



Uplift

An Empowerment
Approach to Parent
Engagement in Schools

Susan Maury



Charity gives, justice changes.



Uplift

An Empowerment Approach to Parent Engagement in Schools

An action research project conducted by Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service.

Author:
Susan Maury

With appreciation to the members of the reference group: Deb Sestak, Di Mossenton-Brown, Mark Watters, Michael Devine, Iain Ritchie, and Colin Valentine

Special thanks to Gaye Hart, Family Solutions Case Manager

Suggested citation:
Maury, Susan (2014). *Uplift: An Empowerment Approach to Parent Engagement in Schools*. Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service.

ISBN 978-0-9871110-6-7

Published by:
Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service
P.O. Box 6041
North Collingwood, Victoria 3066
Info@goodshepvic.org.au

© Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service

July 2014

Executive summary

Parent engagement in a child's learning has demonstrated positive effects on the child's educational, social and long-term employment outcomes. With vulnerable populations testing as much as two and a half years behind students from high socio-economic status backgrounds, there is currently great emphasis in education policy and practice discussions about the importance of increasing parent engagement. However, while it is valued it is far from easy to do so effectively.

The intent of this research was to pilot an empowering methodology, in which the process encourages agency and confidence in parents through the process of self-identifying what effective support of their children's learning looks like to them, and how to measure it over time. This research is focused on parents – their voice, their viewpoint, their vision of how support could be improved.

The process employed three workshops, focussed on creating a vision, developing a plan, and advocating for the plan. Using Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence as a frame, the parents created a vision for their children's school years, then identified actions that families, schools, and the community can take to better support their child's holistic development. These actions were very specific to the local context. The advocacy component allowed parents to share their plan with school and community representatives, broadening support and securing commitments to action.

This simple process, totalling less than ten hours, became a leverage point for community change. Community members sought to work collaboratively with government, schools and community service agencies, resulting in collective impact. Measurable progress has been made on virtually every component of their plan, resulting in steady and sustained community change.

Primary learning points from this pilot are:

1. Parent engagement can be encouraged on a small budget and a small time commitment, even in communities where engagement is not the norm.
2. The process is vitally important. The aspects of this process which made it particularly successful were:
 - a. A holistic view of children's learning environment, which includes not only the school but also home life and the community.
 - b. An empowering methodology, in which parents are not told what options are available to them to 'help the school out,' but rather parents

- c. are identifying what needs to change in the child's environment and who needs to change it.
 - d. A methodical sequence of visioning, planning and enacting/advocating, allowing the group to move from consolidated thinking to action.
 - e. A respectful dialogue and working partnership with other stakeholders across the community.
 - f. An inclusive approach that allows others to join in at any time.
3. Because this model uses an empowerment framework, it is imperative that schools, community groups, and political bodies are prepared to share power and decision-making in a genuine and meaningful way. It would be unconscionable to use this kind of process but withhold the ability to influence and negotiate significant change.
4. It may be possible to replicate this process in a way that aggregates indicators up, so that effective engagement can be measured across multiple communities. This aspect of the model still requires testing.
5. From a policy perspective, the most insightful finding from this research is the quite large gap between the education system's framing of parent engagement and this group's understanding of the issue. The question most commonly asked in the research literature and amongst education practitioners could be summarised as, "How can we engage parents to make the school better and/or improve educational outcomes for children?" The approach of this group, in contrast, can be summarised as, "In what ways can the school and community better support parents in guiding and directing their children's holistic development?" Their frame of reference is much wider, and truly places the child at the centre of the discussion.
6. Increasing parent engagement may be an ideal place for schools and community services to collaborate. While schools are pedagogy experts, community service agencies are experts in engaging vulnerable families.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive summary | i |
| 1. Introduction | 5 |
| 1.1 The need | 5 |
| 1.2 The interest | 6 |
| 1.3 Research intentions | 7 |
| 1.4 Research question and goals | 7 |
| 1.5 Contributions to the field | 7 |
| 2. The policy context for parent engagement | 9 |
| 2.1 Federal Government policy | 9 |
| 2.2 Victorian Government policy | 10 |
| 2.3 National Professional Standards for Teachers | 12 |
| 3. Current understanding of parent engagement | 14 |
| 3.1 The benefits of parent engagement | 14 |
| 3.2 Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence | 16 |
| 3.3 Theoretical models | 16 |
| 3.4 School – community services collaboration | 19 |
| 4. Geographic location and parent engagement | 22 |
| 4.1 SEIFA Index ranking | 22 |
| 4.2 Australia Early Development Index | 22 |
| 4.3 NAPLAN | 23 |
| 4.4 Socio-economic distribution | 24 |
| 4.5 Context: Community initiatives | 24 |
| 5. Research participants | 27 |
| 5.1 Partnership with the school | 27 |
| 5.2 Recruitment of research participants | 27 |
| 6. Methodology | 28 |
| 6.1 Assumptions and framework | 28 |
| 6.2 Measuring empowerment | 28 |
| 6.3 Benefits of creative processes | 30 |
| 6.4 Workshop methodology | 31 |
| 7. The Uplift workshops | 32 |
| 7.1 Overview of the Uplift workshops | 32 |
| 7.2 Ethics | 32 |
| 7.3 Limitations | 32 |
| 7.4 Workshop one: Visioning | 33 |
| 7.5 Workshop two: Planning | 36 |
| 7.6 Workshop three: Advocating | 37 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 8. Outcomes | 40 |
| 8.1 Participant outcomes: vision and plan | 40 |
| 8.2 Participant outcomes: empowerment | 43 |
| 8.3 Process findings | 44 |
| 8.4 Policy implications | 45 |
| 9. Conclusion | 48 |
| References | 49 |
| Appendices | 53 |
| A: Recruitment brochure | 53 |
| B: Informed Consent | 55 |
| C: Workshop 1 running sheet | 57 |
| D: Workshop 2 running sheet | 59 |
| E: Children’s graph | 61 |
| F: Categorised vision | 62 |
| G: Categorised plan | 63 |
| List of Tables | |
| Table 1: Standard 7, National Professional Standards for Teachers (2011) | 13 |
| Table 2: AEDI comparative data table, Hastings and surrounds (2011) | 23 |
| Table 3: Socio-economic distribution of students, Hastings Westpark Primary School (2013) | 24 |
| List of Figures | |
| Figure 1: Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence | 16 |
| Figure 2: Outcome layers | 40 |
| Figure 3: Vision categories and relationships | 41 |
| List of Images | |
| Images 1 – 4: Child representations | 34 |
| Image 5: Creating the vision tree | 34 |
| Image 6: Detail of leaves and fruit with vision statements | 35 |
| Image 7: The completed vision tree | 35 |
| Image 8: The completed vision | 36 |
| Image 9: Specific actions identified for families, school, and the community | 36 |
| Image 10: Commitment birds | 38 |

1. Introduction

1.1 The need

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reviews, Australia's educational performance ranks quite high (OECD, 2013). However, educational underperformance remains a critical issue particularly for populations that are from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds and Indigenous communities. The COAG (Council of Australian Governments) Reform Council 2011 Education Report states that students from low SES households test up to 16 percentage points behind students from the highest SES background in reading. School leavers from low SES backgrounds had the largest decline in post-school participation in employment, education or training. Indigenous students, while gaining ground in literacy and numeracy test scores for years 3 and 5 in 2011, are still testing far behind non-Indigenous students (COAG Reform Council, 2012).

The 2012 PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) report indicates that Indigenous students test 2.5 full years behind non-Indigenous students in reading, science and maths. The socioeconomic performance gap was similar – students from the lowest SES quartile tested 2.5 full years behind their counterparts in the highest SES quartile (Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., & Buckley, S., 2013). Approximately 20 per cent of the students surveyed experienced a 'low sense of belonging,' while a similar number were identified as having 'low participation' (Willms, J., 2003). The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) identifies almost 24 per cent of all Australian children as developmentally vulnerable in one or more (of five) domains upon entering school; nearly 12 per cent are developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains (AEDI, 2011). Prof. Barry McGraw has said that, compared to other educational high performers within the OECD, "Australia languishes with a high-quality, low-equity label" (Black, 2007, p. 2).

A wide range of research conducted within Australia confirms that many young Australians struggle to experience full educational and social inclusion in the school system. A review conducted by LeBon & Boddy (2010), for example, identified homelessness, child abuse and neglect, bullying, disability, chronic illness, behavioural problems, and poor mental health as key barriers in the Australian context. These issues are reflective of societal issues identified by the Australian Institute of Health and Family Welfare as increasing disadvantage, social exclusion, fragile family relationships and vulnerability (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2012) – issues which reverberate throughout the family and can have profound lifelong consequences for young people.

1.2 The interest

Past research conducted by Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service has looked at the family-school relationship from various angles; findings of particular relevance to this issue include the following:

- a. **Standpoint (2010):** Schools can at times (unknowingly) create barriers to full participation by marginalised students (particularly those from low-SES and CALD backgrounds) (Kruger, T., Unpublished).
- b. **“I just want to go to school” (2012):** Many young people who have disengaged with the formal school system do so because they feel schools are uninterested and/or unable to assist them to overcome barriers (Campbell, L., McGuire, M., & Stockley, C., 2012).
- c. **Sudanese Scoping Project (2010):** A wide range of issues create barriers to families for full economic and social inclusion. Specific to schools, students face multiple barriers to full educational inclusion, including low income, language barriers, and little/no prior formal school experience (Benhadya, E. B., Farrier, W. & Landvogt, K., 2010).
- d. **St. Joseph’s Community Development Project (2011/2012):** Developed in response to the Sudanese Scoping Project. Through proactive intensive efforts, the school re-positioned as a first point-of-contact for all family members to successfully engage with the community (Ray-Greig, M., 2012).

