergarten.

Links between Families, Services and Schools

Working well:

There are a number of key points in the service system linking families, schools and services. These include early learning services, school counsellors, Child and Family School Health Nurses, Supplementary Services Scheme (SUPS) workers and the DET transition to school program for children with special needs.

Gaps in the network:

Overall there is a lack of established and consistent links between early learning services and schools based on mutual professional trust and respect. Activities that allow the two sectors to link formally are required. Effective networking requires time and resources. Participation in these activities would be facilitated if resources were available to relieve staff from their teaching load to organise and attend meetings and planning forums.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Child and Family School Health Nurses and school counsellors provide important links for families to the broader child and family service system after a child has started school, although the links are predominately health related. Informal and formal network and referral links between school health nurses and counsellors and early learning services should be developed.

The DET transition to school program for children with additional needs formally links families, services including early learning services and schools in their planning processes and provides a potential model for further developing links between schools and early learning services.

Identified Information and Support Needs

Working well:

Access to support, particularly for families with children with a disability, health or other additional need who are also isolated from mainstream services, is facilitated by the provision of information and other resources in community languages and structured support and advocacy, through community groups or service providers such as Migrant Resource Centres. For example, cultural and language-specific playgroups in Bexley/Arncliffe facilitate the establishment of relationships and support the introduction of families to schools and other agencies.

Gaps in the network:

If successful transition to school for all children is a priority then additional resources are required to address gaps in support for the following children: children with special needs without a definitive diagnosis, children with mild to moderate levels of disabilities and children from CALD and ATSI backgrounds. Children without a definitive diagnosis and those in the low to mild range of disability fall outside DADHC's criteria for support and have needs that cannot be met by health services at current levels of resourcing.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Parents and some early learning services requested increased information about what transition to school means, why it is important and how to judge when a child should start school. Information about transition to school in English and community languages is available, but would be more accessible were its availability more widely known.

Factors Impacting on Appropriate Child and Family Access and Utilisation of Support

Working well:

A number of characteristics of agencies and services facilitated use of services for families isolated from mainstream services. These include visibility, community-based management structures delivering services to a specific community through a trusted individual or organisation, For example, the Aboriginal Mental Health worker acts as an advocate for Aboriginal families and assists them to access mainstream housing and health services.

Multiple services delivered from a single site or through a single program enhanced access to services, some of which are in high demand. For example, Lifestart run playgroups for children with special needs attended by special educators and therapists. Parents receive peer support and information, while their children gain some access to treatment services, such as speech pathology.

Gaps in the network:

Demand and need overwhelms supply of some allied health and disability services, including speech pathology and occupational therapy, which are increasingly identified as pivotal to the school experience of many children.

Schools and support services are not accessible to families in some population groups for reasons of language, cultural competence, social isolation and institutional cultures. It is critical that this inaccessibility is recognised as the responsibility of schools, services and policy and that families' failure to access these services is not attributed to lack of interest in their children.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Patchy public transport compound the difficulties faced by many families in getting the support they need. Provision of new services and maintaining existing ones may need to take the cost of transport into account in allocating resources.

Schools represent a possible point of connection between families, communities and the service system. Programs implemented in other Families First areas including Schools as Community Centres, Parents as Teachers and Families and Schools Together provide potential models to foster the connections between families, schools and the service system.

Factors Impacting on Agencies' and Services' Capacity to Identify and Address Support Needs Early

Working well:

Because many children have some experience in an early learning service, these settings provide an opportunity for the identification of needs for early intervention support. Some early learning services regard this identification as part of their core business and some do not. This disparity could be addressed by the provision of specific resources to increase awareness and the capacity of services, particularly smaller and private agencies, to identify and address needs early.

Gaps in the network:

Service and support is limited by eligibility criteria for treatment services. Children and families who fall outside these criteria should be a priority for new services and efforts to improve existing services.

Services supporting families are inadequately resourced to meet the needs of families with higher needs, including the need for crisis and chronic services. The aims and activities of Families First are directed towards prevention and early intervention, but the impact of the strategy is affected by the operations of the service system as a whole.

Prevention and early intervention is not considered to be the core business of many agencies supporting families, and is not a priority in the context of unmet need for other services. Resources, including staff training and changes to organisational structures, are required if these order services are to become central to the operation of services.

Points in the network that can be built on:

The research found support for prevention and early intervention across the service network. Support for these principles could form the basis of new services and planning priorities. This could be facilitated through the provision of specific, quarantined funding to agencies designed to establish a service stream dedicated to prevention and early intervention. In addition, forums and workshops designed to share information about prevention and early intervention lessons in other areas within South East Sydney, and throughout the state, could increase recognition of the benefits of changing service practice.

There is a high level of recognition of the benefits of communication with other agencies and knowledge of what services operate in an area. Provision of up-to-date information on other services could improve referral processes and service integration. Participation in the Better Service Delivery Program, particularly the staff training elements of the program, could help meet the identified need for service directories (NSW Department of Commerce, 2005).

Key Points in the Service Network where Families Support Needs are identified and they are linked to Relevant Supports

Working well:

Links between DADHC, DET and early childhood settings are effective for families with a child with a diagnosed disability.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Family support services provide a holistic service that identifies family needs and links families with appropriate services. The principles of service provision and models of service delivery provided by these services should be supported and partnerships between family support and other services resourced.

Local, specific examples of partnership, collaboration and new kinds of service delivery should be supported and the potential for their replication explored. For example, the Big Brothers program at Bondi Beach Public School, which takes advantage of the diversity of the school community in using fathers as volunteers. Elements of these services and programs that could be duplicated in other areas include the use of a service that is known to and trusted by a community to assist in the development of new services; using multi-function organisations or expanding the use of a single service to deliver new services from a trusted, non-stigmatising centre; facilitated service delivery through a trusted individual or community group; and use of a service that is visible and accessible or one that can provide transport.

Strengths and Gaps in Coordination in the Service Network

Working well:

If supported and resourced, existing interagency groups represent good models for interagency collaboration and a potential base for building links across the service network. These groups include the Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program (ECICP), the St George Advocates, the Eastern Suburbs Children's Services Network, Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) local forums and the Sutherland Shire Children's Strategic Working Party.

Gaps in the network:

Network coordination and service integration is often dependent on personal relationships and individual efforts. Formal recognition of service coordination as a key activity of individual agencies, and resources towards incorporating service coordination into the core business of agencies, could address this dependence.

A number of service providers reported not knowing what services operated in their area or said they would not be confident about referring families to other services. Network coordination varies within and between areas and the effectiveness of existing forums in sharing information or acting to improve service integration is unclear.

Points in the network that can be built on:

The presence of Families First in an area is an opportunity to build and support local and regional groups with responsibility for service planning and implementation. These groups could include representatives from each of the human service agencies, non-government organisations and local government. Smaller organisations and key community representatives could be supported to participate in Families First management, and differing capacities and interests taken into account.

Factors that Enhance and Inhibit the Development of Partnerships

Gaps in the network:

At the level of the service system, resources are required to develop strategies to promote and facilitate the active involvement of all relevant agencies in partnerships. Families First represents a good opportunity to create new partnerships. The planning processes of Families First and other strategies should take account of local knowledge. They should be flexible to ensure broad representation and to achieve the ongoing engagement and re-engagement of agencies.

At the level of individual agencies, changes in practice to increase interagency collaboration will require resources, including funding and training. Education strategies to increase knowledge of the research basis and principles of Families First are necessary to sustain engagement in its implementation.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Good examples of partnership and models for increased collaboration can be found across South East Sydney. For example, Innar Nurra brokers partnerships between Aboriginal-specific and non-Aboriginal specific services and has so improved service provision to ATSI women and children. Kooloora Community Centre has very strong links with the Malabar/Matraville community and provides community advocacy as well as services, including playgroups supported by transport, that respond to locally-identified needs.

The research also found support for new and stronger partnerships. However, information about how to build partnerships and good examples of partnerships in other areas, as well as resources such as time and training, are necessary to build on this support.

Priority Planning Options

A number of issues emerged in the literature review and the fieldwork as key areas for future service and network development. These are outlined below in terms of service gaps, transition to school and network development.

Service gaps options refer to points in the service network where identified needs cannot be met by the current operations of services. These should be taken into account in the future planning of human service agencies. Transition to School options refer to possible strategies to improve those parts of the service network that are specifically designed to support children starting school and their families.

Network development options refer to strategies for improving the coordination and integration of the service network and changing practice in line with the principles of Families First.

Service Gaps

- Gaps in support for the following children: children with special needs without a definitive diagnosis, children with mild to moderate levels of disabilities and children from CALD and ATSI background were identified.
- Access to low cost, high quality early learning services including long day care, preschools and supported playgroup for vulnerable families.
- Access to diagnostic and allied health services.

Transition to School

- Developing strategies to establish consistent links between early learning services and schools based on mutual professional trust and respect.
- Extending funding so that support services continue into the school term will develop a transitional bridge for children with special needs between the different systems of support prior to starting school and once schools commences.
- Providing increased access to information, in English and community languages, about what transition to school means, why it is important and how to judge when a child should start school.

Network Development

- Implementing initiatives that position schools as possible key point connecting families, communities and the service system. A number of initiatives that aim to do this, such as Schools as Community Centres, Parents as Teachers and Families and Schools Together, have been implemented successfully in other Families First areas.
- Allocating dedicated resources to promote and facilitate active involvement from a broad range of agencies to build on and strengthen pre-existing service networks, and to develop clearly defined roles in service network planning, will facilitate network development.
- Incorporating the principles of prevention and early intervention and service coordination into the core business and management practices of relevant agencies at all levels requires that these principles are included in job descriptions, performance indicators, orientation packages and training courses.

1 Background to Families First

Families First was introduced in New South Wales in 1998. It is a government strategy that aims to increase the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention services to support families and communities to care for their children. The broad aim of Families First is to develop a coordinated network of services for all families and to identify children and families who require further assistance, to link them to appropriate support early, before problems become entrenched (The Cabinet Office, 2002).

The Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) University of New South Wales and the University of Western Sydney were commissioned by the NSW Department of Community Services, on behalf of the South East Sydney Senior Officers Group, to conduct the Understanding the Local Services Network Project for Families First South East Sydney. The project aimed to examine the impact of the network of services supporting families and children in the years prior to school as well as in their transition to school. The project focused on understanding how effectively the service network met the needs of families, and on identifying gaps or barriers in service provision. This report presents the findings of the project.

1.1 Description of Families First

Families First is concerned with the welfare of young children and the implications of early childhood experiences for long-term outcomes in health, education and social development in childhood and adult life. The policy framework is based on developing regional linkages between health, community welfare, educational and other services to ensure a coordinated approach to initial intervention, follow-up visits and other forms of support.

Since many future problems stem from influences in the child's environment, Families First is concerned with the factors affecting the biological and social development of children. The strategy combines universal service elements and targeted services, with operational emphases on: service integration and networking; community outreach, especially via services such as home visiting by early childhood nurses; and community development.

Families First seeks to improve the health and welfare of children aged from birth to eight years, by supporting parents and carers, so that they may grow to their full potential. The statewide policy framework of Families First focuses on four fields of activity:

- Supporting parents who are expecting or caring for a new baby
- Supporting families who are caring for infants or small children
- Supporting families who need extra support
- Strengthening the connection between families and communities.

Families will be supported through the strategic development of a service network that plans and delivers services using a coordinated, interagency approach.

1.2 Project Objectives

The objectives of the Understanding the Local Service Network Project were to:

- Identify where services need to be enhanced or new services developed to fill gaps in the prevention and early intervention network of services.
- Review how the network of services providing support to families (government, non-government and local government) works to provide prevention and early intervention support to families and children in the years prior to school as well as in their transition to school, in order to enhance coordinated and integrated service delivery.

The project achieved this by reviewing the current Local Service Network in the region, and identifying its strengths and weaknesses in providing support to families caring for infants and young children prior to commencing school and in their transition to school.

The project explored the experiences of key people within the area including families, service providers, school teachers and early learning services workers. The project methodology (detailed in Section 2) involved multiple data collection techniques including literature review, surveys, interviews and focus groups.

1.3 Outline of the Report

This first section of the report provided a brief overview of Families First. Section 2 outlines the data collection methodology for the project. Section 3 summarises the literature review and provides a descriptive analysis of the research area. Sections 4 and 5 outline transition to school findings and the local service network findings. Section 6 describes the information needs and strategies in response to these needs that have been identified in the research. The final section of the report outlines planning options in response to the findings of project.

2 Methodology

This section provides a profile of the research areas and a description of the methodology. A mixed method approach using quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis was applied to triangulate the findings between the various stakeholders. The project consists of two main components: a literature review and fieldwork.

2.1 Profile of the Research Areas

We begin with an overview of the context of Families First in South East Sydney by examining key demographic data. The implementation process of a broad, systems-based strategy such as Families First and its ensuing success is inevitably affected by historical and political context, geographic location and demographic characteristics.

Families First began in South East Sydney in 2003. South East Sydney consists of an area encompassing the four Statistical Local Areas (SLA's) of Woollahra, Randwick, Rockdale and Sutherland Shire East.

It was not possible within the scope of the project to research the entire South East Sydney Families First Area. In conjunction with the project reference group, four research locations were selected to take account of the diverse socio-demographic characteristics of the population in the region.

The four locations selected were Bondi (Woollahra SLA), Cronulla (Sutherland Shire East), Bexley/Arncliffe (Rockdale), and Malabar/Matraville (Randwick). These locations were chosen on the basis of prioritising the family and community characteristics listed as of greatest importance, including cultural diversity, Indigeneity, socio-economic disadvantage, disability, vulnerability and varying levels of school retention and completion.

Demographic data from the aggregated Statistical Regions (SR) that comprise South East Sydney is displayed in Table 2.1. Demographic data relevant to each of the key SLA's encompassing the research locations is also displayed. Such data shows the diversity of backgrounds and living standards existing in the South East Sydney Area.

The population of the South East Sydney Area is 645,663 (ABS, 2001), with the largest number of people living in the Randwick area (121,497) and the fewest in the Woollahra area (50,897). Around 5 per cent of the population are children aged between 3 and 6 years of age.

There are substantial differences in the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of families across the areas. A quarter of the South East Sydney population speak a language other than English at home. However, these people are very unevenly distributed, comprising 50 per cent of the Rockdale area population, but only 10 per cent of those living in the Sutherland Shire area. Similarly, 8 per cent of Rockdale residents either do not speak English, or do not speak it well, as compared to 1% of Cronulla residents. Less than one per cent of the population is of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background in South East Sydney (0.4%), with the greatest concentration present in the Randwick area (0.7%).

The socio-demographic characteristics of the research locations also vary markedly between research locations. The South East Sydney area is slightly more prosperous than Australia as a whole. The area has an unemployment rate of 4.6%, and only 6% of persons failing to complete at least year 8 education. However, this masks substantial differences between areas that impact upon levels of disadvantage. The Rockdale area has an unemployment rate of 6.3 per cent, nearly double Cronulla's level of 3.3 per cent. Of the four research locations Rockdale also has the highest proportion of persons with less than year 8 education (11%), the highest proportion of low-income families (5%), and the lowest Index of Socio-Economic Disadvantage (SEIFA). Woollahra by contrast has the lowest proportion of persons with less than year 8 education (2%) and the lowest proportion of low-income families (2%) of the four areas examined. It also has the highest SEIFA rank of any SLA in Australia (196).