Additionally, our Low Income Awareness Checklist for Schools (Stafford, C. & Stafford, G., 2001, 2013) and the Education Costs kit (Emergency Relief Victoria, 2009) emphasise the importance of a mutually respectful partnership between parents/carers and the school. Families who need the greatest support from the school are often most reluctant or unable to access it.

This research builds upon a history of research by Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service into educational disengagement. The “Standpoint” project was jointly conducted in 2010 by Victoria University and Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, with funding from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). Standpoint worked with school staff to identify the barriers to full engagement – often erected unintentionally by school policies, procedures and pedagogy – which many disengaged students face (Kruger, T., Unpublished). “I Just Want to go to School” (Campbell, L., McGuire, M., & Stockley, C., 2012), jointly conducted with Jesuit Social Services and MacKillop Family Services, provided a creative process for disengaged young people to talk about the barriers they faced to full educational inclusion. The next logical step for Good Shepherd was to look at the same issue from the parent’s perspective.

1.3 Research intentions

This research focuses on parents – their voice, their viewpoint, their vision of how engagement could be improved. The intention was to pilot an empowering methodology that could be used by schools and community services, in which the research process encourages agency and confidence in parents. The process allows parents to self-identify what effective support of their children’s learning looks like to them, and how to measure it over time.

1.4 Research question and goals

Primary research question: What do parents self-identify as effective participation in their child/ren’s school and learning? What do parents self-identify as the primary ways to overcome barriers to effective engagement?

Primary goals:

- a. Parents able to thoughtfully self-identify what effective engagement in their child/ren’s school and learning looks like.
- b. Parents able to thoughtfully self-identify barriers to effective engagement with their child/ren’s school and learning.
- c. Parents able to thoughtfully self-identify specific actions which can be taken to minimise or overcome these barriers, with a particular focus on effective partnership with the school.
- d. Development and pilot of an interactive tool that facilitates the above, creating a set of indicators against which parents can regularly assess their progress in improving their engagement.
- e. Refinement of tool, which can then be shared with other stakeholders.
- f. An opportunity for Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service to reflect on effective methods for community service organisations to partner with schools.

1.5 Contributions to the field

This exploratory research contributes to the evidence base, best practice, and policy considerations in some important ways.

The process itself demonstrates that community development and group facilitation skills continue to have a place in social change. These skills are sometimes undervalued in an age of online activism and high-tech solutions to pressing social issues. It is a timely reminder that empowerment and inclusion are sometimes the most important aspects of an intervention – and perhaps far more life-changing than solving problems on behalf of others. However, empowerment and inclusion require power sharing in order to be genuine. In true community, everyone is valued and has a place to speak and contribute. The results of this pilot indicate that a very small, easily replicable and affordable intervention can have profound effects on how individuals and groups identify their place

within society, but benefits will be diminished or lost if this change in perspective is not supported by others.

True parent engagement is centred on the holistic needs of the children and their families, rather than on the needs of the school. When parents are able to identify and address issues that create barriers to participation and educational inclusion, meaningful change ensues. This is a virtuous cycle: the ability to make or influence meaningful change results in greater confidence and engagement.

For the participants of this pilot, community effects on their children were their primary concern. This may be the case for other areas that experience entrenched disadvantage – and such a focus is confirmed by research into neighbourhood effects on educational outcomes. Communities with pockets of disadvantage may have different issues.

The following chapter outlines how parental engagement is prioritised at the Federal and Victorian government levels, as well as how it is codified within the education system.

2. The policy context for parent engagement

The Grattan Institute, an independent Australian think tank, lists effective parent and community engagement as one of five inputs which are necessary to turn a poorly-performing school around (along with effective leadership, a learning community of teachers, ability to measure effective learning, and creating a positive school culture) (Jensen, B. & Sonnemann, J., 2014). This view is reflected in policy frames at the Federal and State level that prioritise parental engagement as a viable strategy for improving educational outcomes.

2.1 Federal Government policy

The current Federal Government's stance on education, termed a 'students first' approach, has four key areas:

- teacher quality
- principal autonomy
- **engaging parents in education¹**
- strengthening the curriculum (Pyne, C., 2014).

The concept of 'engaging parents in education' is expanded on the StudentsFirst Department of Education web site, which says in part:

Parents are one of the most important influences on a child's education. When parents are engaged in their children's education, they are more likely to attend school, and to perform better. The Government wants to encourage parents to support their children to get the most out of their schooling, from their first day onwards...

While it's important to stay informed and involved in school activities, parental engagement is mostly about what parents can do at home. This includes talking about learning, helping kids to develop strong work habits, encouraging respect for school and teachers, and providing consistent messages about how to behave at school and at home.

When parents set high expectations, talk regularly about school and the value of learning, and encourage positive attitudes to school, children perform better. (DEECD, 2013)

This indicates a continuing commitment to and interest in effective parent engagement strategies.

¹ Emphasis added.

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCETYA , 2008) was ratified by all Australian Education Ministers, and includes two elegantly-stated goals, followed by a statement that promotes shared responsibility for their achievement:

“Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.

Goal 2: All young Australians become:

- Successful learners
- Confident and creative individuals
- Active and informed citizens.

Achieving these educational goals is the collective responsibility of governments, school sectors and individual schools as well as parents and carers, young Australians, families, other education and training providers, business and the broader community.” (MCETYA , 2008, p. 7)

The Melbourne Declaration was followed by the Review of Funding for Schooling report (DEEWR, 2011), commonly known as “the Gonski report” after the commission Chair. The Report recognises the need for equity, encapsulated in the executive summary: “Australia must aspire to have a schooling system that is among the best in the world for its quality and equity, and must prioritise support for its lowest performing students. Every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family or the school they attend. Further, no student in Australia should leave school without the basic skills and competencies needed to participate in the workforce and lead successful and productive lives. The system as a whole must work to meet the needs of all Australian children, now and in the future” (p. xiv).

The commission is clearly articulating the need for a superior school system – providing quality education to all students while drawing upon the community as a resource.

2.2 Victorian Government policy

Towards Victoria as a Learning Community was a special lecture given by the then Victorian Minister for Education, the Hon. Martin Dixon, MP, in November 2011. It outlined the Government’s broad vision for education reform. Key principles in this vision are increased school autonomy and strengthened partnerships between the school and the community (Dixon, M., 2011).

These principles have been incorporated into the **DEECD Framework**, which includes the Families as Partners in Learning initiative. The importance of this initiative is stated in part:

Research demonstrates that effective schools have high levels of parental and community involvement. This involvement is strongly related to improved student learning, attendance and behaviour. Family involvement can have a major impact on student learning,

regardless of the social or cultural background of the family... The aim of the Family-School Partnerships Framework is to encourage sustainable and effective partnerships between all members of the school community, including teachers, families, and students... Family involvement in schools is therefore central to high quality education and is part of the core business of schools. (DEEWR, Year unknown, p. 2)

The seven dimensions of family partnerships as identified by DEECD are:

- **Communicating:** Engaging families and staff in regular, two-way communication about children and young people's learning needs.
- **Connecting learning at home:** Involving families in their child's learning activities at home, including homework as well as other learning activities that include the families' culture, history and language.
- **Building community and identity:** Ensuring early childhood services and schools practices, policies and programs reflect and value the diversity of families in their community.
- **Recognising the role of the family:** Recognising families as the first and primary educators of their children. Acknowledging the lasting influence families have on their children's attitudes and achievements.
- **Consultative decision-making:** Facilitating family participation in consultation and decision-making as participants in governance and advocacy through parent associations, committees and other forums.
- **Collaborating:** Developing relationships with the not-for-profit sector, community groups and business to assist families' abilities to improve learning and development outcomes for children and young people.
- **Participating:** Including families in early childhood service-based or school-based learning activities (DEECD, 2013).

DEECD also recognises and enumerates many challenges to effective family partnerships:

“Challenges that families may face include:

- time constraints
- transport difficulties
- their own experiences of education
- language and cultural differences
- parent health and wellbeing
- financial circumstances
- confidence about their skills and abilities

Early childhood services and schools also face challenges. Such challenges might include:

- time constraints
- complex working environments
- lack of knowledge on the research and importance of family partnerships
- limited understanding of the contribution families can make to children's outcomes
- little understanding of how to effectively engage with parents and minimal preparation for this role
- language and cultural differences” (DEECD, 2013).

At the time of this writing, the Victorian Government has welcomed input into a review on homework. The Terms of Reference include, under the heading “evidence supporting the value of homework” the subheading, “engagement of parents in student learning” (Parliament of Victoria, 2014).

2.3 National Professional Standards for Teachers

The National Professional Standards for Teachers (Education Services Australia, as the legal entity for the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), 2011) were adopted in 2011 following a lengthy collaborative process spearheaded by MCEECDYA. These standards are intended to “define the work of teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in 21st century schools that will improve educational outcomes for students. The Standards do this by providing a framework which makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers’ careers.” (p. 2)

There are seven standards across the four domains of Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. The four categories of Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead indicate expected change across time in the level of mastery for each standard. Standard 7 is **Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community**. Focus area 7.3 specifically addresses the area of parent/carer engagement (see Table 1).