Table 2.1: Selected Demographics of South East Sydney, by SLA, percentage

| Research area | Bondi | Malabar/ Matraville | Bexley/ Arncliffe | Cronulla | South East Sydney |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Relevant Statistical Local Area (SLA) to which demographic information applies: | Woollahra | Randwick | Rockdale | Sutherland Shire (East) | (3) |
| Total population of SLA (no.) ⁽¹⁾ | 50,897 | 121,497 | 88,523 | 95,050 | 821,013 |
| Proportion of children 3- 6 years ⁽¹⁾ | 3.3 | 3.8 | 4.9 | 4.7 | 4.2 |
| Proportion of people whose main language spoken at home is not English ⁽¹⁾ | 12.9 | 28.1 | 50.0 | 10.9 | 25.1 |
| Proportion of people who speak English 'not well' or 'not at all' ⁽¹⁾ | 0.8 | 3.4 | 7.5 | 1.0 | 3.6 |
| Proportion of Indigenous persons in population ⁽¹⁾ | 0.2 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 |
| Unemployment rate ⁽¹⁾ | 3.6 | 5.4 | 6.3 | 3.7 | 5.0 |
| % aged 15+ completed school year 8 or below | 1.9 | 5.9 | 10.7 | 5.7 | 6.0 |
| % Low income (% of families with family income of less than \$400 per week) ⁽¹⁾ | 1.9 | 4.2 | 5.3 | 3.0 | 4.0 |
| Index of Relative Socio- Economic Disadvantage ⁽²⁾ | 1223.3 (196) | 1107.9 (180) | 1013.1 (151) | 1083.1 (172) | |

Source: (1) 2001 Census of Population and Housing, ABS; (2) SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage for NSW SLAs 2001, ABS. Ranks are in parenthesis. A ranking of 196 indicates the highest SEIFA value; a ranking of 1 indicates the lowest SEIFA value and therefore the highest relative disadvantage in NSW. (3) The South East Sydney Area for which these figures are derived is an aggregate of the following SLA's: Botany Bay, Hurstville, Kogarah, Randwick, Rockdale, South Sydney, Sutherland Shire East, Sutherland Shire West, Sydney Inner, Sydney Remainder, Waverly, Woollahra

2.2 Literature Review

A literature review of documents relating to service networks was conducted to identify key concerns for both service network effectiveness and strategies to prepare for successful transition to school within local government areas, the South East Sydney Area, NSW, national and international. The review involved searches of: electronic databases; published material; and unpublished material and reports from service organisations and academics (Section 3).

2.3 Fieldwork

The fieldwork component of the project included research with families, as well as service providers and teachers in school and prior-to-school settings.

Family research

Fieldwork to gain family perspectives aimed to target family types that have priority status under the Families First strategy and South East Sydney plan. Every effort was made to include families who have had a range of experiences, most particularly those families with multiple disadvantage.

The family research relied primarily on face-to-face interviews. In addition, focus groups and telephone interviews were conducted. In total, thirty families were recruited to the study, and analysis of the interview data showed that the main themes were consistent with and supported by extant research with families. Families were paid \$30 for participation. Interpreters were used to assist in meeting the cultural and language needs of families.

Topics discussed in this phase of the fieldwork included: families' experiences of transition to school; access to support services; child and family support needs; gaps in service provision and facilitation as well as barriers to access; and suggestions for access, information and coordination improvements.

Services, networks and Area stakeholder research

This component of the project included interviews and group discussions with key personnel, including teachers, services providers and key stakeholders. In addition to interviews and focus groups, a school and network survey was conducted.

Kindergarten to Year 2 teacher interviews

Kindergarten to Year 2 teachers in the schools in the research locations were interviewed face to face. Teachers were asked about their experience of children's transition to school, success factors relating to service support, links to other service network supports, gaps and suggestions for improvement.

Transition to school, early childhood service and interagency interviews

Staff from at least one transition to school program, early childhood service and interagency service were interviewed from within each research location. Services were selected on the basis of prioritising disadvantaged families. Staff were asked about their experience of children's transition to school, their awareness of success factors relating to service support, gaps, information needs and suggestions for improvement.

Key Stakeholder interviews and focus groups

Table 2.2 outlines the number and types of interviews and focus groups conducted. A selection of key stakeholders including existing local agencies and providers, Children’s Services Advisers, DET representatives, CALD and ATSI service providers and community groups, local government, and others identified in the project planning were interviewed in relation to the effectiveness the service network. Having first established initial representatives in each of the groups listed in Table 2.2, in conjunction with the Reference Group, a snowballing method was employed to recruit further stakeholders.

Table 2.2: Key Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups

| Interviewee Participant ⁽¹⁾ | Number |
|--|--------|
| Kindergarten to Year 2 teachers and coordinators | 9 |
| CALD | 3 |
| ATSI | 2 |
| Health | 3 |
| Allied health | 7 |
| Family support | 7 |
| Disability | 6 |
| Education | 4 |
| Children’s Services Advisor, DoCS | 2 |
| Housing | 4 |
| Child and Family School Health | 4 |
| Local government | 3 |
| Community or church group | 8 |
| Early learning service | 12 |
| Interagency groups | 8 |

(1) In some cases, interview participants provided services from multiple categories. For example, some family support services also provide early learning services, and some CALD and ATSI services are also allied health or community services. In these cases, participants were classified according to the primary activity of the organisation or, in the case of ATSI and CALD services, the community to which services are provided.

School survey

Principals in all primary schools, including Catholic, public and several non-government schools, in the research locations and surrounding areas were asked to complete a short written questionnaire about service network effectiveness and suggestions for improving service network support outcomes for child and family transitions to school. Lists of schools were obtained from various sources, including the DET website (for public schools), the Catholic Education Office (for Catholic schools) and a variety of sources including web, public information and informal sources (for non-government schools). Lists of services were obtained from a DoCS database. School principals and service centre managers answered the questionnaires.

A total response rate of 49 per cent was achieved for the survey of school principals (Table 2.3). The Bexley/Arncliffe area had the highest response (57%), and Cronulla had the lowest response rate (43%) of the research locations. In terms of school type, Catholic schools had the highest response rate (69%) followed by government schools (47%) and non-government schools (29%). The low rate of returns for non-

government schools in particular makes generalising from these schools difficult, and results must be treated with caution.

Table 2.3: School Survey Response

| Type | Complete | Total surveyed | Per cent |
|-----------------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| <i>By Area</i> | | | |
| Bondi | 11 | 25 | 44.0 |
| Malabar/Matraville | 15 | 32 | 46.9 |
| Bexley/Arncliffe | 25 | 44 | 56.8 |
| Cronulla | 12 | 28 | 42.9 |
| Total | 63 | 129 | 48.8 |
| <i>By school type</i> | | | |
| Catholic | 20 | 29 | 69.0 |
| Government | 37 | 79 | 46.9 |
| Non government | 6 | 21 | 28.6 |
| Total | 63 | 129 | 48.8 |

Service network survey

A short service network survey was sent to all relevant child, family and community services in the research locations, concerning service network effectiveness, gaps, information and suggestions for outcomes of child and family transition to school. The questionnaire primarily collected quantitative data. Of the 74 services sent a questionnaire, 43 replied, yielding a 58 per cent response rate. Response rates varied according to area, as seen in Table 2.4. As with schools, the highest proportion received from the Bexley/Arncliffe area (63%).

Table 2.4: Service Provider Survey Response

| | Complete | Total surveyed | Per cent |
|--------------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Bondi | 15 | 24 | 62.5 |
| Malabar/Matraville | 5 | 11 | 45.5 |
| Bexley/Arncliffe | 17 | 27 | 63.0 |
| Cronulla | 6 | 12 | 50.0 |
| Total | 43 | 74 | 58.1 |

It is important to reiterate that the purpose of the study is to identify service gaps for the South East Sydney area as a whole, not for specific geographic areas and school types. The primary survey analysis therefore does not seek to contrast results by area, and limits comparison of school findings to government and non-government only. More extensive breakdowns of service provider survey results by area can be found in appendix A, for those interested in pursuing this information further.

The following section discusses the literature relating to service network effectiveness and strategies for successful transition to school, followed by sections on the findings from the fieldwork.

3 Literature Review

This section reviews the literature and conceptual approaches relevant to the investigation of the effective operation of the service network and its link to successful transition to school. First the early intervention and prevention literature, which formed the evidence base of Families First, is discussed, followed by research on service networks. The debate around the meaning of school readiness and how to assess successful transition to school is then discussed.

3.1 Early Intervention and Prevention

Both international and Australian studies have shown that support for families during infancy and early childhood helps to create a healthy environment that fosters children's lifetime development and educational attainment, minimises the risk of abuse or neglect, and reduces the likelihood of future criminality and addiction (Provence and Naylor, 1983; Johnson and Walker, 1987; Miller and Whittaker, 1988; Weikart and Schweinhart, 1992; Oates et al, 1995; National Crime Prevention, 1999; McCain and Mustard, 1999). It has been estimated by one researcher that the financial benefits of taking early preventative steps outweigh the costs of providing remedial and custodial programs later by a ratio of 7:1 (Barnett, 1993).

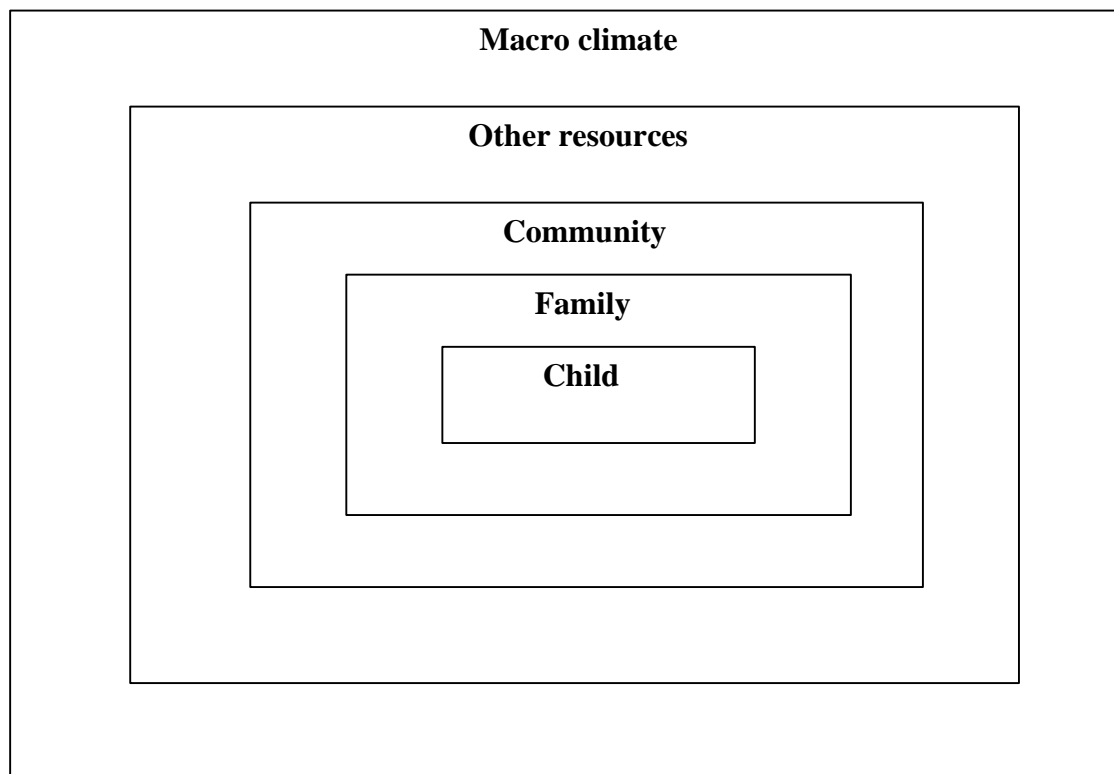
Underlying the current policy emphasis on the provision of services in the first years of life is the increased recognition of the importance of early brain development. Research indicates that the years from conception to age six, particularly the first three years, set the base for competence and coping skills that affect learning, behaviour and health throughout life. While the process of development occurs through early childhood to adolescence, the brain is most receptive in early childhood, maturing in a sequential manner. Given favourable conditions and experiences, the brain develops healthy and diverse capabilities. Conversely, brain development is negatively affected if disruptions to normal developmental experiences occur. Children who are abused or neglected can develop maladaptive behaviours (Perry and Marcellus, 1997). According to McCain and Mustard (1999) the evidence is clear that quality early childhood development programs that involve parents can improve the way parents relate to and care for children, which in turn improves outcomes for children significantly.

In the human ecological model, first developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and refined in recent years, child, family and community outcomes are conceived as a function of the relationships between the elements of the social context of a child (Figure 3.1). The strength of the ecological model is its holistic capacity. Various components build a comprehensive 'relational structure' that can adapt and adjust to the 'socio-ecological map' of the 'systemic rings'. The rings relate from each level directly to all other levels or indirectly through other levels. The model offers overall completeness and a context-sensitive, dynamic approach with the potential to deliver comprehensive results. Bronfenbrenner initiated a major change by moving away from research approaches that disregarded the social context.

The pathways perspective has its conceptual origins in Bronfenbrenner's model and has been influential in the development of Australian strategies, including Families First (National Crime Prevention, 1999). It emphasises that, for many people, crucial transition points such as starting school, moving from primary to secondary school,

leaving school and starting a family are associated with increased risk and vulnerability. At the same time, however, these transition points represent opportunities for increasing resilience and 'protective factors' against 'risk'. In contradistinction to biological models that see the early years as the only critical intervention points, the pathways model emphasise that vulnerability and risk are multi-factorial and the importance of intervening early at transition points, before problems become entrenched.

Figure 3.1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory



3.2 Integrated Service Networks

In recent years, the increase in networks across service sectors has been explained in terms of attempts to connect governments and citizens in more meaningful ways (Brown and Keast, 2003) and in terms of increasingly complex policy agendas and mandates (O'Toole, 1997: 47). In the case of direct service delivery, overlapping requirements related to service provision for certain groups of people has also been responsible for efforts to increase networks (Rivard et al, 1999).

Yet assessment of network effectiveness has been described as 'extremely problematic' (Provan and Milward, 1995: 7), in part because 'effectiveness tends to be seen by external groups as depending on what specific service providers either do or do not do, rather than how well services are provided as a result of network activities' (Provan and Milward, 2001: 422). In addition, definitions of networks sometimes conflict with each other. Some models of network require a high degree of interdependence, some do not; some argue that building networks should benefit all organisations within it, others that networks may result in individual organisations being assessed as redundant. It is possible to assess the strength and effectiveness of

networks from the perspective of either individual organisations or the network as a whole, but these perspectives may produce different and conflicting judgments.

Fortunately, an alternative standpoint is suggested in work on service integration. Complementing efforts to manage and evaluate networks from an organisational point of view, long-standing efforts to integrate services adopt the perspective of those using the services and aim to bring about continuity of care and reduced fragmentation and duplication (Rivard et al, 1999; Provan and Milward, 1995; Kwait et al, 2001). International efforts are being made to increase service integration in education, child welfare, health and public welfare. At the same time, worldwide interest in early childhood development and new forms of service integration aims to bring parents and communities into new alliances with services to support children (Waldfoegel, 1997; Corter et al, 2002).

In order to understand how the network of services is operating in South East Sydney to support parents and children, this research project undertook a similar approach and adopted the perspective of families in assessing its effectiveness. Provan and Milward write that '[s]ervice-delivery networks must be built and maintained at the organisation and network levels, but overall network effectiveness will ultimately be judged by community-level stakeholders' (2001: 423).

3.3 Transition to School

Improving the experience of children in their early years has been prioritised in recent years in order to improve learning outcomes and transitions from one sphere of life to another (OECD, 2001:76). The term 'school readiness' is commonly used in discussions about the transition to school. However the meaning of this term can vary for different groups of people such as early childhood teachers, kindergarten teachers, parents and children (Dockett and Perry 2002).

There is also much debate about how to measure 'school readiness'. Some measurements are based on assessment of development, others on level of skills depending on the theoretical approach adopted. For example the *idealist/nativist* view of 'school readiness' is something gained through a maturational process. Development is via predictable stages and external influences have no impact on it. In contrast the *empiricist/environmentalists'* approach to school readiness is that there are a set of behaviours, skills and personality traits that are the basic foundations to school achievements gained through training (NSW, DoCS, 2003). *Vygotskian theory* asserts that learning comes before development. Children will learn from the stimulation around them. Children should be placed in rich learning environments to accelerate their development (Dockett, Perry and Tracey, 2000).

More recently school readiness is viewed a multi-dimensional concept involving cognitive, social physical and emotional development. For example according to *social constructivists'* view 'school readiness' involves supporting a child's behaviour and development in terms of what that child is ready for. It uses a community-level measurement strategy including multiple modes of assessments and respondents, sensitivity to local cultural and ethnic issues, positive and negative indicators of readiness and willingness for action based on the results. 'School readiness' according to *interactionalist perspective* is the result of educational decisions shaped by skills,

experiences and learning opportunities that a child has had and the goals of the community, classroom and teacher (Janus and Offord, 2000).

In Canada, Janus and Offord (2000), have proposed a combination and modification of the *social constructivist* and *interactionalist* views. Their concept of readiness to learn, the Early Development Index (EDI) consists of five domains (or scales): physical health and well-being; social knowledge and competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and general knowledge and communication skills and two indicators: special skills and special problems. Results are measured at the population level.

In Australia, Dockett and Perry (2002), using a grounded theory approach developed a series of categories to describe the most important issues raised by children, parents and teachers when discussing 'school readiness'. These categories include knowledge (references to ideas, facts or concepts needed to be known prior to entering school), adjustment (social adjustment to the school context), skills (small units of action that could be observed or inferred from observable behaviour) disposition (children's attitude to school), rules (fitting in with school and school expectations), family issues (family functioning or involvement with the school) and educational environment (the nature of the school setting). The research found that children predominantly focus on rules whereas parents and teachers emphasise adjustment issues, although they focused on different aspects.

The findings of Dockett and Perry's (2001) research reflect Bronfenbrenner's (1979) human ecological model discussed earlier and are relevant to the debate about successful transition to school. Dockett and Perry found 'that positive and responsive relationships are vital to successful transitions and that effective transitions involve communities of individuals rather than individuals in communities' (2001:15).

Transition to school is a complex process and definitions of successful transition call on a range of domains, relationships and measures (Dockett and Perry, 2004). The transition process has been recognised for some time as a priority for many schools and early learning settings, which run transition and orientation programs. Many schools operate transition to school programs, others have orientation to school programs, and some have 'rebadged' their orientation programs, renaming them transition programs. The differences between transition and orientation programs are essentially those of time and intention. Orientation programs may occur in one session, usually of a couple of hours. They typically include large group sessions for families and provide an opportunity for the school to share information with families, such things as the school uniform, school hours and what the school expects of parents. Children typically spend time in a kindergarten classroom and may visit some areas of the school. Transition programs occur over a much longer time period and include opportunities for more individual contact between families, children and schools. Typically, they include several sessions during which the children spend time in a classroom, often with the person who will be their Kindergarten teacher. There may also be sessions for parents to attend, where they can share information with school staff, as well as seek information.

It is also important to note that there is some debate around when transition to school begins and ends. Dockett and Perry note that there is a distinction here between the transition process and transition programs discussed above. The transition process in

Dockett and Perry's description begins when there is first discussion in the family about a child starting school. Particularly when there are older siblings in a family, this starting point could occur quite early in a child's life. The transition process is finalised when all participants/stakeholders – children, families and educators – are satisfied that a successful start to school has been made – for both child and family.

Perry and Dockett (in press) suggest that there is no simple answer to the question of when the transition process begins and ends:

Transitions to school will take different amounts of time for different children and families to complete. A successful transition will have been made when the child and family feel that they are an accepted and valued part of the educational community based on the school. The signal that this has occurred will differ from child to child: it could be a child's enthusiasm to go to school; a sense of pride in what they have achieved at school; a close friendship that has developed through school, or it could be something totally different. For families, it could be being welcomed into the local parents' group, adopting a role within the school community, or being regarded with respect by staff at the school.

The Understanding the Local Service Network Project applies the above research to its conceptualisation of transition to school. Transition to school is treated broadly, considered across a range of domains and is assumed to be achieved if school is a positive experience for children, families, schools and communities. Such a transition is assisted by children's participation in early learning opportunities. Families First has a goal of universal access to formal early learning opportunities, based on research demonstrating the significance of the first years of life to the development of children and links between early child development programs and the performance of schools (Mustard, 2003, Woodruff, 2003).

Participation in early learning opportunities may also reduce the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups of children in the early years of school (Ochilree, 1994). Children from low-income families are less likely to participate in early learning experiences than children from middle- and upper-income families and while the advantages of early education programs sometimes diminish over time, '[t]hree decades of evaluations of early childhood education programs designed for low-income children have demonstrated definitively that positive effects *can* be achieved' (Stipek and Ogawa, 2000: 3).

Bowman, Donovan and Burns (2001, pp. 7-8) describe the quality of early childhood services as a critical aspect of their effectiveness. Specifically, they note that:

- While no single curriculum or pedagogical approach can be identified as best, children who attend well-planned, high-quality early childhood programs in which curriculum aims are specified and integrated across domains tend to learn more and are better prepared to master the complex demands of formal schooling; and
- Young children who are living in circumstances that place them at greater risk of school failure – including poverty, low level of maternal education, maternal depression, and other factors that can limit their access to opportunities and

resources that enhance learning and development – are much more likely to succeed in school if they attend well-planned, high quality early childhood programs.

In relation to the last point, Bowman et al., (2001: 8) report that, at least in the US, “many children, especially those in low income households, are served in child care programs of such low quality that learning and development are not enhanced and may even be jeopardized”.

Despite regulations administered by DoCS governing the operation of children’s services in NSW there is still considerable variations in the quality of service provision. Features that contribute to the quality of children’s services include:

- Curriculum content – focused on children’s learning;
- Qualified teachers;
- Low teacher-child ratios and small class sizes;
- Intense and coherent programming; and
- Collaborative relationships with parents. (Bowman et al., 2001: 133)

Features such as qualified teachers and lower teacher-child ratios are expensive, in terms of the cost of childcare. Nevertheless, they are important features if young children and their families are to benefit from early childhood service provision. It is certainly not the case that *any* provision of children’s services will lead to desirable learning and developmental outcomes. For children’s services to be effective, they need to be high quality services. This is particularly so for children living in disadvantaged circumstances.

While formal early learning opportunities are generally defined as those provided by long day care and preschools, a broader definition of early learning opportunities will be used in this project as it was in earlier Families First research (Warrilow et al, 2004: 6). This broader definition will be used in recognition that early learning opportunities could be available in parent support programs, other types of community services such as community centres or libraries, and existing family and social networks. This broader definition should also be applied in the context of the recognised importance of the quality of services.

The accessibility of early learning opportunities will depend in part on the links between services that provide these opportunities and other services for families, such as Migrant Resource Centres, neighbourhood centres, libraries, community health centres, general practitioners, church groups, family support services and housing and accommodation support. An integrated service system will ensure that early learning opportunities are accessible to all children and families.

While an integrated service network provides accessible early learning opportunities to all families, families who need extra support may need or use a number of specific health or other services. For these families, an integrated service network will also operationalise system-of-care principles, including family-focused care, coordination of services and use of least restrictive service options. These principles are designed to eliminate fragmentation and duplication of services, and ensure people ‘do not “fall through the cracks” in the system’ (Kwait et al, 2001: 469). An integrated service

system will ensure that any additional needs for children and families are identified and addressed.

3.4 Summary of the Literature

An integrated service network that facilitates a positive transition to school will have strong links between:

- families and services that provide early learning opportunities (hereafter early learning services);
- families and services that provide other support to families (hereafter child and family services);
- families and schools;
- families with additional needs and services that provide support in identifying and addressing those needs;
- early learning services and child and family services; and
- early learning services and schools.

For the purposes of this project ‘strong links’ will be present if:

- child and family services know about and recognise the value of early learning services;
- early learning services know about and recognise the value of child and family services; and
- services have the capacity to refer families to other services.

In addition, strong links will be present *only if* formal or informal links and referral mechanisms between child and family services and early learning services:

- exist;
- increase the accessibility of early learning services; and
- effect a transition between services that is family focused, individualised and culturally competent, where cultural competency is defined as the institutionalisation of appropriate practices for diverse populations.

The data collection instruments (Attachment A) were designed to assess the integration of services and the experience of children’s transition to school. The following two sections report on the findings of the fieldwork in relation to successful transition to school and the extent and effectiveness of the service network.

4 Transition to School Findings

This section examines the findings from the fieldwork component of the project relating to transitions to school. As outlined in Section 2 data were collected using interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders including kindergarten teachers and coordinators, early learning teachers, service providers and families, and a survey of school principals and service managers. The results reported here include analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data. Questions covering a range of aspects of school networks and transition were addressed in the both the survey and the interviews.

The section begins with an overview of the schools and their transition programs. The main findings from the research are concerned with factors facilitating successful transition to school; factors limiting successful transition to school; the links between families, services and schools and identified information and support needs. Each of these is discussed below.

4.1 Transition to School Programs

To gauge an estimate of school size the survey asked about the number of kindergarten classes and number of children enrolled in 2004. Government schools on average enrolled more kindergarten students (59 more children on average per school) than other schools. Consequently they had more classes (2.3 per school) than non-government schools (around 1.5 per school). Class sizes were similar across all schools, ranging from 22 to 25 students per class.

As noted in the literature, activities around transition to school vary considerably and ranged from orientation programs typically running over one session to more extended transition programs that occur over longer periods of time. Nearly all schools responding to the survey reported organising some form of transition to school or orientation program. These programs involved a range of activities, including an orientation day or night for children, an information day or night for parents, visits to the school by enrolling children, and visits to early learning services by school teachers (Table 4.1). Over 80 per cent of the schools surveyed ran orientation days/nights. Eighty-nine per cent of government schools have the child visit the school. A number of schools are involved in additional activities concerning transition to school (15-16%). These included providing information packages, extended orientation programs, observations and assessments of children.

Nearly half of all schools surveyed provided information packages for families. About a quarter of all the schools ran extended transition to school programs for parents and children, where pre-schoolers spent a number of mornings in the kindergarten class with other children.

A fifth of schools surveyed conducted observations and assessments of preschoolers, through either an interview process or orientation program. This was done so as to ascertain the social skills and support needs of the children. The majority of both non-government and government schools transition programs involved students and teachers visiting early learning services.

Table 4.1: Transition to School Programs

| | Government | | All Non-Government | | Total | |
|--|------------|----------|--------------------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Run some kind of transition program | 36 | 97.3 | 24 | 92.3 | 60 | 95.2 |
| Run an orientation/information day/night | 34 | 91.9 | 24 | 92.3 | 58 | 92.1 |
| Have children visit the school | 33 | 89.2 | 20 | 76.9 | 53 | 84.1 |
| Have teachers/students visit any early learning services | 20 | 54.1 | 15 | 57.7 | 35 | 55.6 |
| Other program | 6 | 16.2 | 3 | 11.5 | 9 | 14.3 |
| Total respondents | 37 | | 26 | | 63 | |

The survey also asked schools what they did to prepare for children starting school. Approximately half of the principals' surveyed conducted interviews with families and examined preschool and other agency reports. Schools also gave parents information at the orientation and information sessions, concerning such things as school policies and uniforms. Almost two-fifths of schools conducted assessments to identify children with special needs, such as speaking a language other than English or learning difficulties. A quarter of survey respondents' began preparing for the arrival of kindergarten children by organising classroom equipment, selecting teacher's aides and organising recess and lunch supervision. A quarter of the schools made older children aware of the new children starting school.

In terms of what schools thought other services did to prepare children for school, just over a quarter of schools thought services predominately identified children with special needs through assessment and observation, and assisted in securing additional funding for supporting such things as teachers' aides. A similar proportion believed services engaged in liaison and information collection, including sharing information between preschools, kindergarten teachers, counsellors, and families. About a fifth of schools said that they were unsure of what other services do to prepare children for school.

4.2 Factors Facilitating Transition to School

The research found that a number of factors facilitated the transition to school process for both children and parents. For children, these factors included the development of social skills and independence and access to early learning services. Whilst children were the primary beneficiaries of in-house transition to school programs, such programs also assisted parents in the transition process.

Development of social skills and independence

In the discussions about 'school readiness' in the interviews and focus groups social skills and independence - rather than academic skills such as whether a child can count or read letters emerged as the most important factors in facilitating transition to school, according to parents, kindergarten teachers and staff from early learning services. Social skills included interacting effectively with peers by cooperating,

taking turns and sharing, and having the confidence to participate in activities inside and outside the classroom as well as to ask questions. Lack of confidence or immaturity was often associated with being unable to follow instructions, which in turn led to children falling behind. One kindergarten teacher involved in assessing children at the school's orientation program stated:

I'm looking at their social skills...how they interact with their peers and how they interact with adults. I look at their oral language skills, how they communicate. (Teacher)

Independence, including being able to open their lunch boxes and its contents as well as dress themselves, also rated highly. Kindergarten teachers and early learning services staff thought that parents could also facilitate the transition process by talking to their children about 'big' school and what the school day would entail.

Factors identified by schools principals in the survey as important for children to make a successful transition to school were similar to those identified in the interviews, as shown in Table 4.2. The most important factor identified 'adjustment', or social skills and independence. Mean scores for adjustment ranged from 7 and above (out of a possible 8) for all types of schools. 'Disposition' and 'skill' also scored highly, whilst pre-existing knowledge was rated as of least importance, showing the lowest mean score of all issues for schools overall. No great variations were apparent across the schools.

Table 4.2: Principals' Ratings of Importance of Factors Affecting Transition

| | Government | | All Non-Government | | Total | |
|---|------------|------|--------------------|------|-----------|------|
| | n | mean | n | mean | n | mean |
| Adjustment (eg. socialising, independence) | 33 | 7.5 | 23 | 7.4 | 56 | 7.5 |
| Skill (eg. shoelaces, toilet) | 23 | 5.6 | 15 | 5.6 | 38 | 5.6 |
| Family Issues (eg. family functioning, involvement) | 22 | 4.6 | 13 | 4.7 | 35 | 4.7 |
| Rules (eg. know and conform) | 20 | 4.4 | 12 | 4.4 | 32 | 4.4 |
| Physical (eg. eating, health) | 18 | 4.2 | 14 | 4.5 | 32 | 4.3 |
| Educational Environment (eg. what happens, curriculum) | 20 | 4.2 | 11 | 4.3 | 31 | 4.3 |
| Total Respondents | 37 | | 26 | | 63 | |

Note: Respondents were asked to rank at least three of the issues using scores ranging from 1 to 8. Results here are calculated by reverse coding such score (1 becomes 8, 2 becomes 7 etc) and taking the mean of all scores provided for each issue (ie missing values or 'zeros' were excluded from each calculation) Source: Dockett and Perry (2001).