It is clear that effective parent engagement is now considered a core skill for teachers. The teacher’s role is expected to encompass as many dimensions that impact on a child’s learning as is possible – including time the child spends outside of the classroom.

| Focus area | Graduate | Proficient | Highly Accomplished | Lead |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| 7.3 Engage with the parents/carers | Understand strategies for working effectively, sensitively and confidentially with parents/ carers. | Establish and maintain respectful collaborative relationships with parents/ carers regarding their children’s learning and well-being. | Demonstrate responsiveness in all communications with parents/carers about their children’s learning and well-being. | Identify, initiate and build on opportunities that engage parents/carers in both the progress of their children’s learning and in the educational priorities. |

Table 1: Standard 7, National Professional Standards for Teachers (2011)

In sum, there is a clear picture emerging that both Federal and State education policy recognise the importance of parent engagement as a key dimension to improving long-term educational outcomes for children and young people. The concept of “learning” extends outside of the classroom to include the influences of family and the wider community. However, identifying effective methods of engaging parents – and most particularly parents of vulnerable children – is still a struggle for many educators. Finding the right methods for effective engagement takes place within the context of the many other teaching initiatives which are the core domain of teachers and schools. This may be an area where social services organisations can provide significant, specialised support to schools through piloting innovative methods.

The following chapter provides a theoretical framework for the research through an exploration of the current evidence.

3. Current understanding of parent engagement

In this chapter, the evidence is presented for the benefits of parental engagement. This is followed by an exploration of the current practices and research that informed the structure of the Uplift pilot.

3.1 The benefits of parental engagement

There is extensive research exploring the role of parental engagement with their child's formal education, including parent's interaction with the school community. The research overwhelmingly supports the positive outcomes that are achieved through parent engagement. This section summarises some of the main research findings of relevance to this project.

Emerson et al (2012) recently conducted a comprehensive literature review which provides a succinct list of the wide-ranging benefits of effective parental engagement:

“International research has shown that parental engagement (of various kinds) has a positive impact on many indicators of student achievement, including:

- higher grades and test scores,
- enrolment in higher level programs and advanced classes,
- higher successful completion of classes,
- lower drop-out rates,
- higher graduation rates, and
- a greater likelihood of commencing postsecondary education.

Beyond educational achievement, parental engagement is associated with various indicators of student development. These include:

- more regular school attendance,
- better social skills,
- improved behaviour,
- better adaptation to school,
- increased social capital,
- a greater sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning.” (p. 8)

Researchers look at parental engagement in two distinctive streams: parental engagement in the school community (that is, active participation in school life), and parental engagement in their child/ren's learning (that is, direct interaction with the child in the home or community). It is the second stream that has the most direct impact on

academic achievement. However, it may be that for many parents it is through their active engagement with the school community that they internalise the norms and positive behaviours that result in effective engagement with their child/ren's learning. This is perhaps most reflective in the concept of 'parental role construction,' that is, how parents view their role in assisting their child/ren to achieve positive academic and social outcomes.

It is through socialisation processes that this viewpoint is normalised and operationalised. Emerson et al put it well when they write,

Parental role construction is important not just because it affects parents' decisions about how and whether to become engaged, but also because role construction is intimately linked to academic achievement. Parental aspirations and expectations for their children's education have a strong relationship to academic outcomes. In turn, a parent's sense of efficacy and belief in their ability to help their children is central to whether and how they become involved with their children's schooling. The lowest likelihood of engagement occurs when parental role construction is weak – that is, when parents do not believe they should be involved in their child's education and have at the same time a low sense of efficacy. (Ibid., p. 11)

While these attitudes and behaviours are enacted one-on-one between a parent and their child, it is a community issue. Community-held norms, beliefs, and values are more likely to be internalised by parents (and children), and are more likely to predominate when reinforced by the community. In addition, a community that holds high achievement and positive social behaviour in esteem will surround the child with strong reinforcement of these values even when the child is away from the parent or the school.

In sum, the evidence is clear that parent engagement is a critical input into improved educational outcomes for children. It is also clear that how parents engage with their child/ren's learning is influenced by a wide range of factors. The following section examines a frame for categorising these factors, allowing for greater ease to address them effectively.

3.2 Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Epstein's (1987) Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Figure 1) is the theoretical frame used in the construction and delivery of the Uplift workshops. This frame was adopted due to its use by DEECD. It also provides a useful frame for categorising and addressing various factors that influence parent engagement.

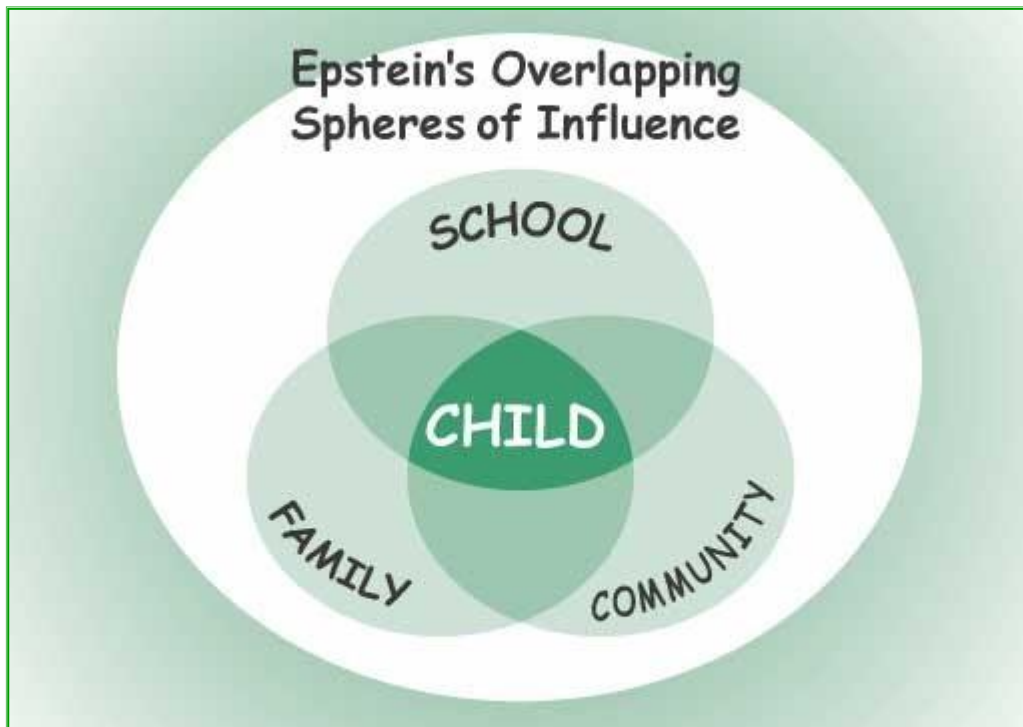


Figure 1: Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Epstein's model recognises that much learning takes place outside of the school. A child is much more likely to meet or exceed developmental milestones when there is congruence between the family, school and community learning environments, reflective of best practice content and support.

The following section summarises some of the principal theoretical models used by researchers to examine the complex interplay of parent and community influence on children's learning.

3.3 Theoretical models

The Uplift research project pulls on a broad range of theoretical models and prior research in the realms of educational attainment and holistic well-being of children and young people. Specifically, this project builds upon research into neighbourhood impacts,

intergenerational closure, neighbourhood effect heterogeneity, contagion or peer-effects theories, social capital and connection, and community capacity. A brief summary and discussion of these concepts is included in this section.

Neighbourhood impacts

Significant research demonstrates the impact of neighbourhoods on a child's educational achievement and employment status as an adult. For example, Johnson (2008) reports that high socio-economic status (SES) neighbours positively impact on children's educational outcomes (particularly for females and 'white' children). A Los Angeles study conducted by Sastry & Pebley (2010) reports that children's achievement scores were mediated by the economic status of their neighbourhood and their mother's reading scores.

Fischer & Kmec (2004) found that high school graduation rates were moderated by neighbourhood SES, which seems to mediate a family's ability to translate resources into educational achievement for their children. There are many possibilities for what specific aspects of living in a low-SES neighbourhood contributes to reduced education rates; these include higher stress levels and reduced health of parents, reduced access to resources, and exposure to violence and crime (Fischer, M. J. & Kmec, J. A., 2004).

Within the Australian context, Tony Vinson's foundational book *Dropping off the Edge* (2007) demonstrates that geographical location is predictive of a host of outcomes, including completing school. Confirming the link, the Participation and Equity Report (CSHE, 2008) indicates that these inequalities continue up to the university level: "people from low SES backgrounds are about one-third as likely as people from high SES backgrounds to participate in higher education.... [and] comprise less than 10 per cent of postgraduate students." (Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE), University of Melbourne, 2008)

These findings corroborate the definition of social exclusion put forward by Saunders (2007), to include disengagement, services exclusion, and economic exclusion. These dimensions are considered separate from financial poverty, but of course they are often experienced together, erecting a formidable barrier to full social, educational, and economic inclusion and participation.

Intergenerational closure

The role of parents in their child's development is placed within the context of the wider community and neighbourhood. Whether community views and behaviours reinforce or challenge the parents' nurturing practices is of critical importance. From a structural perspective, a closed structure for passing on values, norms and attitudes is far superior to an open structure. Coleman (1988) calls alignment 'intergenerational closure.' This closure ensures that values and norms that are communicated in the home are mirrored and enforced in the broader community. It is not solely up to the parent to reinforce these attitudes and behaviours, as other members of the community – other parents as well as teachers and other authority figures – will provide feedback to children and young people

that support the parents' views. This community-wide consensus increases a sense of trust and reciprocity amongst parents and authority figures; as Coleman says, "we may say that closure creates trustworthiness in a social structure" (p. S108).

Neighbourhood effect heterogeneity

When the community and parental values and norms are ones that improve outcomes for children, a closed system is a good goal to pursue. In places where this is not the case, parents have a stronger role to play in teaching their children how to engage with the community strategically. Galster (2010), in a review paper, makes the link between low-SES neighbourhoods and such outcomes as weaker cohesion and fewer social controls.