Access to early learning services

As reflected in the literature, families, teachers and early learning services staff identified access to early learning services such as long day care, preschools and playgroups as a key factor facilitating successful transition to school. High quality early learning services gave children the opportunity to interact socially with their peers and other adults. They learned to listen, participate within group activities, to share and take turns, and to gain confidence and independence.

Teachers in the interviews pointed out that most children starting school in this area had attended early learning services. One teacher noted:

I suppose in lots of ways the children that come to school and have attended preschool. Often I find that the preschools are great. That really affects whether they're ready etc for school. It's the children that don't attend preschool, that turn up in the kindergarten system that sometimes are the ones that teachers are concerned about. They haven't been picked up early. (Teacher)

The cost associated with long day care and preschools and a lack of available places meant that some families were unable to gain access to them prior to their children starting school. The cost of childcare in South East Sydney is significant, amounting to \$90 a day in some services. It is highly probable that expenses of this order have an impact on the accessibility of early learning services, and schools report that some children enrol at school before they are socialised to cope with classroom demands because of the cost of child care.

Cost of early childhood services and difficulties in using child and family services can mean that families who are newly arrived to the country or to a particular area do not use any early learning services prior to enrolling. Although participants from all areas and all services and schools note that most children have some experience in an early learning service, those who have not often need extra support and their transition is difficult. This is illustrated in the comment from one teacher that:

while they're trying to understand how school works they miss learning, you know, six months of learning has just disappeared before your eyes so yeah I think they would benefit greatly from other services if they could be encouraged to access them. I think it's a confidence thing as well, someone who feels out of the loop doesn't really want to approach and I think that's a major problem. (Teacher)

In response to this, a number of schools and organisations established facilitated playgroups. One example is a playgroup operating in a school. The school provides the venue but a private corporation initially funded the playgroup facilitator. At the time of the research they were seeking further funding. The kindergarten teacher who developed the playgroup noticed that a number of children starting school had no exposure to preschool or playgroups. These children also tended to be aged 4 ½ years, with limited English and social skills. The program aimed to combine a preschool/playgroup setting with a qualified teacher and to encourage the caregivers, many of who were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and/or

grandparents, to interact with their children in various activities. Children attending the playgroup were more settled when starting kindergarten, according to the kindergarten teachers at the school.

Although access to early learning services was acknowledged as a key factor in successful transition to school some early learning service staff raised concerns about the difficulties faced by children moving from the child-centred approach within many early learning settings to the very structured classroom environment. Some early learning service staff felt that the school environment needed to adapt more to the needs of the child, particularly in the transition period. Examples of adaptive behaviour included allowing children to sleep during the day if needed.

Contact with schools through transition to school programs

For some families, schools can be a daunting place especially if it is their first child starting school or their experience of school was negative. Transition to school programs, as outlined in literature and Section 4.1, vary markedly. Generally families attending found them useful in the transition process. Child and family service providers and early learning services staff felt it was important for the children and their families to build a relationship with the school, to allow them to become familiar with the school environment and its operation prior to starting school. Service providers felt that transition programs over more extended periods allowed for the development of a relationship and familiarity with the school.

Transition programs for children with identified disabilities

Families, teachers, early learning services staff and service providers identified the DET transition to school program as a key support for the successful transition to school for children with identified disabilities. The planning meetings give the families and the children the opportunity to establish formal and informal contact with the school. These transition meetings identify the needs of the child, family and school so that appropriate support can be organised. One service provider described how a successful transition for a child with a disability was achieved.

One child who was very low functioning...couldn't talk...It's been very hard for the teacher, although she's had a lot of support. But the children have been good with him and he's been invited to parties...He might not have learnt much but he has become part of that community. They received support from the Department...In this case the [teachers] aide was there three-quarters of the day....It depends on the teacher's attitude, she found it very hard but she was very calm, very open to help and she likes him. (Early learning service)

4.3 Factors limiting successful transition to school

A number of factors emerged as limiting successful transition to school. These included: limited access to early learning services, a lack of an established and consistent link between early learning services and schools; and a lack of a relational bridge between services supporting children prior to starting school and services once school commences. Another barrier identified in the research concerns problems associated with access to information about transition to school for families from CALD backgrounds.

Limited access to early learning services

The most common barriers to accessing early learning services such as long day care and preschools are the long waiting lists and costs, as discussed in Section 4.2. Apart from these barriers, some families, such as newly arrived migrants and mothers not in paid work were unable to access early learning services because priority is given to working parents. For some parents, this meant they could not participate in training programs or look for paid work. Transport, isolation and language are other barriers to accessing early learning services. These factors are also important in the access of families to other child and family services, discussed in Section 5.

Families, service providers and teachers reported that playgroups are another form of early learning services that potentially assist children in their transition to school by providing an environment outside their home where they can meet and interact with other children and adults. Playgroups can be parent-run or take the form of supported playgroups, which are operated by trained staff for example a teacher and/or a parent support worker. As there are sometimes no costs associated with them, they are an option for families with limited income. However, some families from ATSI and CALD backgrounds are reluctant to attend some parent-run playgroups because they do not feel welcomed or comfortable. If playgroups represent only 'mainstream' language skills, parenting practices and family arrangements, they may exclude families who have different characteristics.

Lack of established and consistent links between early learning services and schools

The research found there is a lack of established and consistent links between early learning services and schools. The type and number of links varied between schools, and depended greatly on the attitude of early learning service staff, and on individual school principals and teachers. Apart from information about children with disabilities or developmental delays, a number of schools did not consistently utilise the information available from the early learning services. Some early learning services noted that they prepared reports and folders of children's work over the year but received no feedback about the reports. They wondered if this information was used. One service provider noted:

[We need] to get schools into preschools, more understanding, identifying [children] who are at risk early. Preschools have a pretty good idea who is going to struggle and how to access that knowledge. For children who are in my program, they come through a transition to school plan. At least they're identified but it's the kids who turn up out of the woodwork. But most of them have been in some kind of early childhood setting and they [early learning services] would have a lot to tell us.(Teacher)

Some early learning services felt that professional trust and respect between them and the school community was not mutual. Communication between the two sectors is informal and limited.

The quantitative data reflected these findings. Links between schools and early learning services were not universal (Table 4.3). School teacher visits to early learning services were the most common form of linkage for 60 per cent of all

schools. Less than half of all schools surveyed exchanged information or had early learning service staff provide child profiles to the school prior to the beginning of school. Also a third of school principals surveyed identified the need to develop closer links with early learning services, in keeping with the qualitative findings.

Table 4.3: School Links With Early Learning Services

| | Government | | All Non-Government | | Total | |
|---|------------|----------|--------------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Teacher visits early learning service | 24 | 64.9 | 14 | 53.8 | 38 | 60.3 |
| Early learning service staff visits | 18 | 48.7 | 7 | 26.9 | 25 | 39.7 |
| Early learning service staff provide child profiles | 16 | 43.2 | 12 | 46.2 | 28 | 44.4 |
| Exchange information | 19 | 51.4 | 11 | 42.3 | 30 | 47.6 |
| Other | 3 | 8.1 | 2 | 7.7 | 5 | 7.9 |
| No | 3 | 8.1 | 6 | 23.1 | 9 | 14.3 |
| Total Respondents | 37 | | 26 | | 63 | |

Transition between service types after school begins

The interviews and focus groups revealed a lack of a ‘service transition’ bridge between services supporting children (especially children with special needs) prior to school and services supporting children once school begins. Prior to starting school parents and children are involved with early intervention services that are family-centred. Service providers noted that parents and children build up relationships with these support workers. After starting school they enter a separate system of support and funding. A service provider noted:

Parents sometimes feel that they’ve been thrown out. I know with some early interventions, they follow the children through and I think that’s what more early interventions should do, to be there to support the families. (Early learning service)

This changeover can be stressful for both the children, who are already vulnerable, and their parents. The funding system also offers little capacity for prevention, especially for children with mild intellectual disability. Often no support is organised for these children until a crisis occurs.

Access to information about transition to school

Accessing information about the school community and the importance of transition to school and what is involved is often difficult for people from CALD backgrounds. Information in community languages is not freely available for parents at orientation days. One parent from a CALD background pointed out that schools in Australia operate differently to those in other countries and for parents with little or no English this can be confusing.

Parents wanted more information on how the school operated, for example, how to make an appointment and how to talk to teachers so they could be more relaxed about approaching the school. One service provider noted that the ethnic liaison officer provided valuable support because they linked teachers and school and parents.

Information about other services and support available to families is also inaccessible because of language, a point that will be discussed in Section 5.

4.4 Links Between Families, Services and Schools

Several points in the service system emerged as key links between families, services and schools. These included early learning services, school counsellors, Child and Family School Health Nurses and the DET transition to school program, for children with special needs. Each is discussed below. The links between schools and the service network are then discussed.

Early learning services and early intervention

Early childhood services provide many of the services that make transition to school a positive experience for children and families. In addition, they may be key points in identifying potential problems early. In terms of Families First, one of the major benefits associated with access to early learning services prior to attending school is that learning difficulties and developmental delays can be detected early and families can be referred to appropriate support services. The operation of Supplementary Services Scheme (SUPS) teams in some areas enabled early learning services to link into the network of support available. The SUPS team also provided support to early learning services staff.

However, long waiting lists for child and family services, particularly allied health services and the cost of private services impacted on the ability of families to access appropriate support. As one service provider stated:

And then there are some parents who haven't noticed their child's development...And sometimes the risks can be very subtle...I think it's more the case that students who never have any contact with an institutional setting, who never have attended long day care or preschool, those children tend to slip through more often. (Early learning service)

Schools counsellors and the service network

School counsellors provide an important link for families and children to the broader child and family network once a child begins school. School counsellors reported that they are often assigned to school for a limited period. Consequently they spend most of their time doing crisis work rather than focusing on prevention and early intervention. Teachers recognised the important role counsellors played. One teacher stated:

A good school counsellor makes all the difference. Having access to the school counsellor is a departmental thing where we only get a day a week and really the work, a good school counsellor could easily do 2 days per week to do all the program we'd like to see.(Teacher)

Child and Family School Health Nurses

Child and family school health nurses' screening of children and referral process provide a critical point of early intervention once a child starts school. They also provide a link between schools and the service network, especially for children whose difficulties have not been picked up before starting school. As one teacher stated:

I must say that we're very fortunate that we have the school nurse from [centre name]. She comes up on orientation days and she's very proactive...She provides lots of fantastic information and she sends along things for the newsletter...She does tests on the kids' hearing and she screens the kindies. And that's marvellous, you don't get that in all schools anymore. (Teacher)

DET transition to school

The DET transition to school program provided crucial support for children with an identified disability. Planning meetings that brought together the family, the school, services already supporting the child and services that would be involved once school started assisted the families and schools in the transition process. Families using the services stated it was a useful service but found that the resources were limited.

Schools links to the service network

The research found that schools in general are only linked to the broader service system via the school counsellors and child and family school health nurses. The strongest links are to health services such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists. Individual teachers and principals also have established links to the service network. For example one teacher stated:

Because I've been around for a long time and I'm very willing to call in services and talk to parents because I know that there are some great services out there and I try to encourage parents to take those on. The cost is a huge factor. (Teacher)

The survey also shows that schools were less likely to be linked with services other than early learning services (16% with no links; Table 4.4). Proportions recording visits from services were fairly even across schools (41% overall). Information exchange was the most common form of linkage to other services (62% of all schools).

Table 4.4: School Links With Other Child and Family Services

| | Government | | All Non-Government | | Total | |
|-----------------------|------------|----------|--------------------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Exchange information | 25 | 67.6 | 14 | 53.8 | 39 | 61.9 |
| Services visit school | 15 | 40.5 | 11 | 42.3 | 26 | 41.3 |
| Other | 4 | 10.8 | 2 | 7.7 | 6 | 9.5 |
| No | 5 | 13.5 | 5 | 19.2 | 10 | 15.9 |
| Total respondents | 37 | | 26 | | 63 | |

Half of the school principals surveyed had links with allied health professionals including speech therapists and occupational therapists. A third indicated they were seeking links with specialist medical services, such as cochlea implant specialists, psychologists, physiotherapists, hearing and vision specialists, and paediatricians. Early intervention services were accessed by a fifth of the schools surveyed. Other links included the DET Transition to School Unit and child and family services.

Seventy-three per cent of schools had referred children in kindergarten to a child and family or educational support service. Most of these referrals were to allied health professionals, including occupational therapists and speech pathologists. Half of all schools made referrals to specialist medical services, including behavioural optometrists, psychologists, paediatricians, general practitioners and vision and hearing specialists. Community Health Services offering parenting programs, counselling services, and eye and ear testing were accessed by a fifth of the schools surveyed.

4.5 Identified information and support gaps

A number of information and support gaps emerged consistently across the interviews, focus groups and the surveys. These included gaps in support for transition to school for children with special needs without a definitive diagnosis and children from CALD and ATSI background; information about when a child should start school; accessibility of the school; and a lack of supported playgroups.

Gaps in support for transition to school

Gaps in support for children without a definitive diagnosis and those in the low to mild range of impairment were identified. These gaps occur because these children fall outside DADHC's service criteria and health services do not have the resources to meet these children's needs. In some cases speech therapy is difficult to access, as speech pathologists working in the public health system perceived that these children should be supported by DADHC.

Prior identification of children with special needs was a support gap amongst almost a fifth of school principals surveyed. More specifically, one in ten schools identified the problem of children starting school with undiagnosed speech difficulties, hearing and vision problems and learning difficulties. This gap, combined with a 6-month waiting list for diagnosis once a child started attending school, was seen as a major information and support gap.

Families from some population groups find it difficult to use mainstream services. These population groups include newly arrived migrants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, transient and temporarily housed families, CALD families in areas without established communities and families living in poverty, for whom pressures such as food and accommodation make starting school a comparatively minor event.

The alienation of these groups from institutions such as schools was attributed to a number of reasons, including language barriers and cultural expectations, the cultural competence of schools and agencies and memories of parents' own experiences at school. While it is very difficult for individual teachers and workers to address any or all of these factors, it is nonetheless essential that they are acknowledged. Equally, the accessibility and competence of schools in working with these families must be considered a responsibility of schools and agencies, not solely of families themselves.

This point is reflected in the comment from one interview participant from an ATSI service that transition to school for Aboriginal families is often difficult:

I think a lot of Aboriginal families have lost respect for the school system because if you look at our styles of learning before school, Aboriginal families, it's very cultural to let your children learn through trial and error, participate in something without too much instruction, without being told no, don't do that...Whereas if you look at the school system, it's very structured, there's a lot of instruction, there is little to no room for self-directed activities and error, no room for flexibility. (ATSI service)

Families and service providers identified the provision of information from DET and schools in community languages as a good start in improving existing strategies. However, the inaccessibility of schools to these groups means that community languages and interpreting services are not enough. Cultural- and language-specific groups and services such as the South Pacific playgroup in Bexley/Arncliffe perform valuable roles in establishing relationships and supporting the introduction of families to schools and other agencies.

In some areas, relatively long-established CALD populations, such as the Arabic speaking community in Bexley, have established language and culture-specific services and groups. In other areas, emergent populations and highly mobile and transient populations do not have access to such services. Interviews identified the ATSI population in Cronulla as dispersed and under-serviced, and Bondi as home to newly-arrived families from many Asian and European countries. Teachers and agency staff in these areas only occasionally have the linguistic capabilities to communicate with families in their first language, and population numbers are mostly too small to attract funding for language and culture-specific services. These are particularly difficult problems facing schools and support services, and have a significant impact on the utility of services to families.

Access to information about when to start school

Some parents found it difficult to gain information about when a child should start school, particularly children whose birthdays are March to July. Parents reported getting inconsistent information from different sources about when their child should start school.

A common theme emerging in the interviews with teachers was that children starting school aged 4 ½ years tended to struggle more in their transition and tended to lag behind, although not in all cases. According to some teachers, the decision by some families whether to send their child to school was financial because they could not afford to keep their child in an early learning service.

A fifth of schools surveyed said many parents are unsure of school expectations, and readiness skills for kindergarten children. A number of schools said they would like to see more involvement from parents with their children starting school.

Access to the school prior to starting school

Both families and service providers suggested that successful transition for all children involved demystifying school for parents and children and helping schools become more approachable and comfortable with parents. Some service providers and

families felt it was important to let parents know the benefits of attending transition to school programs, particularly those who have little or no exposure to early learning services.

4.6 Summary

A number of factors were identified in the discussions about opportunities to develop 'school readiness' as facilitating the transition to school process for both children and parents. Social skills and independence emerged as the most important factors in facilitating transition.

A number of factors emerged as detracting from successful transition to school. These included: limited access to early learning services and a lack of consistent links between early learning services and schools. Another barrier identified in the research concerns problems associated with access to information about transition to school for families from CALD backgrounds.

Access to early learning services such as long day care, preschools and playgroups were key factors in facilitating successful transition to school. High quality early learning services gave children the opportunity to interact socially with their peers and other adults. They learned to listen, participate in group activities, to share and take turns and to gain confidence and independence. All of these experiences assist in the transition to school.

The cost associated with long day care centre and preschools and a lack of available places means that some families cannot access them. Families from low income and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often find it difficult to access these services. Supported playgroups organised by some schools and NGOs provided opportunities for children from disadvantaged families, unable to access long day care or preschools, to benefit from social interactions with other children and adults.

Transition to school activities vary across South East Sydney. Some families find schools daunting places especially if it is their first child starting school or their experience of school was negative. Service providers commented on the importance of building a relationship with the school and becoming familiar with the school environment and its operation prior to starting school. This is often difficult to achieve when orientation and information sessions are conducted over a few hours. Extended transition programs over a number of days provided more opportunities for this relationship and familiarity to develop.

The links between early learning services and schools varied between schools and depended on the actions of individual principals and teachers. Apart from information about children with disabilities or developmental delays, schools did not consistently utilise the information available from the early learning services. Communication between the two sectors was informal and limited. The lack of a 'service transition' bridge between services supporting children (especially children with special needs) prior to school and services supporting children once school begins weakened the likelihood of successful transition to school.

Accessing information about the school community and the importance of transition to school and what is involved is often difficult for people from CALD backgrounds.

Information in community languages is not freely available for parents at orientation days.

Several points in the service system emerged as key links between families, services and schools. These included early learning services, school counsellors, child and family health school nurses and DET transition to school programs.

The research found that schools in general are only linked to the broader service system via the school counsellors and child and family health school nurses. These services provide vital links but only after a child starts school. The strongest links are to health services such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists. Individual teachers and principals also have established links to the service network.

A number of information and support gaps emerged consistently from the interviews, focus groups and the surveys. These included gaps in support for transition to school for children with special needs without a definitive diagnosis and children from CALD and ATSI background; information about when a child should start school; accessibility of the school and a lack of supported playgroups.

In addition to the specific focus on transition to school, the research analysed the operations of the broader service system for families with children aged 3-5. The two sets of findings provide an overview of the operation of the service network for families during the significant experience of a child starting school. The following section reviews the findings from the local service network.

5 Local Service Network Findings

This section describes findings from interviews, focus groups and the survey on the local service network and service integration. More detailed information on services in each area, including number of operating days per week, types of services provided, and reported referral and communication links, is provided in Appendix A. The findings presented here relate to factors impacting on appropriate child and family access and utilisation of support; factors impacting on agencies and services capacity to identify and address support needs early; key points in the service network where families support needs are identified and they are linked to relevant supports; strengths and gaps in coordination in the service network so that families receive integrated, relevant and timely support; and factors that enhance the development of partnerships and barriers that inhibit partnerships being developed across the service network.

Each of these is outlined below.

5.1 Factors Impacting on Appropriate Child and Family Access and Utilisation of Support

A number of factors affect families' use of services and support. Factors that facilitate use of services include visibility, provision of a number of services from a single site, community-centred and community-specific service delivery and links with the local area. In contrast, the very high demand for, and limited supply of, a number of services, social and geographic isolation of families and patchy transport systems were identified by survey and interview participants as limitations on access to services. Each of these factors is detailed below.

This subsection concludes with discussion and recommendations around the place of schools in the service system, as schools are an almost universal experience for children and families and so represent an opportunity for connection between families and support services.

Factors facilitating access

Access to services and programs was facilitated by a range of factors in each of the sites.

Strong links with the local community facilitated use of a service. These links were established in various ways, including length of time in an area; location in a visible, accessible centre; or community-based management structures. Organisations with a community development focus and funding, such as Bondi Beach Cottage and Kooloora Community Centre, reported being able to set up new programs that were responsive to specific, locally-identified needs. Examples of these programs are domestic violence support groups in Bondi and a respite service for parents in Maroubra.

Services designed for and delivered to a specific community, through a trusted individual or organisation, addressed gaps in service integration and access for families isolated from mainstream services. The Aboriginal Mental Health worker, for example, acts as an advocate for Aboriginal families in their engagements with mainstream housing and health services.

Multiple services delivered from a single site or through a single program enhanced the accessibility of services and addressed the very high needs for some services in short supply. For example, Lifestart run supported playgroups for children with special needs attended by special educators and therapists. These provide an opportunity for parent support as well as some access to treatment services, such as speech therapy, that have very long waiting lists for individual service.

High demand for and limited supply of services

Access and utilisation of support is significantly impeded by a combination of three factors: growing numbers of children diagnosed with delays in speech and language, developmental delays and developmental disabilities, particularly autism and autism spectrum disorder; increasing clinical and educational emphasis on the impact of these disorders on the experience of school; and long waiting lists for public provision of diagnostic and treatment services for these disorders. Interview participants from all agencies and in all areas identified the provision of these services as problematic, with both demand and need overwhelming supply. Private services are available and a viable option for some families, but a case cannot be made that many families have a 'choice' of private or public service provider when the cost of private services is prohibitive for many.

Waiting lists and demand for diagnostic and treatment services is a problem faced by all families with children who may have additional support needs. For those families in population groups identified as isolated from mainstream services, these difficulties are compounded. As a consequence of this, service providers identified an under-representation of ATSI and some CALD groups among their client groups relative to the community in which they were operating.

Isolation

A number of families with young children in South East Sydney, as in other areas, face difficulties with social or geographic (or both) isolation. Families who had used and benefited from services and groups, such as new mothers groups, family support and playgroups, reported making some effort to find these groups, through using telephone or council directories or approaching agencies. This suggests that families, particularly women, who cannot make that effort are unlikely to get access to those groups unless through a friend or someone else known to them. Isolated families are by definition hard to reach and unlikely to be utilising a great deal of support. It is important to balance respect for privacy and differences among families with the need for effective service provision that reaches those for whom it is intended. Good examples of this balance were found and will be discussed in section 5.3 on key points below.

Public transport and the location of service agencies compound the difficulties of isolation. Transport services in some areas in South East Sydney are very patchy, and services reported difficulties faced by families, particularly with more than one child, in getting around and getting to agencies. The location of some agencies in Maroubra and Matraville means that provision of transport is essential to the delivery of any of their services, and any planning of new services must take the cost and labour of providing transport into account.

Schools in the service system

Given the fractured nature of service provision amongst organisations providing support to children and families, schools represent a possible key point connecting families, communities and the service system. Schools perform institutional and social functions that cannot always accommodate different kinds of families and parenting practices. In addition, teachers, like workers in early learning services, spend most of their time teaching children and so their opportunities to participate in the broader service system are limited. Despite this there are constraints in schools and for school personnel that inhibit their interaction in things outside the education activities of the school.

Nevertheless, as noted earlier in this section, a number of areas were identified where schools are particularly inaccessible to some families, or particularly remote from other services. The place of schools in the community does not appear to have been a focus for government or non-government agencies. In addition, individualistic models of children and families appear to be entrenched, and medical models of service provision and additional needs were dominant in interviews. This is also reflected in the survey results on links between school and child and family services, described in Section 4.

There are two implications of these findings for the place of schools in the service system. First, the involvement of parents in their children's school lives is supported by early intervention research concluding that the involvement of parents in early childhood programs can improve the way parents care for their children, as well as improve educational outcomes for their children. Expanding the place of schools in the communities is a means for increasing this involvement. Second, weak links between families and schools reveal gaps in the integration of the service network and therefore potential sites for strengthening integration. The human ecological model, which emphasises the social context of a child, is also useful here as it suggests other dimensions of the service system than the medical model of service delivery, such as the relationships between families and communities. Teachers and principals cannot change the political and social environment in which children and families live, but it is critical that they are aware of and acknowledge that environment, the functions of schools within it, and the effects of it on families.

More broadly, alternatives to individualistic models, such as those that figure schools as community resources and those that foster the participation of parents in the management of schools, could improve the accessibility of schools to families and reconfigure their place in the service system. A number of these models, such as Schools as Community Centres, Parents as Teachers and Families and Schools Together, have been implemented successfully in other Families First areas.

5.2 Factors Impacting the Capacity of Agencies and Services to Identify and Address Support Needs Early

Barriers to access and utilisation of support, described above, also limit the capacity of agencies and services to identify and address needs early. Factors relating to this capacity include high unmet demand for chronic and crisis services; limited opportunities for improving referrals and relationships; eligibility criteria for treatment services; and scarce and diminishing resources in the community sector.

Unmet demand

The capacity of agencies to operate using the principles of prevention and early intervention is limited by the unmet demand for existing services, especially for diagnostic, assessment, treatment and respite services. It is limited also by the reluctance of workers to add pressure to existing waiting lists or refer families to already overstretched services. Interview participants from child and family services reported being frustrated in their efforts to operate according to principles of early intervention and prevention, largely because scarce resources forced them to focus on chronic and crisis services. For these services, intervening early is rarely possible because of the unmet demand for chronic and crisis services and the lack of resources to provide those services, let alone expand service provision to those requiring different kinds of support. Some early learning services do not accept children with additional needs because of zero vacancy rates. Other early learning services reported limited or no links with schools or child and family services.

Time spent on waiting lists, especially for speech or occupational therapy services, means a delay between identification of a problem and addressing it. Teachers and service providers both identified the time taken to respond to problems as critical, and argued that a long wait can turn an emergent problem into an entrenched one. Teachers and other representatives from school settings report identifying delays or disabilities in children, and argued that either these delays were not evident until the child started school or that workers in early learning services did not pick them up.

In contrast, representatives of early learning services reported identifying problems in children that could not then be addressed. Support for workers and families to address identified needs is provided in some early learning services. There are many instances where this support, for example the SUPS coordinated through Waverley Council in Bondi and Sutherland Shire Council in Cronulla, works extremely well. However, some smaller private services do not use or apply for these services due to the administrative burden of doing so and long waiting lists for some of them.

Eligibility for treatment services

As noted in Section 4, diagnostic or other criteria for much service eligibility limits the numbers of children and families who receive support, and it is families with less severe needs who are excluded from some services. Participants identified several categories likely to be so excluded: children with mild intellectual disabilities; children with behavioural or developmental delays that are not global or do not meet the diagnostic criteria of a disability; families recovering from crisis; and families where parents or children are suffering from psychiatric distress such as undiagnosed depression.

While resources to support families with high needs are also scarce, and all participants argued for the need for more of these resources, it is simply not possible for many service providers to prioritise early intervention within the parameters of their agencies. Compounding this, resource allocation systems were identified by some participants as placing a particular strain on services in South East Sydney. Wealthier areas, and those where performances on skills tests in schools are strong (often the same areas), do not receive as much funding for services and school programs offering extra support as other areas do. Poor and otherwise disadvantaged

children and families who live in areas with a great deal of privilege, such as Bondi and Cronulla, may not receive services they could if they lived elsewhere.

Scarce and diminishing resources

Community resources to support families, act on local community-identified needs and provide integrated services from across agencies are lacking in most areas, and service providers identified this lack as a severe limit on their capacity to provide early intervention and prevention services.

While many interview participants spoke primarily of health and disability needs as paramount, an equally strong argument for services outside the health system was identified. Services such as those provided by neighbourhood centres and community legal centres are scarce in most areas and in some, such as Cronulla, entirely absent. Child and family services, particularly family support services, reported working less effectively in these environments than in areas where a broad range of services are provided, because a small number of organisations need to deliver a large range of services to a lot of families.

Limited opportunities for effective referrals

Participants also reported lacking the time and other resources to seek out referrals from other agencies and to improve communication and referral links. For example, workers from DADHC argued that they receive fewer referrals from early learning services than they should. Workers from some local community-based services reported knowing that their service was not known or accessible to some population groups, for example ATSI families in Cronulla or Japanese and Filipino families in Bondi. At the same time, they reported having no means of doing anything to reach those families and working to or beyond their capacity with existing clients in any case.

Providers reported making referrals to more services than they received (Table 5.1). Seventy per cent of services have referred people to early learning services. In addition, 74% of services have referred people to other services. Most services had communicated with another service about a family (84%) or communicated with a family about another service (93%). Fewer services had received referrals from early learning services (42%). A number had received referrals from other services (61%).

Table 5.1: Service Provider Referrals and Communication

| | Number | Per cent |
|---------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| Referred to early learning services | 30 | 69.8 |
| Received from early learning services | 18 | 41.9 |
| Referred to another service | 32 | 74.4 |
| Received from another service | 26 | 60.5 |
| Communicate with service about family | 36 | 83.7 |
| Communicate with family about service | 40 | 93.0 |
| Total respondents | 43 | |

Knowledge gaps in the service system

Survey results also found some strong links between early learning settings and child and family services. Nearly all services were aware of available early learning services (95%). Most became aware of these services through information brochures (68%), interagency meetings (63%) and through other services (58%). Over half provided early learning services themselves (56%).

Participants suggested that attempts to improve links and referral mechanisms between services are hampered by lack of access to information and technology. Service directories have been used to try to address the fracturing of services, changes to the way services operate and the different geographic boundaries of services. While local councils' online service directories are generally more up-to-date and sensitive than printed directories, many service providers do not know about these directories, or do not have online access, or operate across different council areas. A number of service providers reported not knowing what services operated in their area or said they would not be confident about referring families to other services. If services are not known to each other, it is very unlikely that they will be known to families.

While service providers argued for the need for printed directories, in some cases this is because they were unaware of council-run web-based directories, while in others their services did not have computers or internet access. Participation in the Better Service Delivery Program, particularly the staff training elements of the program, could address some of these gaps (NSW Department of Commerce, 2005).

5.3 Key Points in the Service Network where Families Support Needs are Identified and Linked to Relevant Supports

There are a number of points in the service system that work well to identify and address family support needs. Interagency groups and specific positions within government departments support the needs of children with identified global delays and diagnosed disabilities; early learning services are often critical points for assessment and coordination of treatment; and family support services provide holistic support for families and a connection to the broader service system. The research also identified specific local services in a number of areas. Each of these is discussed below.

Diagnosed disabilities and delays

Teachers, school counsellors and service providers reported that children who have been identified as having a disability or special needs are supported well by the service network in the period immediately prior to starting school. Children with identified global delays, diagnosed disabilities and very high support needs are supported well by DADHC, and by the relationship between DADHC and DET. The Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program (ECICP), coordinated by DADHC with the participation of early learning services, health and disability services, operates well in South East Sydney and represents a potential base for building links across the service network.