Harding et al (2011), in their research into neighbourhood effects on educational outcomes, recognise that neighbourhoods are heterogeneous places; multiple mechanisms influence how any individual child will interact with the community – creating what they term 'effect heterogeneity.' Understanding how these influences operate is particularly critical in neighbourhoods where there may be fewer positive choices (e.g., library, after-school programs, sport or cultural opportunities) and greater negative choices (e.g., vandalism, drug use, gang activity). In this case, differences in outcomes for children are driven "less by differences in social interactions and more by differences between individuals and families in their capacity to access resources and to insulate their children from negative aspects of their neighbourhood and, as a result, their susceptibility to neighbourhood effects" (p. 283). They suggest that parents who are high-functioning and have a strong sense of agency may be able to proactively assist their children to invest their time in positive options while avoiding negative options.

Contagion or peer effects

Harding et al also use a network analysis lens to discuss the phenomena of "contagion" in social circles. They explain, "Contagion or peer-effects theories propose that individuals are more likely to do what others around them are doing. A child will spend more time studying when he sees his peers spending more time studying" (Harding, D., Gennetian, L., Winship, C., Sanbonmatsu, L., and Kling, J., 2011, p. 287). Of course, while the child is affected by the network, s/he is also a part of the network, and therefore also plays a part in spreading contagious behaviours – and perhaps sparking a contagion. This phenomenon is already well-documented in public health initiatives such as anti-smoking, alcohol reduction, weight loss and healthy eating campaigns (Christakis, N. & Fowler, J., 2009).

A recent Australian research report demonstrates through a longitudinal study that children who are actively engaged in and enjoy attending school are more likely to continue post-compulsory education and to hold higher status occupations as adults (Abbott-Chapman, J., Martin, K., Ollington, N., Venn, A., Dwyer, T. & Gall, S., 2013). This may also be influenced by the concept of 'contagion' – whether or not it is acceptable amongst the child's peers, family and community to feel engaged, enjoy, and be involved in school.

Social capital and connection

Social capital and connection are recurring themes in the literature. Baum et al (2000) found that active community participation has certain antecedents, with people from low income and low educational levels much less likely to participate in community activities, resulting in increased risk of social exclusion and poorer health outcomes. The authors note, “a campaign...to increase involvement in civic activities that gives people a sense of gaining more power over their lives could have worthwhile health promoting outcomes.... [T]hose with low educational levels and low incomes...need assistance in acquiring the skills, confidence and motivation to participate in civic activity” (p. 421). Baum and Palmer (2002) identify key characteristics of the geographical landscape that impact on the health, wellbeing and social connectedness of residents, including safe parks and public spaces, walks through attractive areas, and accessible shops and cafes.

Community capacity

Chaskin (2009) proposes the organising frame of community capacity to capture the various aspects of location that impact on health and wellbeing outcomes. He proposes, “community capacity is the interaction of human capital, organisational resources, and social capital that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and to improve or maintain the well-being of a given community” (p. 34). He identifies four primary strategies to increase community capacity: leadership development, organisational development, improved organisational infrastructure, and community organising. While he recognises the limitations a community response can have on issues that are predominantly a result of structural weaknesses external to the local setting, he suggests that “an organised community can provide a necessary foundation for effective mobilisation and advocacy to effect change in broader policy arenas and in the practice of external actors” (p. 37).

In sum, parental engagement is predominantly discussed in policy circles as an individual matter, with engagement levels varying amongst families in a somewhat arbitrary way (e.g., “good” parents and “bad” parents). However, the research literature shows a different picture, with individual behaviour firmly grounded within community contexts, norms and constraints.

3.4 School – community services collaboration

Schools and teaching staff are pedagogy experts. While they understand the value of increasing parent engagement in learning processes and the school community, they may feel under-prepared to know how to do so effectively. On the other hand, community service agencies do not have pedagogical expertise, but they are intimately familiar with the realities faced by the families who are least likely to engage, and have practice knowledge and skills in motivating and facilitating engagement. This provides an intersection for effective collaboration and partnership. With increasing expectations on schools to provide more holistic services coupled with restrictive budgets, partnerships between schools and social service agencies have resulted in some innovative partnerships. This section explores some of the current models in use.

A partnership model that is gaining traction within Australia generally and Victoria in particular is the extended school hubs model. The DEECD website explains that “this [model] involves a school, or cluster of schools, working with a range of partners and organisations to provide services and activities before, during and after school hours to help meet the needs of children and young people, their families and the wider community” (DEECD, 2013). The information also explains that, as these hubs are flexible and location-specific, the exact nature of the partnerships and programs differs from school to school.

In a review of hub schools, Black et al (2010) indicate that hub models both make support services more accessible to students and families, and de-stigmatise their use. The authors caution that the various models are so diverse in their goals, structure, implementation – and perhaps most critically in the rigour of assessment processes – that drawing firm conclusions about this model is difficult. However, enthusiasm for these models is high and those involved point to many improvements across the spectrum, including increased student and parent engagement, improved educational performance and wellbeing, improved cross-sectoral care of students’ complex needs, increased proactive (rather than reactive) intervention, and increased networks between the school and the community (Ibid., pp. 11, 12).

But what about other partnership types between schools and service organisations? Specifically, could service organisations successfully provide a facilitative role rather than service provision per se? This area is under-researched, perhaps because it is a less popular model. However, case studies conducted by Warren et al (2009) in large cities located in the United States (Chicago, Los Angeles, and Newark), look specifically at the effectiveness of social service agencies as a broker in developing a collaborative parent-school relationship. The researchers concluded:

“Despite their differences...the cases offer a distinct, relational approach to parent engagement that has led to important gains in the breadth and strength of parent participation in schools. This community-based approach (1) highlights relationship building, (2) develops the capacity of parents to be leaders, and (3) works to close the gaps in culture and power between educators and parents. The three aspects are related. Strong relationships among parents create mutual support and a sense of community out of which parents can develop as leaders, and the assertion of their leadership can produce change in power relationships and the culture of schooling” (p. 2239).

The authors emphasise that it can be difficult for school staff and teachers to promote meaningful parent engagement since they are focussed on the immediate and specific hoped-for benefits to the school. This focus results in a narrowed construct of what constitutes meaningful engagement – restricting it to running the cake stall rather than informing school policy, for example. Social service organisations are more attuned to the needs of the family as a whole and see engagement as an outcome of increased agency, confidence and social capital rather than increased attendance at school functions or increased interest in homework. Additionally, their perspective is more likely to see the

benefits parents on the margins may provide to school life, whereas schools are more likely to view full, meaningful engagement as problematic when it challenges school norms and attitudes. The authors say, “Our concern is to foster extensive and meaningful engagement by parents in children’s learning and the life of the school, and, beyond that, for parents to become active agents in the transformation of their schools and communities” (Ibid., p. 2246).

In sum, models of effective partnerships between schools and social service agencies are still being explored. The Uplift research project contributes to the discussion of possible models. Identifying a specific area where the interests of schools and agencies intersect – parent engagement – provides clear roles and benefits for both partners.

The following chapter provides an overview of the community where the Uplift workshops were piloted.

4. Geographic location and parent engagement

This research was conducted at Hastings Westpark Primary School, in Hastings, Victoria. Hastings is located on the Mornington Peninsula, and the school is adjacent to Westpark estate, government housing that was historically provided to naval personnel, and currently houses low income, disadvantaged families. The greater Hastings area is experiencing gentrification, with many new housing communities under construction or recently occupied. However, the majority of students at the primary school come from the housing estate. Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service was invited to conduct this research by the school leadership, due to the close working relationship with Good Shepherd practitioners on the Mornington Peninsula and the school's interest in lifting parent engagement.

This chapter provides some background information to this school community.

4.1 SEIFA Index ranking

The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas, or the SEIFA index, ranks areas according to relative advantage or disadvantage, using the data from the five-yearly Census. Using the rank of 1,000 as a point of departure and representing the Australian average, it measures such dimensions as income, educational attainment, employment, and occupations. The lower the SEIFA score, the higher the disadvantage. The SEIFA index of disadvantage ranking for Hastings and surrounds is 912.2 (profile.id, 2011). This is the lowest-ranking community on the Peninsula, which has an overall score of 1,022.5. Because this is a relative index, communities are ranked on a bell curve. As a way to compare, 15% of collection districts (CD) have a score below 900, and are considered highly disadvantaged.

4.2 Australia Early Development Index

The Australia Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population based measure of how children have developed by the time they start school. It looks at the five areas of physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge (AEDI, 2014). According to the most recently published statistical analysis for the AEDI (2011), Hastings and surrounds is a community that ranks high for educationally vulnerable children. The table below shows Hastings data as compared to all of Australia, Victoria, and the Mornington Peninsula:

| Region | # of children | Average score | Developmentally vulnerable | Developmentally at risk | On Track | |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| | | | Below the 10 th percentile | Between the 10 th and 25 th percentile | Between the 25 th and 50 th percentile | Above the 50 th percentile |
| Australia | 247,232 | 9.6 | 9.3 | 13.0 | 21.7 | 56.0 |
| Victoria | 57,499 | 10.0 | 7.7 | 11.7 | 20.8 | 59.0 |
| Mornington Peninsula | 1,649 | 9.6 | 9.2 | 15.7 | 21.0 | 54.1 |
| Hastings & surrounds | 126 | 9.2 | 18.3 | 15.9 | 21.4 | 44.4 |

Table 2: AEDI comparative data table, Hastings & surrounds (2011)

The AEDI indicates that the Hastings region has approximately double the percentage of vulnerable children than the Australian, Victorian, and the Peninsula average, and a significantly lower comparative percentage of children above the 50th percentile (10 percentage points lower than the Peninsula average, and 15 percentage points below the Victorian average).