Teachers and service providers strongly endorsed the capacity of DET, with reference to children with special needs, to identify children about to start school and the school at which they will be enrolling, notify the school and set up at least one meeting between the school, the family, and the early childhood services currently being used.

These meetings are to exchange information and plan for the following year and are particularly valuable as they both make use of existing relationships between families and services and support the establishment of new relationships between the family and schools. Two important caveats should be noted here. First, service providers and DET representatives noted that the success of this process is determined very much by the receptiveness of school teachers and principals to children with disabilities. Second, some service providers criticised the process as ending too quickly, such that extra support finished with the beginning of the school year.

Early learning services

In some areas, the relationships between schools and early learning services are very good, and information is communicated readily between families, prior to school services and schools. Many early childhood services are also key in identifying children who may need treatment services and in coordinating assessments from services such as Tumbatin Clinic.

In some areas, schools have initiated programs in response to identified needs among the school population. Many ATSI children in La Perouse were reported by some workers as experiencing a good transition to school, in part because of the relationship between Gujaga Aboriginal Children's Services and La Perouse Public School. This, in turn, was largely due to the capabilities of the school principal. In Bondi, a 'Big Brothers' style program initiated by Bondi Beach Public School has fathers of enrolled students volunteering to spend time with other students, playing sport or doing other leisure activities. The program was initiated in response to a school-community need and designed to improve the behaviour of some students and provide some respite to parents.

Elements of these programs and services that could be duplicated in other areas include the universal, school-wide focus of the programs and the use of the area's strengths. In Bondi, for example, the Big Brothers program takes advantage of the diversity of the school community in using fathers as volunteers.

Family support services

The holistic service model utilised by family support services was described by some service providers as effective and able to address the needs of families who are otherwise isolated from the service network.

Elements of these services that could be duplicated in other areas include community-identified needs directing the kinds of programs that are delivered. For example, programs for children who have witnessed domestic violence have been run in some areas, while groups for grandparents or fathers have also been set up in response to a local need.

However, limitations on family support were also identified. According to respondents, the number of family support services in South East Sydney is low, relative to areas such as South West Sydney and Cumberland Prospect, due to resource allocation systems and the relative advantage of South East Sydney. Family support services that do operate are often staffed by few or part-time staff, inadequately accommodated and unable to provide services such as child care.

Other examples

The research identified other local examples of services and partnerships with the capacity to identify and address the needs of families. Innar Nurra brokers partnerships between Aboriginal-specific and non-Aboriginal specific services and has improved service provision to ATSI women and children. Kooloora Community Centre has very strong links with the Malabar community and provides community advocacy as well as services, including playgroups supported by transport, that respond to locally-identified needs. Some service providers indicated that the child support worker in the Court Assistance Scheme in Cronulla provided an opportunity to link women and children who may not be receiving any other support to services. Home and Community Care (HACC) workers in Bexley/Arncliffe and the Aboriginal Mental Health Worker in Malabar/Matraville both work outside their job descriptions to meet the needs of families and children.

Elements of these services and programs that could be duplicated in other areas include the use of a service that is known to and trusted by a community to assist in the development of new services; using multi-function organisations or expanding the use of a single service to deliver new services from a trusted, non-stigmatising centre; facilitated service delivery through a trusted individual or community group; and use of a service that is visible and accessible or one that can provide transport.

5.4 Strengths and Gaps in Coordination in the Service Network

Strengths and gaps in coordination in the service network relate to the formal and informal links between services and the capacity of agencies to provide integrated, relevant, accessible and timely support to families. In South East Sydney, integration of the service system varies between and within areas and is often dependent on individual efforts, rather than organisational relationships. Informal links work very well in some areas, less well in others. Interagency groups are present in some areas, and participants gave mixed responses on their effectiveness. In the context of conceptualising an integrated service network as one with strong links between families, services and schools, school counsellors perform a critical role in linking families to support.

Informal links

In all areas, strong informal links between some services were evident. These links were in most cases based on personal relationships between workers, and were in part a product of the relatively low turnover of staff in South East Sydney.

In marked contrast to other areas, many early learning services and child and family services in South East Sydney have had the same staff working continuously for ten years and more. There are several benefits provided by this. A number of workers have set up interagency or other groups to support workers in their area, and have been able to sustain these groups. Individual services and individual workers have been instrumental in both setting up services and sustaining them. However, the dependence of these groups and services on personal relationships and effort means both that their innovations cannot be easily reproduced in other areas, and that the sustainability of the services is dependent on individuals.

These points are illustrated in the comment of one interview participant from a service supporting children and families that:

It concerns me that government are happy for us to do this as voluntary workers but they should be funding it. We need to develop partnerships between schools by using our networks but it's a very new field for us and a lot of us don't fully know how to get up those partnerships. (Service provider)

Connected to this, coordination and integration of services within and between areas vary. Formal interagency mechanisms are not present in each area, and the smaller services do not have the capacity to participate in existing interagencies without the provision of extra resources to do so.

In some areas, as noted above, the relationships between early learning services and schools are very good. However, in all areas in South East Sydney there is a large number of both schools and early learning services, and it is not possible for individual teachers or workers to manage and sustain links between them. To focus on the relatively simple experience of transition to school by a child for a family who does not require extra support, for example, it is difficult to see how a single school could sustain a strong relationship with more than a couple of early learning services. This is particularly true when this relationship may involve visits between settings, orientation days, provision of information to parents, documentation and communication of the needs and progress of children, and so on. Yet a single school may have children transitioning from three or more early learning services. While challenging, such coordination and liaison does occur, however it requires support and resources.

For children and families who require additional support, this experience of transition to school may be more complex and fraught. In this context, the goodwill and efforts of teachers and services have been instrumental in ensuring a smooth transition to school for many children and families, but these efforts alone cannot ensure an integrated service system. While an integrated service system is not sufficient to ensure a positive transition to school, strong links between services, schools and families will facilitate.

School counsellors

Equally, while a number of school teachers and principals attempt to identify and respond to the needs of families, individual teachers are generally too busy teaching to have much of a role in the broader service network. In this context, school counsellors perform a vital role in connecting families and services. The role of these counsellors is determined in part by the accessibility of the school environment, and, as noted earlier in this section, this varies across areas and population groups. Schools in areas of high need, or that have a large number of students and families with additional needs, will require more from their counsellors than other schools do, and the capacity of counsellors to meet family needs in these area may be less than is needed.

Adding to the network's capacity

Some characteristics of key points in the existing service system's capacity have been identified in Section 5.3. These include building on existing groups, utilising the

strengths of an area, use of a trusted service to deliver new services and acting on community-identified needs. More generally, the adaptation and replication of existing programs will be facilitated if the successes of individual programs are known throughout South East Sydney. The opportunities for services to hear about what is being done in other areas inside and beyond South East Sydney are limited.

The presence of Families First in an area is an opportunity to build and support local and regional groups with responsibility for service planning and implementation. These groups could include representatives from each of the human services agencies, non-government organisations and local government. Smaller organisations and key community representatives could be supported to participate in Families First management, and differing capacities and interests taken into account. In other Families First areas, local service network groups have been formed and supported. These groups have specific responsibilities in planning and implementing Families First and are formally linked to regional management groups. They also provide an opportunity for individual service providers to share ideas and learn about strategies adopted by other services.

5.5 Factors that Enhance and Inhibit the Development of Partnerships

Factors determining the current degree of integration of the service network, described above, also affect opportunities for the development of partnerships across the service network. These opportunities are facilitated by the acknowledgement of the value of partnerships and are inhibited by existing demands on staff time and organisational capacity. The development of new partnerships and maintenance of existing ones requires resources.

Support for partnerships

As we have argued in this and the previous section, good examples of partnership and models for increased collaboration can be found across South East Sydney. For example in South East Sydney some interagency groups are convened and supported by local councils. The research also found support for new and stronger partnerships. Many services recognised a need for increased partnership and stronger relationships, reporting that a single service cannot meet all the needs of all families. As noted in Section 3, the experience of transition to school is strongly affected by the strength and integration of the service network. Many families, particularly ATSI and some CALD families, can only get the support they need through partnerships, advocacy, and different ways of delivering services.

The research also found support for new and stronger partnerships. However, information about how to build partnerships, good examples of partnerships in other areas, and resources such as time and training are necessary to build on this support. This support and enthusiasm is a factor supporting stronger links.

Staff time and organisational capacity

However, the capacity of agencies to develop stronger partnerships is limited by demands on staff time and organisational capacity. Smaller organisations are often unable to release staff to attend key meetings for existing interagencies and groups. A number of services reported that they have no time to respond to new community

needs or to form new relationships because they spend all available time delivering services.

There is also a great deal of disparity in the amount of knowledge workers have about Families First principles, such as service integration and early intervention, and Families First itself, across South East Sydney. Despite South East Sydney being one of the last areas for Families First to be introduced, the experiences of other areas of Families First, and planning and implementation priorities for South East Sydney, were not universally known.

Resources

The formation and maintenance of new partnerships requires resources, including funding, staff training and time. Resources should be deployed to develop strategies to promote and facilitate the active involvement of all relevant agencies in these partnerships. This may involve, for example, resources to cover staff time to attend meetings, larger agencies providing support to smaller ones in securing funds to deliver new services, or staff training to increase cultural competence and in the demands and benefits of early intervention practices.

Research in other Families First areas has shown that increased integration is fostered when principles of prevention and early intervention and the focus on cross-agency planning and implementation are incorporated into the core business and management practices of agencies at all levels. Including these principles in job descriptions, performance indicators, orientation packages and training courses assists this.

5.6 Summary

Findings on the operation of the local service network identified factors determining families' use of services; the capacity of agencies to intervene early and address needs; key points in the service network where needs are identified and addressed; and factors facilitating and inhibiting partnerships.

A number of factors affect families' use of services and support. Schools and other services are not accessible to some population groups. High demand is not met by supply of a number of services, including allied health and early learning services. Cost, social and geographic isolation of families and limited access to transport also affect service use.

The capacity of agencies to operate using the principles of early intervention and prevention is limited by the unmet demand for existing services, especially for diagnostic, assessment, treatment and respite services. Workers are often reluctant to add pressure to existing waiting lists or refer families to already overstretched services. Eligibility criteria for services limits the numbers of children and families who receive support. Community resources to support families are stretched in most areas and this limits their capacity to provide early intervention and prevention services.

A number of points in the service system work well to identify and address support needs. Interagency groups and specific positions help address the needs of children with identified global delays and diagnosed disabilities. These children are supported well by DADHC with their limited resources, and by the relationship between

DADHC and DET. The Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program (ECICP), coordinated by DADHC with the participation of early learning services, health and disability services, operates well in South East Sydney and represents a potential base for building links across the service network.

Interagency groups exist in some areas with varying degrees of effectiveness. Communication between schools, early learning services and families works well in some areas, but this largely depends on individuals rather than organisational links. Similarly, formal and informal links between services vary between and within areas and is often dependent on individual efforts and relationships. Given the variable and often ad hoc integration of the service system, school counsellors and school nurses are critical links for families to the broader service system. A number of factors limit the capacity of agencies to develop stronger partnerships. These include lack of staff time and organisational capacity. This is particularly evident in smaller organisations that are often unable to release staff to attend key meetings. The formation and maintenance of new partnerships requires resources, including funding, staff training and time.

The next section of the report discusses information needs and potential strategies to address them.

6 Information Needs and Strategies

This section outlines the information needs for families, service providers and Families First emerging from the findings of the research. Information needs relating to transition to school and network development, derived from the research data and analysis, are outlined. Preliminary strategies to obtain the required information are suggested. The section concludes with priority information needs.

6.1 Factors Facilitating and Limiting Successful Transition to School

Teachers, early learning service staff and families emphasised the importance of children being equipped with sufficient social skills and independence to have a successful transition to school.¹ Families, teachers and early learning staff identified access to early learning services as crucial to the development of these aspects. Lack of availability and cost hampered many families' ability to access these services, particularly vulnerable families. Even when children attend early learning services some families struggle with the decision about whether their child is 'ready' for school. At times parents receive conflicting information.

Transition to school programs vary considerably across South East Sydney, although families who attended these generally found them useful. Programs that involved going to the school over a few weeks allowed the children and families to begin to establish relationships with the school.

A number of families do not attend the orientation and transition to school programs. Reasons for this may include:

- families not knowing which school their child will attend;
- parental work commitments preventing attendance;
- the experience of transition to school not being a priority for some families or communities; and
- a lack of effective information to parents, as some do not understand that they can be involved in their children's education, or indeed the benefits associated with this involvement.

Information needs

Information needs relating to factors facilitating successful transition to school include:

- Accessible information about successful transition to school in English and community languages for parents.
- Information for parents about when children should start school.
- Information for parents about what is involved in transition to school programs and why it is important to attend.

¹ Nevertheless, teachers in schools and in early learning services may mean different things by these terms (Dockett and Perry, 2004).

- Information for teachers about the support needs of some children, particularly those who do not attend early learning services.
- Information for service providers about the support needs of emerging populations in South East Sydney, including Japanese, Ethiopian and Eritrean, and ways to their improve access to early learning services.

Possible ways to obtain required information

Possible ways to obtain the required information include:

- Making existing information on successful transition to school, for example, on the DET website, more accessible and available. Distributing materials in community languages through early learning services and at orientation and transition to school programs. This information could include what transition to school involves and why it is important.
- Publishing research on transition to school programs based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and evidence of effectiveness (for example flexible, multiple opportunities to participate).
- Expanding data collection at enrolment to include information about the experience of early learning services and other support services prior to starting school.
- Analysing the expanded school enrolment data to establish the links between access to and use of support and successful transition to school
- Analysing the expanded school enrolment data to examine the needs of emergent and transient populations in terms of transition to school.
- Analysing the expanded school enrolment data for use by local services and schools to plan the development of future services and address gaps in support.

6.2 Links between Families, Services and Schools

Early learning services and schools identified the need to establish more opportunities to share information both formally and informally, while preserving the privacy of parents and children. Information exchange would assist in planning and organising support for children prior to starting school. This would reduce the incidence of children with additional support needs who had attended early learning services beginning school without appropriate support plans in place.

Information needs:

Information needs relating to links between families, services and schools include:

- Information about strategies to develop consistent links that facilitate the establishment of mutual professional respect and trust between different sectors including early learning services, schools and the broader service network.
- Information on good practice protocols for sharing information between early learning services and schools and the barriers to establishing opportunities for information sharing.

- Information on strategies to develop transitional bridges between services at critical transition periods.

Possible ways to obtain required information

Possible ways to obtain the required information include:

- Conducting an audit of the ways in which other agencies share information.
- Undertaking research to identify existing and potential opportunities for developing resourced links between schools and early learning services, for example, joint training.

6.3 Factors Impacting on Appropriate Child and Family Access and Utilisation of Support

Information about existing services was identified by families, service providers and schools as critical in the utilisation of support. Many families do not know about services including housing, allied health, early learning services and transition to school programs, often only finding out about them by chance. In addition, a range of information is required to address the factors limiting access and utilisation of support, around effective service models, changing population needs and supporting schools as a key service point.

Information needs:

Information needs relating to factors impacting on appropriate child and family access and utilisation of support include:

- Information about effective models of service delivery to improve access to and use of support services that are culturally appropriate and non-stigmatising and respond to families' needs.
- Information in relation to service gaps for families living in the area now and those likely to develop with changing demographics, for example: service gaps relating to changing numbers of families with infants, very young children and older children; changing numbers of families needing crisis services; and changes in the need for ATSI-specific or language-specific services.
- Information about the characteristics of school communities that benefit from the implementation of service models such as Schools as Community Centres, Parents as Teachers and Families and Schools Together.

Possible ways to obtain required information

Possible ways to obtain the required information include:

- Reviewing effective models of service delivery that respond to families' needs, for example, examining initiatives implemented in other Families First areas to improve vulnerable families' access to supported playgroups.
- Reviewing the characteristics of the school communities where different service models, designed to make schools a community resource, have been implemented successfully and the factors facilitating implementation.

6.4 Factors Impacting on Agencies' and Services' Capacity to Identify and Address Support Needs Early

Service providers across the Area, particularly those not involved in interagency or network activities, found it difficult to find out information about other services to meet additional needs of the families and children they supported. Some individual services had developed their own service directories. Families in the area also found it difficult to access information about services.

Lack of information together with a number of other factors impact on agencies' and services' capacity to identify and address support needs early. These include unmet demand for chronic and crisis services which means prioritising early intervention and prevention services is difficult; staff capacity; and limited training and resources. Opportunities for cross-agency collaboration and changes to work practices are limited by time, resources and existing demand for services.

Information needs:

- Clear information about the types of services available and their capacity to meet current demands and effective ways of distributing this information to service providers and families.
- Access to information about what has been implemented in other Families First areas

Possible ways to obtain required information

Possible ways to obtain the required information include:

- Developing comprehensive service directories that are updated regularly, which contain information on services providing support and education to children and families within and between areas. These could be available in electronic and printed versions, and their usefulness enhanced through training in the use of web-based resources.
- Sharing service information from existing data systems, such as DoCS and local government service directories.
- Investigating effective ways of distributing and displaying culturally sensitive information for example in shopping centres, Centrelink offices, health services, chemists, sports venues, local newspapers and community radio.
- At the level of regional management of Families First, reviewing and disseminating information on the Families First website about models of good practice and successful network development.
- Conducting training and staff development for service providers in available sources of information about successful practices in other Families First areas.

6.5 Key Points in the Service Network where Families Support Needs are identified and they are linked to Relevant Supports

As noted in section 1.1 there are a number of emerging populations evident in South East Sydney including Japanese, Filipino, Ethiopian and Eritrean. Services and

schools identified gaps in support to these populations, and information about their needs as a priority.

Information needs:

Information needs relating to key points in the service network where families support needs are identified and they are linked to relevant supports include:

- Information on the support needs and barriers to accessing mainstream services of emerging populations.
- Information about factors that facilitate early learning services operating as a point of early intervention and links to service network, particularly for emerging populations and vulnerable families.

Possible ways to obtain required information

Possible ways to obtain the required information include:

- Research examining the support needs of emergent and transient populations, and to identify service models that operate effectively for these populations.
- Identifying active groups and networks that could be supported to establish culturally appropriate playgroups or other social support and early learning opportunities.

6.6 Strengths and Gaps in Coordination in the Service Network

Strong informal links between services are evident in many areas but often depend on personal relationships and individual efforts. Formal interagency groups are a source of information and peer support, but there is limited evidence of joint planning, case management and partnerships. Coordination and integration between services within and between areas vary. Information is needed on the effectiveness of specific groups, the resources that groups require to increase service integration and the key individuals and agencies that need to be engaged to ensure broad participation.

Information needs:

Information needs relating to strengths and gaps in coordination in the service network include:

- Identification of key active interagency groups and key community leaders in the area.
- Identification of resources needed to expand the size and role of these groups.
- Information about barriers to sharing information at interagency meetings between the sectors.

Possible ways to obtain required information

- Using local knowledge and information gained through the Community Capacity Building projects to identify key groups and stakeholders and community leaders.
- Consulting with individual representatives from existing interagencies.

- Reviewing existing practices and protocols for information sharing in other Families First areas.

6.7 Factors that Enhance and Inhibit the Development of Partnerships

Examples of effective and productive partnerships and models for increased collaboration can be found across South East Sydney, but these are dependent on individual workers or networks. Changes in practice to increase interagency collaboration and a focus on early intervention and prevention will require resources, including funding and training.

Information needs:

Information needs relating to factors that enhance and inhibit the development of partnerships include:

- Information about methods for effective community consultation.
- Information about appropriate strategies to engage representatives from ATSI and CALD services in building partnerships and improving coordination.

Possible ways to obtain required information

Possible ways to obtain the required information include:

- Drawing on local knowledge and key people to develop strategies to engage cultural and community leaders and organisations in Families First.
- Reviewing existing information about the operation of Families First in other areas and methods of identifying key stakeholders, engaging them and maintaining active participation in the planning and implementation of Families First.

6.8 Priority Information Needs

Priority information needs most relevant for the future planning of Families First strategies in South East Sydney are outlined in terms of service gaps, transition to school and service network development.

Service Gaps

Information needs relating to service gaps include:

- Information about effective models of service delivery to improve access to and use of mainstream support services that are culturally appropriate, non-stigmatising and respond to families' needs.
- Information on effective models of service delivery and initiatives implemented in other Families First areas to improve access to early learning services such as supported playgroups, particularly for vulnerable families.
- Information on effective models of service delivery and initiatives implemented in other Families First areas to improve access to high demand services such as speech pathology and occupational therapy.

- Information about the support needs of emergent and transient populations and service models that operate effectively as a point of early intervention and links to the service network for these groups.

Transition to School

Priority information needs relating to transition to school include:

- Information about strategies to establish consistent links between early learning services and schools and the development of mutual professional trust and respect.
- Accessible and culturally appropriate information, in English and community languages, about what transition to school means, why it is important and how to judge when a child should start school and the importance of early learning services and parent involvement.
- Information about the characteristics of school communities that benefit from services models implemented in other Families First areas such as Schools as Community Centres, Parents and Teachers and, Families and Schools Together.

Network Development

Priority information needs relating to network development include:

- Information drawing on local knowledge and key stakeholders for the development of strategies to engage cultural and community leaders and organisations in Families First.
- Reviewing existing information on the operation of Families First in other areas and methods of identifying key stakeholders, engaging them and maintaining their active participation in the planning and implementation of Families First.

This section of the report discussed the information needs and proposes preliminary strategies designed to address these issue. The final section of the report outlines planning options based on the findings of the research in terms of transition to school and the service network.

7 Planning Options

Planning options for transition to school and network development arising from the literature review and the main findings of the research are outlined in this section of the report. It begins with the options concerned with factors facilitating and impacting on transition to school. The links between families, services and identified support needs schools are outlined.

Options focusing on the service network are then described in relation to factors impacting on appropriate child and family access and utilisation of support; factors impacting on agencies and services' capacity to identify and address support needs early; key points in the service network where families' support needs are identified and they are linked to relevant supports; strengths and gaps in coordination in the service network so that families receive integrated, relevant and timely support; and factors that enhance the development of partnerships and barriers that inhibit partnerships being developed across the service network. Each are listed below in terms of examples of what was working well, service and network gaps and areas that could be built on.

7.1 Factors Facilitating and Limiting Successful Transition to School

Working well:

Access to high quality early learning services such as long day care, preschools and playgroups, provides an environment where social skills and independence are fostered. Parents, teachers and early learning service workers regarded the development of these skills as important to successful transition to school.

Gaps in the network:

Starting school can be a daunting time for both children and their families. It is especially difficult for children with special needs as they move to a different system of support and funding. Often this occurs without a transitional bridge between the two systems of support. The transition to school process for these children would be facilitated if services supporting them prior to starting school could continue to be involved once school begins.

Lack of availability, cost, or pressing demands such as lack of stable housing or domestic violence, limit many vulnerable families' access to early learning. Children from ATSI and CALD backgrounds often do not access support services due to isolation, language background, expectations or experiences of discrimination. Providing increased access to low cost quality early learning services such as supported playgroups gives opportunities for children in vulnerable families to develop skills to facilitate their transition to school. For example, the supported playgroup operating within a school and culturally specific playgroups in the Bexley/Arncliffe area have been set up in response to the locally-identified need to provide structured, supported support to particular population groups.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Examples of good links between teachers and some early learning services were evident but depend largely on individual efforts and professional attitudes. Some teachers regard early learning workers as a useful source of information when planning for the needs of children starting school. For example some teachers visit children in their early learning settings if they are identified as potentially having difficulty transitioning to school. Development of protocols to enhance information exchange could enhance links between these sectors.

Transition to school programs vary from school to school but were found to be useful in the transition process for those families attending. Greater access to programs running over an extended period of time, rather than short information/orientation sessions, would assist more children and parents to build a relationship with the school prior to starting kindergarten.

7.2 Links between Families, Services and Schools

Working well:

There are a number of key points in the service system linking families, schools and services. These include early learning services, school counsellors, Child and Family School Health Nurses, Supplementary Services Scheme (SUPS) workers and the DET transition to school program for children with special needs.

Gaps in the network:

Overall there is a lack of established and consistent links between early learning services and schools based on mutual professional trust and respect. Activities that allow the two sectors to link formally are required. Effective networking requires time and resources. Participation in these activities would be facilitated if resources were available to relieve staff from their teaching load to organise and attend meetings and planning forums.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Child and Family School Health Nurses and school counsellors provide important links for families to the broader child and family service system after a child has started school, although the links are predominately health related. Informal and formal network and referral links between school health nurses and counsellors and early learning services should be developed.

The DET transition to school program for children with additional needs formally links families, services including early learning services and schools in their planning processes and provides a potential model for further developing links between schools and early learning services.

7.3 Identified Information and Support Needs

Working well:

Access to support, particularly for families with children with a disability, health or other additional need who are also isolated from mainstream services, is facilitated by the provision of information and other resources in community languages and structured support and advocacy, through community groups or service providers such as Migrant Resource Centres. For example, cultural and language-specific playgroups in Bexley/Arncliffe facilitate the establishment of relationships and support the introduction of families to schools and other agencies.

Gaps in the network:

If successful transition to school for all children is a priority then additional resources are required to address gaps in support for the following children: children with special needs without a definitive diagnosis, children with mild to moderate levels of disabilities and children from CALD and ATSI backgrounds. Children without a definitive diagnosis and those in the low to mild range of disability fall outside DADHC's criteria for support and have needs that cannot be met by health services at current levels of resourcing.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Parents and some early learning services requested increased information about what transition to school means, why it is important and how to judge when a child should start school. Information about transition to school in English and community languages is available, but would be more accessible were its availability more widely known.

7.4 Factors Impacting on Appropriate Child and Family Access and Utilisation of Support

Working well:

A number of characteristics of agencies and services facilitated use of services for families isolated from mainstream services. These include visibility, community-based management structures delivering services to a specific community through a trusted individual or organisation. For example, the Aboriginal Mental Health worker acts as an advocate for Aboriginal families and assists them to access mainstream housing and health services.

Multiple services delivered from a single site or through a single program enhanced access to services, some of which are in high demand. For example, Lifestart run playgroups for children with special needs attended by special educators and therapists. Parents receive peer support and information, while their children gain some access to treatment services, such as speech pathology.

Gaps in the network:

Demand and need overwhelms supply of some allied health and disability services, including speech pathology and occupational therapy, which are increasingly identified as pivotal to the school experience of many children.

Schools and support services are not accessible to families in some population groups for reasons of language, cultural competence, social isolation and institutional cultures. It is critical that this inaccessibility is recognised as the responsibility of schools, services and policy and that families' failure to access these services is not attributed to lack of interest in their children.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Patchy public transport compound the difficulties faced by many families in getting the support they need. Provision of new services and maintaining existing ones may need to take the cost of transport into account in allocating resources.

Schools represent a possible point of connection between families, communities and the service system. Programs implemented in other Families First areas including Schools as Community Centres, Parents as Teachers and Families and Schools Together provide potential models to foster the connections between families, schools and the service system.

7.5 Factors Impacting on Agencies' and Services' Capacity to Identify and Address Support Needs Early

Working well:

Because many children have some experience in an early learning service, these settings provide an opportunity for the identification of needs for early intervention support. Some early learning services regard this identification as part of their core business and some do not. This disparity could be addressed by the provision of specific resources to increase awareness and the capacity of services, particularly smaller and private agencies, to identify and address needs early.

Gaps in the network:

Service and support is limited by eligibility criteria for treatment services. Children and families who fall outside these criteria should be a priority for new services and efforts to improve existing services.

Services supporting families are inadequately resourced to meet the needs of families with higher needs, including the need for crisis and chronic services. The aims and activities of Families First are directed towards prevention and early intervention, but the impact of the strategy is affected by the operations of the service system as a whole.

Prevention and early intervention is not considered to be the core business of many agencies supporting families, and is not a priority in the context of unmet need for other services. Resources, including staff training and changes to organisational structures, are required if these order services are to become central to the operation of services.

Points in the network that can be built on:

The research found support for prevention and early intervention across the service network. Support for these principles could form the basis of new services and planning priorities. This could be facilitated through the provision of specific, quarantined funding to agencies designed to establish a service stream dedicated to prevention and early intervention. In addition, forums and workshops designed to share information about prevention and early intervention lessons in other areas within South East Sydney, and throughout the state, could increase recognition of the benefits of changing service practice.

There is a high level of recognition of the benefits of communication with other agencies and knowledge of what services operate in an area. Provision of up-to-date information on other services could improve referral processes and service integration. Participation in the Better Service Delivery Program, particularly the staff training elements of the program, could help meet the identified need for service directories (NSW Department of Commerce, 2005).

7.6 Key Points in the Service Network where Families Support Needs are identified and they are linked to Relevant Supports

Working well:

Links between DADHC, DET and early childhood settings are effective for families with a child with a diagnosed disability.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Family support services provide a holistic service that identifies family needs and links families with appropriate services. The principles of service provision and models of service delivery provided by these services should be supported and partnerships between family support and other services resourced.

Local, specific examples of partnership, collaboration and new kinds of service delivery should be supported and the potential for their replication explored. For example, the Big Brothers program at Bondi Beach Public School, which takes advantage of the diversity of the school community in using fathers as volunteers. Elements of these services and programs that could be duplicated in other areas include the use of a service that is known to and trusted by a community to assist in the development of new services; using multi-function organisations or expanding the use of a single service to deliver new services from a trusted, non-stigmatising centre; facilitated service delivery through a trusted individual or community group; and use of a service that is visible and accessible or one that can provide transport.

7.7 Strengths and Gaps in Coordination in the Service Network

Working well:

If supported and resourced, existing interagency groups represent good models for interagency collaboration and a potential base for building links across the service network. These groups include the Early Childhood Intervention Coordination Program (ECICP), the St George Advocates, the Eastern Suburbs Children's Services

Network, Community Services Grants Program (CSGP) local forums and the Sutherland Shire Children's Strategic Working Party.

Gaps in the network:

Network coordination and service integration is often dependent on personal relationships and individual efforts. Formal recognition of service coordination as a key activity of individual agencies, and resources towards incorporating service coordination into the core business of agencies, could address this dependence.

A number of service providers reported not knowing what services operated in their area or said they would not be confident about referring families to other services. Network coordination varies within and between areas and the effectiveness of existing forums in sharing information or acting to improve service integration is unclear.

Points in the network that can be built on:

The presence of Families First in an area is an opportunity to build and support local and regional groups with responsibility for service planning and implementation. These groups could include representatives from each of the human service agencies, non-government organisations and local government. Smaller organisations and key community representatives could be supported to participate in Families First management, and differing capacities and interests taken into account.