4.3 NAPLAN

The My School website is maintained by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), and provides information by school on combined average NAPLAN results (ACARA, 2013). NAPLAN stands for the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy. NAPLAN is a series of common literacy and numeracy tests conducted annually across Australia for all students in years three, five, seven and nine. Students are assessed across five categories: Reading, Persuasive Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation, and Numeracy. Each school's combined results are then averaged and made public.

In 2012, Hastings Westpark Primary School's test averages for year five are ranked 'considerably below' Australia-wide averages, and are also ranked 'below' schools of comparative socio-economic make-up in all but one category. Results for year three are slightly better, with three of the five categories ranked 'considerably below' national averages and only one category 'considerably below' schools of similar SES ranking. In 2013 (administered during the course of the research), year five results were 'comparable' or 'below' similar schools in three categories. Year three results remained roughly comparable to 2012.

4.4 Socio-economic distribution

The My School website (ACARA, 2013) also displays the socio-economic student distribution of each school across four quartiles. The distribution of Hastings Westpark Primary School's population for 2013 is shown in Table 3.

| | Bottom quarter | Middle quarters | | Top quarter |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----|-------------|
| School Distribution | 73% | 23% | 5% | 0% |
| Australian Distribution | 25% | 25% | 25% | 25% |

Table 3: Socio-economic distribution of students, Hastings Westpark Primary School (2013)

4.5 Context: Community initiatives

The context within which this research project took place is critical to its success. Specifically, the following initiatives or changes were key in setting the stage for this research:

- a. **Change of leadership at Hastings Westpark Primary School, in November 2011.** There have been some significant changes at the school with the change in leadership. This includes introducing the Walker Learning Approach (an Australian-developed evidence-based approach to individualised learning), providing more innovative learning opportunities (e.g. accessible music programs), and increasing community and parent engagement.
- b. **Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal, 2005 – 2013.** This DHS-sponsored initiative was “a state government initiative to narrow the gap between some of the most disadvantaged communities in Victoria, and the rest of the state. It brought together the resources and ideas of residents, governments, businesses and community groups to tackle the issues that hold back communities. It’s about encouraging new partnerships in communities to tackle what are often old problems – but with new ideas and fresh energy” (2013, p. 6). The objectives were:
 - increase community pride and participation
 - enhance housing and the physical environment
 - lift employment and learning opportunities; expand the local economy

- improve safety and reduce crime
- promote health and wellbeing
- increase access to services; improve government responsiveness (Ibid., p. 6).

Using a collaborative approach, the Neighbourhood Renewal project involved a wide range of stakeholders from across the community in a broad range of activities. Although the program's duration has finished, three working groups continue to make progress on the primary issues: the Employment and Learning working group, the Community Safety working group, and 3915 Connected which focuses on increasing community connectedness.

c. The Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY) project. This project was coordinated by the Royal Children's Hospital Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH). The Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY) project ran from 2008 – 2012 and involved taking a holistic approach to improving the transition pathways and school readiness from early years to formal schooling. The three goals for this program were:

- children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and schools
- early years services and schools actively connect with families
- schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children (CCCH, 2013).

Like the Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal initiative, the LSEY project used an inclusive process to develop and implement locally responsive strategies and activities. This included forming both a practitioner network and a partnership (management) group for those who work with children and families in schools, kindergartens, childcare services, or related community services. The practitioner network is also supported by a leadership group, which ensures they stay on target, and a knowledge bank of mentors who have rotated off the leadership group. A collaborative approach was taken by all these groups to create and implement a plan addressing the project's goals. The early years health and education network in Hastings has been strengthened and is using a multi-pronged approach to successfully engage with families.

d. Wallaroo Community Centre sits at the intersection of these various change initiatives. This community centre is located adjacent to Hastings Westpark Primary School and the Westpark housing estate. Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service has been a strong community presence on the Mornington Peninsula for over 20 years, and has operated a community house in the Westpark community since 2005. In 2010 Good Shepherd moved into the

purpose-built Wallaroo Community Centre. This facility provides a range of adult recreation and educational opportunities as well as a kindergarten, a children's holiday program, and maternal and child health services. Wallaroo Community Centre and Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service staff are involved in both the Neighbourhood Renewal project and the LSEY study, and also have close ties with Hastings Westpark Primary School. The Community Centre continues to broker progress on the community-strengthening activities generated by these initiatives. For example, the Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal initiative recently received funding from DHS to employ a Parent Engagement Officer. This .8 FTE position sits with Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, and works across the school system in Hastings.

The Uplift research project therefore nests within the priorities of the community around improving educational systems, and compliments a broader collaborative effort that has been in motion over the past six years.

The following chapter provides information on the school's interest in piloting this engagement method, and how participants were recruited.

5. Research participants

5.1 Partnership with the school

Hastings Westpark Primary School has suffered from years of stigma. Following a leadership change in November 2011, the school has made many changes in both curriculum and community engagement practices. The Principal saw the Uplift research as an opportunity to bolster parental engagement in the school, which was quite low. According to the Principal, just prior to conducting the research there were three or four parents who regularly interacted with the school, and one who oversaw the work that in other schools is done by a volunteer parents committee. School enrolments were down to approximately 90 students representing 60 families. Despite the recent positive changes at the school, many families who live locally were choosing to send their children to other primary schools.

5.2 Recruitment of research participants

A flyer was sent home with each child inviting parents to participate. A follow-up notice was placed in the school newsletter. The Principal also made face-to-face contact with parents, encouraging them to participate. The Manager of Wallaroo Community House also handed out flyers and talked to parents about participation. Wallaroo is located adjacent to the school, and operates a kindergarten that feeds into Westpark Primary. It also served as the location of the workshops. Incentives for participation included a gift voucher for each workshop attended, free childcare for pre-school-aged children, and breakfast.

This process resulted in nine parent participants. Seven had children enrolled at Westpark Primary; one had children enrolled at Hastings Primary School, and one had a child enrolled at St. Mary's Catholic Primary School. Some participants also had older children who attended Western Port Secondary College. Eight participants were mothers; one was a grandmother.

A researcher based at Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service's Social Policy & Research Unit in Collingwood held primary responsibility for designing, facilitating, and documenting the workshops. Two Mornington Peninsula-based Good Shepherd Family Support staff provided support: The Manager of Wallaroo Community House, and a certified family and arts therapist, who assisted with co-facilitation and workshop design.

The following chapter provides detailed information on how the methodology was developed.

6. Methodology

A primary component of this action research was to develop and trial a process that could be used to promote empowerment and participation of parents in their child/ren's learning. While the workshops are original in their design and implementation, they incorporated three specific processes. Section 6.1 summarises the assumptions that governed design choices. Section 6.2 describes a tested framework for measuring empowerment. Section 6.3 provides an evidence base for the use of creative processes. Section 6.4 briefly describes the workshop method used to organise the data generated by the group.

6.1 Assumptions and framework

In light of lessons learned from the literature review, there was interest in designing an intervention which might assist in mitigating the barriers to effective parent engagement while also encouraging increased engagement. Certain assumptions underpinned the workshop design and implementation:

- a. Parents have critical insight and knowledge concerning what they would like for their children. They also understand the opportunities and constraints of the environment, inclusive of the three areas of focus for this research – families, school and community.
- b. The topic was approached from a positive perspective. This in no way compromised critical analysis, but rather framed the discussion in action and hope.
- c. A process that draws this wisdom out in an organic way will result in richer, more meaningful outcomes while also increasing ownership by the participants. Visioning and analysis do not have to be dry, difficult processes in order to be meaningful and rigorous.
- d. Within the identified scope, participants should be able to direct the process. This includes maintaining ownership of the content, determining who to share the results with and how to put the outcomes to use.

6.2 Measuring empowerment

As this process was trialling an empowerment method for increasing parent engagement, the workshop content was deliberately designed to encourage empowerment. It therefore was intended not only to *measure* empowerment, but also to *facilitate* empowerment. The process reflects this intention; for example, the overarching workshop questions are quite general, and within this scope the participants were free to direct the discussions as they wished. Additionally, participants were aware that the plan resulting from the workshops (as well as the other documents they generated, such as the vision) was a tool for them to

keep and use. The final workshop was left unscheduled, so that the participants could decide the best use of the time to ensure their plan resulted in action.

The research process needed a tested frame that reflected these principles. The literature of the international development sector, where empowerment is a cornerstone of practice, provided one. Specifically, the frame used is pulled from a free-for-download book entitled “Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them” (Jupp, D. & Ali, S.I. with contributions from Barahona, C., 2010).

The approach was developed by an agency that assists community groups to increase their empowerment, specifically related to land rights in Bangladesh. With over 25,000 operative groups at the time of the book’s publication, the agency found that land acquisition was experienced by only 30 per cent of the groups; however, all of the groups found it worthwhile to meet together regularly. The agency developed this approach to measuring empowerment as a way to capture the benefits the groups found in meeting together; if it was not the attainment of land rights, then what was the perceived benefit?

A distinctive feature of this approach is that the process itself encourages empowerment. Each community group was facilitated to develop a list of indicators for how they identify successful empowerment. An example is this statement, from one of the groups: “We have elected own members in UP [Union Parishad – the lowest tier of local government] to get into local power structure.” (Ibid., p. 48) This is then turned into a general statement: “Movement representative on the UP.” (Ibid.) Eight thousand uniquely-generated statements were distilled into 132 indicators, which became common across all groups. These were categorised into political, social, economic/natural resources, and capability indicators, and ranked on a scale of awareness (lowest tier), confidence and capability (demonstration of ability), or effectiveness and self-sustaining (fully empowered).

Each year, an external facilitator leads each group to reflect on their performance for each indicator, giving themselves a simple rating – either a happy face (“we are strong on this indicator”) or a sad face (“this indicator needs attention”). From this assessment the groups develop a working plan for the year. This rich content remains under the control of the group. This is a powerful example of a process that undergirds and reinforces the intention of the organisation, as groups exercise agency in their discussions and planning, and experience increased critical thinking, strategic planning abilities, and confidence as a result.

While the outcomes from the discussions and planning remain with the group, their self-ratings on the indicators are reported back to the agency. As this is a binary system (either a happy face or a sad face), it is straightforward to record the self-ratings in a database. The data can then be analysed in a range of ways; for example, is there a greater sense of empowerment recorded by location? By age of group? By political or social activism? By group size? And so on. This information is used for results-based decision-making, and is also shared with funders. Perhaps the most interesting use is in the constant renegotiation of the relationship between the agency and the groups. The process gives the groups a conduit for identifying ways that they could be better

supported, or for proposing ways that they can express their empowerment within the organisation itself.

The agency suggests that this can support programs designed to build capacity and advocacy skills within the context of rights-based, governance or social movements. It can measure both attitudinal and behaviour changes. The report's authors state: "The experience described here should build confidence that transparency, rigour and reliability can be assured in community-led approaches to monitoring and evaluation without distorting the original purpose, which is a system of reflection for the community members themselves" (Ibid., p. 12).

This is precisely the kind of frame that was needed. The principles were adapted for this small pilot.

6.3 Benefits of creative processes

Another strategy to support an empowering process was to create workshop processes that are accessible. At the same time, quality needed to be assured. Hence the workshops needed to be both easy (to engage with) and profound (in their outcomes). There was also a deliberate strategy to make the workshops fun while attempting to eliminate any activities that might intimidate research participants or increase their stress levels. There is a large body of evidence demonstrating that negative emotional states reduce an individuals' capacity for divergent, flexible thinking, while positive mood states increase these cognitive capacities (Hirt, E. R., Devers, E. E., & McCrea, S. M., 2008) (Alexander, J. K., Hillier, A., Smith, R. M., Tivarus, M. E. & Beversdorf, D. Q., 2007) (Isen, A. M., 2001).

To address these requirements, all workshops relied heavily on creative processes, which can hold this tension. The strong links between creativity and cognitive flexibility – which promotes divergent and insightful thinking, as well as creative problem-solving abilities – are well known (Zabelina, D. L. & Robinson, M. D., 2010).

The Uplift research design makes particular use of visual arts, which can carry multiple and richer meanings and embody concepts more completely than written words are often able to convey. Using art as a research process allows for creating shared understanding, transforming or re-imagining knowledge, and facilitating insightful thinking (Marshall, J., 2007). Additionally, visual images assist in developing metaphors; metaphor use is strongly aligned with creative, divergent thinking and can also assist individuals and groups to grapple with complexity (Gibbs, Jr., R. W., 2008).

6.4 Workshop methodology

The information generated by these creative and engaging methods needed to be organised and made more accessible, so that progress could be tracked. Therefore, the workshops also drew upon a process known as the Technology of Participation®. This workshop process was originally developed by The Institute for Cultural Affairs in the United States and is used by trained facilitators globally. A key feature of this process is to use index cards to record and organise individual contributions into overarching categories. This process is designed to recognise and honour all contributions, consider large amounts of data more effectively, identify patterns from individual contributions, and welcome diversity of opinion while minimising polarisation or conflict (The Institute of Cultural Affairs). Additionally, it allowed the information generated by the creative processes to be transposed into distinct, measurable contributions. Aspects of the Technology of Participation® were incorporated into the workshops.

The following chapter describes the three workshops as they were realised.

7. The Uplift workshops

The three Uplift workshops (Visioning, Planning, and Advocating) are described here in more detail. A brief overview of the workshops is followed by discussions on ethics and limitations. The three workshops are then described as they actually unfolded.

7.1 Overview of the Uplift workshops

This project was designed as a short, sharp piece of action research. A series of workshops were designed and held on three consecutive Wednesday mornings, from 9:15 am to 12 pm, for a total time of approximately 9 hours.

Workshop 1 was a visioning workshop. After identifying the strengths, abilities and interests of the participants' children, a shared vision was developed.

Workshop 2 was a planning workshop. The components of the vision were categorised and named, and specific actions were identified for supporting the vision. These actions were listed for family, school and community.

Workshop 3 was an advocacy workshop. Key guests were identified and invited by the participants in order to share their vision and action points.

More details concerning each workshop and the outcomes are contained in the sections that follow. Running sheets of workshops 1 and 2 are also included in the appendices. Workshop 3 was left unplanned to respond to the participants' wishes and therefore no running sheet was created.

7.2 Ethics

The Uplift research design and process was approved by Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service's Ethics Committee. This included review of the structure, process and recruitment strategies, as well as ensuring confidentiality, informed consent and provision of duty of care. Additionally, design considerations were informed by the project's reference group.

7.3 Limitations

The Uplift pilot should be considered in light of its limitations. It was limited by design, as it was only tested at one site. It is expected that other locations would have differing issues and the outcomes might vary enormously for this reason. Additionally, while the frame

used is intended to provide a way to aggregate self-ratings of empowerment, this aspect remains untested at the time of writing, as the pilot included only one site. Further piloting is required to know how effective this method may be across a wide range of communities, and whether the results could be effectively aggregated.

Additionally, choices were made concerning the design and implementation. For example, participation was limited to parents only. Opening up the process to other community members would result in a very different process.

Finally, the unique setting of the school likely influenced results. As described in Chapter 5, the school may be unusual in its extremely low parent involvement prior to the workshops. In a setting where there is a dichotomy of high participation by some parents and low participation by others, it may be more difficult to engage parents with low participation.

7.4 Workshop one: Visioning

The Visioning workshop started with an introduction to the research, which included explaining the intention of the research, informed consent, confidentiality, what would and would not be included in the final report, how the report would be disseminated, and who would be likely to access it.

As a way to establish the process within a positive framework, introductions were made by having each participant make a paper representation of each of their children. They were asked to include words or images that represented strengths and abilities that their children had received from them. Participants also included interests of their children. Participants (including the research team) then shared about each of their children. This exercise also served to place the emphasis on children's wellbeing. The response to this exercise was positive, and relaxed the group.

The participants were then given a large piece of paper and paints, and were asked to collectively paint a tree, in which the roots represent families, the trunk represents school, and the branches represent community. This reflects the key aspects of Epstein's model (see section 3.2), as primary influences on a child's learning environment. Initially the group was apprehensive about this exercise, but as they worked together on it the relationships within the group strengthened, and they enjoyed the process.



Images 1 - 4: Child representations



Images 5: Creating the vision tree

Finally, the participants were asked to respond to the question, “What do we want for our children during their school years?” They wrote their responses on paper that they fashioned into leaves and fruit and placed on the tree. These responses became the shared vision.



Image 6: Detail of leaves and fruit with vision statements

The child representations were then added into the tree.



Image 7: The completed vision tree

Reflecting on the process, participants voiced surprise that such an easy and enjoyable process could yield such complex and thorough results. One mother pointed out that their vision reflected inner skills and abilities that everyone draws on, but which results in a different path for each individual.

They were also surprised at the high degree of consensus amongst the group, and felt reassured that their concerns and hopes were shared by others. Finally, they said the workshop had them thinking more comprehensively about the issues surrounding their child/ren's learning environment.

7.5 Workshop two: Planning

The second workshop focussed on developing a plan to support the vision. In preparation, the researcher recorded all of the vision statements that were on the tree, removed the duplicates, and wrote each unique statement on an index card. These cards were then grouped into very loose categories and attached to the wall.

With the researcher acting as facilitator, the group together reviewed all of the cards, rearranged them into definitive categories, added a few ideas that they felt were missing, and then gave each category an overarching name.



Image 8: The completed vision



Image 9: Specific actions identified for families, school, and the community

Participants then divided into three smaller groups. Each group was tasked with drawing a picture to represent what specific actions (a) families; (b) the school; and (c) the community needed to take in order to support this vision. The researcher captured ideas on flip chart paper as they were discussed around the table and also when the small groups explained their drawings. Other ideas were added as they came out of the group's critical reflection of the plans as they took shape.

At the end of the workshop, the participants commented on how such an easy process resulted in a comprehensive plan. They also discussed the importance of getting more

parents involved in implementing the plan. Finally, they expressed excitement to see their plan implemented, and pride at its quality.

The workshop finished with a discussion that plans can only be made for oneself. Therefore, it was suggested that the group may like to invite key people to workshop three. This would allow them to share their vision and plan in order to get some commitments for action from others. They were also given the option of using the time in other ways if they preferred. However, the group felt strongly that if they wanted to see action on their plan, they needed to invite key individuals. They drew up an invite list which included politicians, school representatives, and representatives from community groups. Invitations were sent out by email by the research team and Westpark Primary's Principal. Acceptances were received from three politicians (Federal, State, and local), the primary school Principal, and a representative of DHS. The community services sector was represented by the Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service Mornington Peninsula staff.

7.6 Workshop three: Advocating

The guests were invited to attend the final hour of the third workshop, providing the participants time to plan. The workshop started with a discussion about the plan that had been developed the week prior. One of the participants remarked, "It's a great plan, but if nothing happens it's useless." This comment led the group to conclude that an active engagement process was necessary to make the plan relevant to more stakeholders. Discussions centred around how to engage more parents in the plan, as well as how to communicate the plan to the broader community. The Manager of Wallaroo Community House provided information on the forums that had been developed in the wake of the Neighbourhood Renewal project coordinated by DHS. Recognising the need for a venue within which to speak, the participants were pleased to hear there were plans to develop a resident's group for the community.

Prior to this workshop, the researcher and the arts therapist discussed how to appropriately engage the visitors with the content. There was a reluctance to put the participants in a position of 'presenting,' with concern that power dynamics may make it an intimidating or unproductive experience. The goal was, therefore, to find a way to engage the visitors in a similar fashion to how the participants were engaged – that is, through a creative process.