7.8 Factors that Enhance and Inhibit the Development of Partnerships

Gaps in the network:

At the level of the service system, resources are required to develop strategies to promote and facilitate the active involvement of all relevant agencies in partnerships. Families First represents a good opportunity to create new partnerships. The planning processes of Families First and other strategies should take account of local knowledge. They should be flexible to ensure broad representation and to achieve the ongoing engagement and re-engagement of agencies.

At the level of individual agencies, changes in practice to increase interagency collaboration will require resources, including funding and training. Education strategies to increase knowledge of the research basis and principles of Families First are necessary to sustain engagement in its implementation.

Points in the network that can be built on:

Good examples of partnership and models for increased collaboration can be found across South East Sydney. For example, Innar Nurra brokers partnerships between Aboriginal-specific and non-Aboriginal specific services and has so improved service provision to ATSI women and children. Kooloora Community Centre has very strong links with the Malabar/Matraville community and provides community advocacy as well as services, including playgroups supported by transport, that respond to locally-identified needs.

The research also found support for new and stronger partnerships. However, information about how to build partnerships and good examples of partnerships in other areas, as well as resources such as time and training, are necessary to build on this support.

7.9 Priority Planning Options

A number of issues emerged in the literature review and the fieldwork as key areas for future service and network development. These are outlined below in terms of service gaps, transition to school and network development.

Service gaps options refer to points in the service network where identified needs cannot be met by the current operations of services. These should be taken into account in the future planning of human service agencies. Transition to School options refer to possible strategies to improve those parts of the service network that are specifically designed to support children starting school and their families. Network development options refer to strategies for improving the coordination and integration of the service network and changing practice in line with the principles of Families First.

Service Gaps

- Gaps in support for the following children: children with special needs without a definitive diagnosis, children with mild to moderate levels of disabilities and children from CALD and ATSI background were identified.
- Access to low cost, high quality early learning services including long day care, preschools and supported playgroup for vulnerable families.
- Access to diagnostic and allied health services.

Transition to School

- Developing strategies to establish consistent links between early learning services and schools based on mutual professional trust and respect.
- Extending funding so that support services continue into the school term will develop a transitional bridge for children with special needs between the different systems of support prior to starting school and once schools commences.
- Providing increased access to information, in English and community languages, about what transition to school means, why it is important and how to judge when a child should start school.

Network Development

- Implementing initiatives that position schools as possible key point connecting families, communities and the service system. A number of initiatives that aim to do this, such as Schools as Community Centres, Parents as Teachers and Families and Schools Together, have been implemented successfully in other Families First areas.
- Allocating dedicated resources to promote and facilitate active involvement from a broad range of agencies to build on and strengthen pre-existing service networks, and to develop clearly defined roles in service network planning, will facilitate network development.
- Incorporating the principles of prevention and early intervention and service coordination into the core business and management practices of relevant agencies at all levels requires that these principles are included in job descriptions, performance indicators, orientation packages and training courses.

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Appendix A: Service Provider Survey Results by Area

The results presented below outline the findings from the survey of service managers and coordinators broken down by area.

Service provider operating days

Operating days were fairly similar across all areas, as can be seen below in table A.2. The mean number of days was five, with a slightly higher mean apparent in the Malabar/Matraville area (5.4 day), and lower number apparent in Cronulla (4.8).

Table A.2: Service Provider Operating Days

| | Bondi | | Malabar/ Matraville | | Bexley/Arncliffe | | Cronulla | | Total | |
|-------------------------|-------|------|------------------------|------|------------------|------|----------|------|-------|------|
| | n | mean | n | mean | n | mean | n | mean | n | mean |
| Operating days per week | 15 | 4.9 | 5 | 5.4 | 17 | 4.9 | 6 | 4.8 | 43 | 5.0 |
| Total respondents | 15 | | 5 | | 17 | | 6 | | 43 | |

Types of service provided

Service providers were asked to list the type of services they provided for children aged 3-5 years and their families. Table A.3 shows that the most common type of service was direct child services, such as childcare facilities or education with 70 per cent offering this type of service. Services in Matraville/Malabar in particular offered this service (80%). The next most common service offered was parent support and education (54%).

Other services were less common, but fairly evenly spread across areas, with a few exceptions. In the Malabar/Matraville no counselling services responded to the survey.

Table A.3: Type of Service Provided, by Area

| | Bondi | | Malabar/ Matraville | | Bexley/Arncliffe | | Cronulla | | Total | |
|--|-------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Parent support | 8 | 53.3 | 2 | 40.0 | 9 | 52.9 | 4 | 66.7 | 23 | 53.5 |
| Counselling or therapy | 3 | 20.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 29.4 | 1 | 16.7 | 9 | 20.9 |
| Child health | 2 | 13.3 | 1 | 20.0 | 1 | 5.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 9.3 |
| Services for families who need extra support | 1 | 6.7 | 1 | 20.0 | 5 | 29.4 | 1 | 16.7 | 8 | 18.6 |
| Referrals | 2 | 13.3 | 1 | 20.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 7.0 |
| Early learning | 10 | 66.7 | 4 | 80.0 | 13 | 76.5 | 3 | 50.0 | 30 | 69.8 |
| Training, licensing | 2 | 13.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 4.7 |
| Other | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 20.0 | 1 | 5.9 | 1 | 16.7 | 3 | 7.0 |
| Total respondents | 15 | | 5 | | 17 | | 6 | | 43 | |

Referrals and communication between services

Most services have referred clients to other services. As can be seen in Table A.4 below, 70 per cent of services have referred clients to early learning services, though the rate is lower for services in Malabar/Matravill (20%). The majority of services had communicated with another service about a family (84%) or communicated with a family about another service (93%).

Fewer services had received referrals from early learning services (42%), with Malabar/Matraville receiving the least (20%). A number had received referrals from other services though (61%), with Cronulla respondents receiving the most referrals from other services (83%).

Table A.4: Referrals and Communication between Services, by Area

| | Bondi | | Malabar/ Matraville | | Bexley/Arncliffe | | Cronulla | | Total | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Referred to early learning service | 11 | 73.3 | 1 | 20.0 | 13 | 76.5 | 5 | 83.3 | 30 | 69.8 |
| Received from early learning service | 6 | 40.0 | 1 | 20.0 | 9 | 52.9 | 2 | 33.3 | 18 | 41.9 |
| Referred to another service | 11 | 73.3 | 3 | 60.0 | 12 | 70.6 | 6 | 100.0 | 32 | 74.4 |
| Received from another service | 8 | 53.3 | 2 | 40.0 | 11 | 64.7 | 5 | 83.3 | 26 | 60.5 |
| Communicate with service about family | 12 | 80.0 | 4 | 80.0 | 14 | 82.4 | 6 | 100.0 | 36 | 83.7 |
| Communicate with family about service | 14 | 93.3 | 4 | 80.0 | 16 | 94.1 | 6 | 100.0 | 40 | 93.0 |
| Total respondents | 15 | | 5 | | 17 | | 6 | | 43 | |

Supporting families and children

Service providers were asked to describe in their own words what works best in supporting children and families. The results were coded into broad categories and are displayed in table A.5 below. Thirty-five per cent of respondent stated that the provision of an effective administrative set-up, including health, administration and waiting lists helped to support families. Bondi respondents particularly favoured this (53%). Fifty per cent of respondents in Cronulla reported family centres and support worked best in supporting families compared to 26 per cent of services across all areas. Early learning services were mentioned as providing effective support to families by over 30 per cent of services in the Bondi and Bexley/Arncliffe respondents. Information and communication (19%), services for disadvantaged

families or families with special needs (12%) and flexibility and training including early intervention (7%) were also raised as helpful.

Table A.5: Views on Effective Support to Families, by Area

| | Bondi | | Malabar/ Matraville | | Bexley/Arncliffe | | Cronulla | | Total | |
|---|-------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Health, Admin, including Waiting Lists | 8 | 53.3 | 1 | 20.0 | 5 | 29.4 | 1 | 16.7 | 15 | 34.9 |
| Family Centre, Support | 2 | 13.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 35.3 | 3 | 50.0 | 11 | 25.6 |
| Early learning services | 5 | 33.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 35.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 11 | 25.6 |
| Services for disadvantaged /special needs | 1 | 6.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 23.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 11.6 |
| Flexibility, Training | | | | | | | | | | |
| Early Intervention, Information and | 1 | 6.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 5.9 | 1 | 16.7 | 3 | 7.0 |
| Communicate | 1 | 6.7 | 3 | 60.0 | 2 | 11.8 | 2 | 33.3 | 8 | 18.6 |
| Other | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total respondents | 15 | | 5 | | 17 | | 6 | | 43 | |

Improvement needed

Table A.6 shows the responses to a question about things that need to be improved to effectively support families. The most important issue mentioned was administrative set-up and waiting lists (35%). Only small numbers of Bondi respondents (27%) mentioned administrative set-up as needing improvement. In Cronulla 67 per cent indicated that it needed improvement.

In terms of other improvements, early learning services was the next most commonly mentioned answer (21%). Services for disadvantaged families or families with special needs (19%) and family centres and support (19%) were also commonly cited areas for improvement.

Table A.6: Views on Gaps in Support, by Area

| | Bondi | | Malabar/ Matraville | | Bexley/Arncliffe | | Cronulla | | Total | |
|--|-------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Admin, including Waiting Lists | 4 | 26.7 | 1 | 20.0 | 6 | 35.3 | 4 | 66.7 | 15 | 34.9 |
| Family Centre, Support | 3 | 20.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 23.5 | 1 | 16.7 | 8 | 18.6 |
| Early learning services | 5 | 33.3 | 1 | 20.0 | 3 | 17.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 9 | 20.9 |
| Services for disadvantaged /special needs | 2 | 13.3 | 1 | 20.0 | 4 | 23.5 | 1 | 16.7 | 8 | 18.6 |
| Flexibility, Early Intervention, Training | 4 | 26.7 | 1 | 20.0 | 2 | 11.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 16.3 |
| Information and Communicate | 1 | 6.7 | 2 | 40.0 | 2 | 11.8 | 1 | 16.7 | 6 | 14.0 |
| Other | 5 | 33.3 | 1 | 20.0 | 1 | 5.9 | 1 | 16.7 | 8 | 18.6 |
| Total Respondents | 15 | | 5 | | 17 | | 6 | | 43 | |

Service provider knowledge of early learning services

Table A.7 shows the knowledge held by services of early learning services. The majority of services are aware of available early learning services (95%). Most became aware these services through information brochures (68%), interagency meetings (63%), and through other services (58%). It should be noted that over half of the respondents were early learning services (56%). All of the Malabar/Matraville services who responded to the survey provided early learning opportunities compared to 70 per cent of services across all areas.

Table A.7: Knowledge of Early Learning Services, by Area

| | Bondi | | Malabar/ Matraville | | Bexley/Arncliffe | | Cronulla | | Total | |
|--|-------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Know about available early learning services | 15 | 100.0 | 4 | 80.0 | 16 | 94.1 | 6 | 100.0 | 41 | 95.4 |
| Source of information: | | | | | | | | | | |
| Information brochures/Internet | 10 | 66.7 | 2 | 40.0 | 13 | 76.5 | 4 | 66.7 | 29 | 67.4 |
| Interagency meetings | 10 | 66.7 | 1 | 20.0 | 11 | 64.7 | 5 | 83.3 | 27 | 62.8 |
| Through other service providers | 9 | 60.0 | 1 | 20.0 | 10 | 58.8 | 5 | 83.3 | 25 | 58.1 |
| Provide services themselves | 7 | 46.7 | 2 | 40.0 | 12 | 70.6 | 3 | 50.0 | 24 | 55.8 |
| Other | 5 | 33.3 | 2 | 40.0 | 6 | 35.3 | 2 | 33.3 | 15 | 34.9 |
| Provide early learning opportunities | 10 | 66.7 | 5 | 100.0 | 12 | 70.6 | 3 | 50.0 | 30 | 69.8 |
| Total respondents | 15 | | 5 | | 17 | | 6 | | 43 | |

Service providers' views on transition to school

Further open-ended questions were provided for services to describe what works best in helping children make the transition to school. The results were coded into broad categories and are displayed in table A.8 below. Seventy –nine per cent of services were involved in transition activities, with 88 per cent of the Bexley Arncliffe services reporting involvement.

The most important issue mentioned in terms of ensuring a successful transition was cooperation with the schools, including visits and transition arrangements. This was mentioned by 44 per cent of services overall, including 60 per cent of Bondi services, but only 20 per cent of Malabar/Matraville services. Support for parents was the next most common response, mentioned by 28 per cent of services overall. Early learning services (16%) and information exchange and support (14%) were also mentioned as working well.

Table A.8: Views on Effective Transition to School, by Area

| | Bondi | | Malabar/ Matraville | | Bexley/Arncliffe | | Cronulla | | Total | |
|--|-------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Involved in Transition Activities | 12 | 80.0 | 4 | 80.0 | 15 | 88.2 | 3 | 50.0 | 34 | 79.1 |
| School visits, cooperation and transition arrangements | 9 | 60.0 | 1 | 20.0 | 8 | 47.1 | 1 | 16.7 | 19 | 44.2 |
| Support for parents | 3 | 20.0 | 2 | 40.0 | 5 | 29.4 | 2 | 33.3 | 12 | 27.9 |
| Early Learning Services | 3 | 20.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 17.7 | 1 | 16.7 | 7 | 16.3 |
| Information exchange, support | 2 | 13.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 4 | 23.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 14.0 |
| Overall cooperation, coordination, waiting lists | 2 | 13.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 17.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 11.6 |
| Provision for disadvantage and special needs | 1 | 6.7 | 1 | 20.0 | 1 | 5.9 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 7.0 |
| Other | 1 | 6.7 | 1 | 20.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 16.7 | 3 | 7.0 |
| Flexibility and choice | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 11.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 4.7 |
| Total respondents | 15 | | 5 | | 17 | | 6 | | 43 | |

Improvements needed to ensure a successful transition to school

Table A.9 shows the responses to a question about improvement need to ensure all children have a successful transition to school. The most important issue mentioned was overall administrative cooperation, coordination and waiting lists (33%). Other areas identified as in need of improvement are information exchange and support (21%); and cooperation with the schools, including visits and transition arrangements (21%). Sixteen per cent of respondents rated the support for disadvantage families and families special needs required improvement.

Table A.9: Views on Gaps in Transition to School Services, by Area

| | Bondi | | Malabar/ Matraville | | Bexley/Arncliffe | | Cronulla | | Total | |
|--|-------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|----------|
| | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent | n | per cent |
| Involved in Transition Activities | 12 | 80.0 | 4 | 80.0 | 15 | 88.2 | 3 | 50.0 | 34 | 79.1 |
| Overall cooperation, coordination, waiting lists | 4 | 26.7 | 2 | 40.0 | 6 | 35.3 | 2 | 33.3 | 14 | 32.6 |
| Information exchange, support | 2 | 13.3 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 35.3 | 1 | 16.7 | 9 | 20.9 |
| School visits, cooperation and transition arrangements | 4 | 26.7 | 1 | 20.0 | 2 | 11.8 | 2 | 33.3 | 9 | 20.9 |
| Provision for disadvantage and special needs | 3 | 20.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 17.7 | 1 | 16.7 | 7 | 16.3 |
| Support for parents | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 40.0 | 2 | 11.8 | 1 | 16.7 | 5 | 11.6 |
| Flexibility and choice | 1 | 6.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 11.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 7.0 |
| Early Learning Services | 1 | 6.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 2.3 |
| Total respondents | 15 | | 5 | | 17 | | 6 | | 43 | |