The researcher opened the advocacy session by briefly explaining to the guests the process and outcomes of the workshops, and that they had been invited to participate in the plan by making some key commitments to specific actions. At this point, the politicians started asking questions of the participants and the mood in the room was somewhat distancing and confrontational. The arts therapist then explained to the group how these commitments were to be made.

Instructions for making origami birds were given to everyone, along with a supply of origami paper. Individuals (guests and participants alike) were instructed to make origami birds, place their name on them, and then attach them to the specific actions that they were committing to support. This extended the imagery of the tree and fruit, as the birds could “fly from the tree and land on an action.” As nobody in the room was skilled at origami, the dynamics changed immediately as guests and participants worked together to make presentable birds, and shared much laughter at the sometimes amateur results.

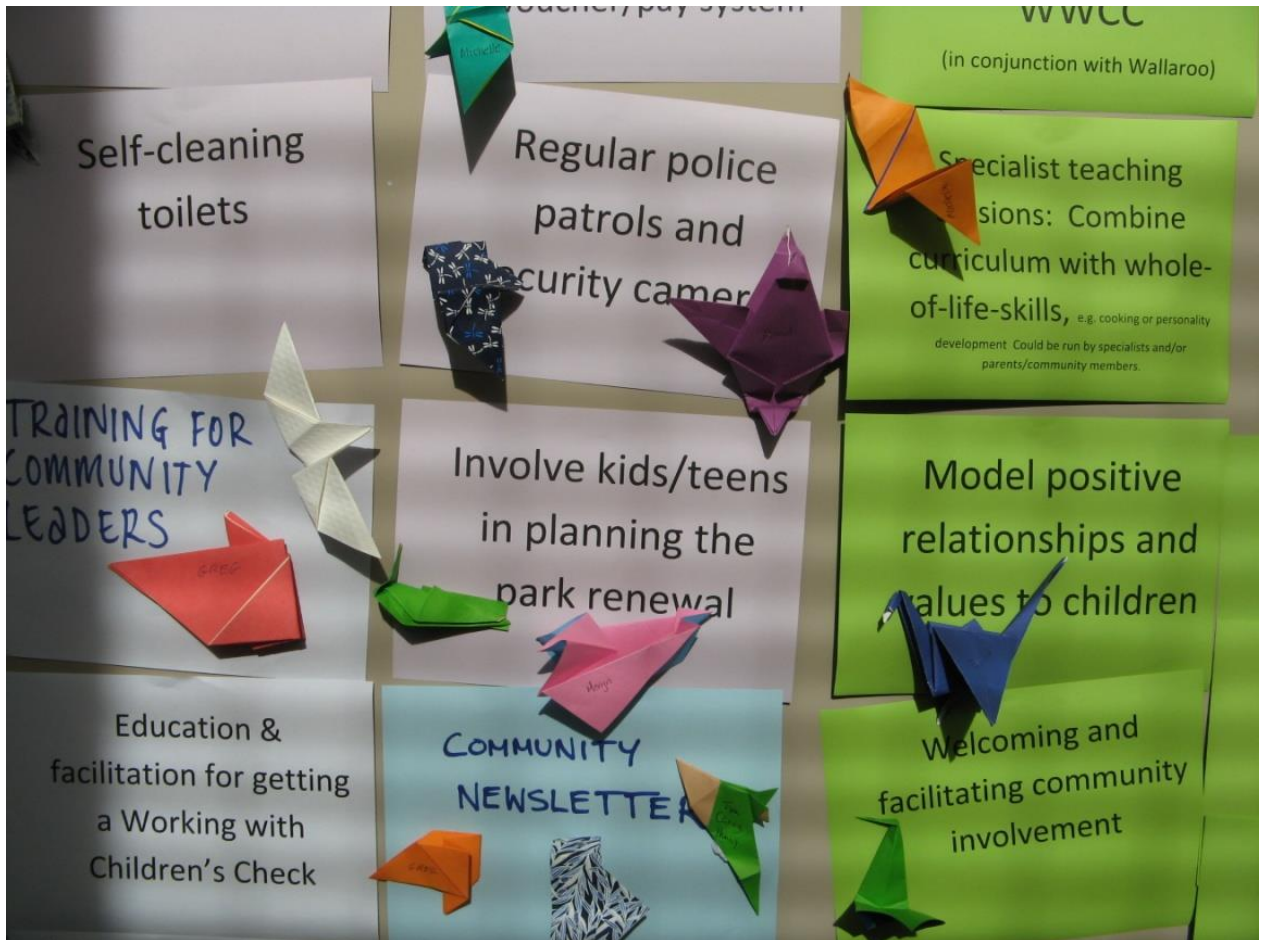


Image 10: Commitment birds

Following this activity, discussion was much more congenial and productive. The participants spoke compellingly about the issues that were most crucial to them and why, and the guests asked questions, provided insight into process where they could, and made some specific and tangible commitments to supporting the plan.

While the meeting resulted in specific commitments by the invited guests, the more astounding outcome was to see the fierce commitment of the participants themselves to ensure the plan was viable. At one point the local Councillor said that the Shire Council had trouble servicing the community because there is no established community group. One of the participants immediately responded, "That's us – we're that group. We meet every Wednesday morning right here in this room." Following the meeting one of the participants accompanied the Councillor to recruit more members for the community group. They removed the plan from the wall and took it with them, so that new members would know what the group's goals were. The participants also discussed specific plans for using the school as a way to galvanise more community members into action – through, for example, establishing a free family movie night which would serve to increase social ties and trust.

It was at this point that the group ceased to be research participants and self-identified as a community action group. While they dissipated quickly after the first two workshops, they lingered for almost an hour after the third one, discussing and planning. One conversation centred on their desire to change the name of the community; to paraphrase: "It's important we get a new name, now that there are so many positive changes taking place. This community is like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly – and when that happens, the name changes too." This quote powerfully reveals the strong sense of agency and hope which the group had at the conclusion of the research.

The following chapter discusses the outcomes and learning points from the pilot. These are organised into participant outcomes – considering both the vision and plan as well as the broader goal of empowerment; findings from the process; and policy implications.

8. Outcomes

Because of the nature of this research, there are layers of outcomes which should be considered separately.

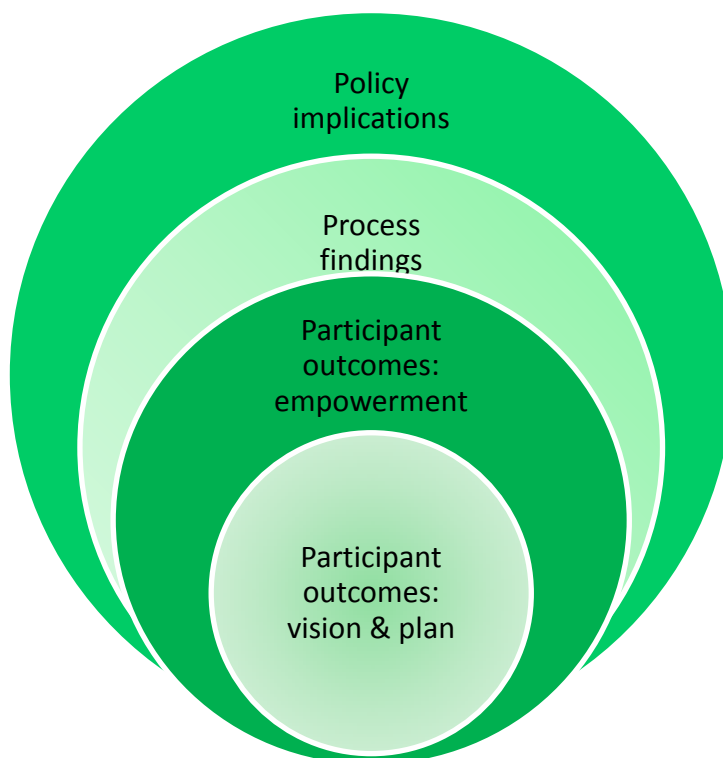


Figure 2: Outcome layers

8.1 Participant outcomes: vision and plan

The participants' vision and plan were deemed by them to be comprehensive, motivating, thoughtful, relevant, and realistic. They indicated surprise at the depth of the outcomes, pride in their work, and a desire to share it with others.

The outputs from the workshops can be found in the appendices. Findings of note include:

1. All participants identified a **love of learning in their children**. When identifying the skills, abilities and interests of the children, the top ranked responses were:
 - Reading (12)
 - Playing outside/sports (12)
 - Music/singing (10)

- Art/painting/drawing (9)
- Maths/numbers (5)
- School/studying (5)

2. Categorising and naming the vision components was deliberate and thoughtful (see Figure 3). The participants felt strongly that there was a relationship between the identified categories. *If* children have active fun in their childhood, have meaningful extended learning opportunities, experience equality, and have people modeling guided behaviours, they would *then* develop the life skills necessary to succeed in any way which the child chose to define success. In other words, **they envision an integrated, holistic environment that is self-reinforcing and nurturing to their children’s holistic development.**

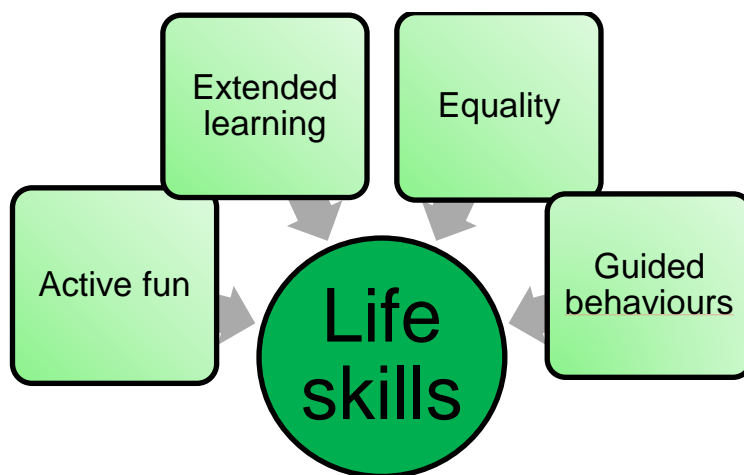


Figure 3: Vision categories and relationships

3. Participants also noted that **the vision is applicable to all children.** These inputs allow a child to thrive in childhood and prepare them for whatever life path they choose to pursue into adulthood. It is a practical, robust vision.
4. **The plan requires collaboration.** Although the actions they identified are not an over-reach, they understood that meaningful change was not going to happen if they chose to work alone. It was this insight that prompted them to share their vision and plan more widely, and also instigated many lengthy conversations around how to recruit more parents to their community action group.

Specifically, in terms of movement on the plan, there are already a range of actions that have been taken or are taking place as a result of this process. As already stated, the research sits within a supportive environment and therefore these activities, while drawing directly from the plan, reflect a number of actors. Some activities have been implemented directly by the research participants, while others have been carried by the Resident’s

Action Group, the school, the Community House, the Council, or other community members. It is reflective of collective impact. To date the following actions – all directly from their plan – are either in process or completed:

- a. Several of the research participants have joined the Westpark Resident's Group.
- b. One of the research participants was alerted to Westpark's AEDI rating (through a connection external to Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service and external to this research project in particular). She organised for a local community member to present information on the AEDI to the Resident's Group, and as a result the group has formed a sub-committee that is looking specifically at Westpark's AEDI rating and considering ways to raise it.
- c. The Principal organised a Reading for Life program, which trains adult volunteers to provide 15 weeks of reading and literacy coaching in the school. In the year prior to the research project, he had one parent volunteer for this program. After the research project, he had eight volunteers – and seven had participated in the research.
- d. In response to their advocacy session, the DHS representative who attended has secured a grant to pay for an upgrade to the park located at the centre of the community. This was a cornerstone of their action plan. They are now advising on the upgrade process.
- e. Another item on their action plan is to promote healthy eating through a school program. Wallaroo Community House was running a small healthy cooking program called Kids in the Kitchen. After the research project, the numbers of children participating increased so dramatically that they moved the program to the school, where the facilities could handle the numbers more easily.
- f. The participants talked passionately about the stigma attached to the name Westpark; they felt a name change would reflect the positive changes in the community. The name of the school was changed a few months later, to Wallaroo Primary School. At the time of writing this report, the Resident's Action Group has received approval to change the name of the community as well – also to Wallaroo.
- g. As per the plan, a Parents Group now meets fortnightly, supported by the school chaplain. A dozen parents attended the first meeting at the start of the school year.
- h. The participants wanted to start movie nights at the school, to help parents get to know each other in a low-risk environment; their ultimate goal was to get more community support for their plan. This has also been implemented, with a turnout of over 40 children, plus parents. This will become an annual event.
- i. Community participation and support for the school has also increased. This includes individuals who assist with the gardening and cooking groups, mentoring, caring for the school's chickens, assisting with the school's breakfast program, and also practical supports for individual students. The school is also increasing ties with the local Shire Councillor.
- j. A community newsletter was started by the participants, and is now being put out by the Community House. They are also discussing other ways to keep the community connected and informed (for example, using Facebook).

- k. An end-of-year barbeque was organised by the Resident's Action Group and supported by the Shire, the local Rotary Club, and the Community House. Flyers were printed up and delivered to all Westpark houses door-to-door. Approximately 120 people attended the event. This time was deliberately used to increase community connections, particularly for families with low engagement.

At the heart of all of this activity is a group of mothers who bonded through the research project. They have developed a strong support network, which also includes other parents who did not participate in the research. This group provides social support through informal shared child care and socialisation opportunities.

8.2 Participant outcomes: empowerment

At the conclusion of the third workshop, participants demonstrated a strong sense of ownership and empowerment. This was embodied in their language use, their comfort and fluency in sharing their outcomes with the invited guests, their eagerness to establish or join a community group, and their strong sense of responsibility for seeing the plan implemented.

The participants finished the third workshop full of energy, purpose, and dedication to implementing their plan. It was expected it would take time for them to find ways to move the plan forward within the context of their daily lives, with the hope that their sense of agency and expectation would infect their networks. They have identified venues for effecting change, both within existing structures as well as new ones that are in the process of being established. They have also identified some very specific ways to share their vision and plan, and to garner support for it, and have made extraordinary progress. These are strong indications of an increased sense of efficacy.

Another indicator of empowerment is to listen to what the participants have to say about the research experience. For example:

"I can't believe I am here! This is really out of my comfort zone, but it's okay. My husband can't believe I'm coming, my kids can't believe I am coming, but it's fantastic." (Shared during workshop 2. This participant has since joined the Resident's Group.)

And the following quotes are from two participants who were interviewed three months after the conclusion of the research by a third party:

"I thought that [the workshops] were very productive. We came up with some good ideas and because of that the Westpark Resident's Action Group has now been formed, and I feel that changes are starting to happen. I feel that we're actually being listened to. And I think a lot of that started with the Uplift research project."

“I really do believe [the Council] are listening. [Our Councillor] has been heavily involved, he’s been attending the meetings, and yes I do feel that he is starting to listen to us... They are starting to understand that we really do want this place more liveable, more accessible for the young ones to have things to do.”

“With the Uplift program, there were three meetings that we went to, and just about everyone who was involved with that group, we said oh we should meet regularly because everything that we’ve talked about here, all these really good ideas for Westpark, and how to change the community, we didn’t want to waste those ideas. So that’s why we started the resident’s group.”

“A lot of the parents [with children at the school] don’t really want to get involved with the primary school stuff. I was one of those parents a few years ago, but the Uplift program... I suppose it was a change in my life that I had to open myself up to other things and keep my mind busy [in the wake of a personal tragedy]. But we also want to have a welcoming environment for parents, like a non-judgemental thing, regardless of their walk in life, to just try and make them feel it’s okay, people who are in the group are no better than someone who has never had anything to do with it, you know?”

In sum, there are strong indications that the workshops achieved the goal of facilitating empowerment for the workshop participants. Due to the supportive environment within which this research took place, this sense of empowerment has both grown and spread to individuals who were not involved in the research.

8.3 Process findings

The workshops met and exceeded all pre-identified goals. The methodology therefore shows great promise as a tool for initiating or enhancing parental engagement in child/ren’s learning. Critical supports of particular note include the role the antecedents and support structures played, and the philosophical stance of the research team. Both inputs are important in understanding the success of this pilot.

Antecedents: In this particular community, years of previous work had already identified the need for a residents’ group. The school, community groups and government representatives were already wanting to hear from this group; therefore, there was already a system or structure for them to step into, which filled a void. This may not be true for all groups – in fact, it is probably the exception rather than the norm. While the process is important, equally important is the encompassing environment. The process does not stand alone.

Process: The principles that undergirded the process emphasise an empowering methodology, which sought to engage parents in a respectful manner on a topic in

which they have expertise – their children. The three components to the workshops – visioning, planning and advocating – reflect a deliberate movement from consolidated thinking to measurable indicators to taking action. The outcomes of the process remain in the community and are being used by them.

Support structure: This plan was not developed in a vacuum; a range of community groups support the group and its plan. Because the plan includes action items for families, the school and the community, it is not possible for the group to implement their plan without wider involvement. The third workshop made initial contact with some key stakeholders, but it has been helpful for the group to have a mentor/facilitator who assists them with keeping up the right contacts and learning the most effective ways to action their agenda. The Manager of the Wallaroo Community House has been the primary mentor/facilitator for this group.

What we don't know: There are also some very important unanswered questions:

- Would this process work with CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) families?
- Would this process work with more marginalised, low-functioning individuals?
- Could vision and plan outcomes be aggregated up in a meaningful way, providing a list of indicators that could be used across communities?
- Could the outcomes be useful to communities across time for planning and measuring progress?

8.4 Policy implications

As has already been established, there is great interest across the spectrum in increasing parent engagement in schools. The indications from this small pilot show that:

1. Parent engagement can be encouraged on a small budget and a small time commitment, even in communities where engagement is not the norm.
2. The process is vitally important. The aspects of this process that made it particularly successful were:
 - a. A holistic view of children's learning environment, which includes not only the school but also home life and the community.
 - b. An empowering methodology, in which parents are not told what options are available to them to 'help the school out,' but rather parents are identifying what needs to change in the child's environment and who needs to change it.
 - c. A methodical sequence of visioning, planning and enacting/advocating, allowing the group to move from consolidated thinking to action.
 - d. A respectful dialogue and working partnership with other stakeholders across the community.
 - e. An inclusive approach that allows others to join in at any time.

3. It may be possible to replicate this process in a way that aggregates indicators up, so that effective engagement can be measured across multiple communities. This aspect of the model still requires testing.
4. This process may not be the right one for some groups. For example, parents who face barriers to participation such as disability, mental illness or addiction; newly-arrived parents who may have little or no English or don't yet have context for the Australian school system; parents who are absent due to work or other commitments. These groups need specific supports in order to effectively engage with their children's learning. Without further piloting it is difficult to know whether this process could be useful or adapted in some way to serve the needs of these groups. Additionally, it is unknown how this process would work in communities where parent engagement is across a spectrum of involvement.
5. The most critical policy implication is the role that is expected from parents in the school. Parents care passionately about their children's learning, but that passion may not be ignited when the opportunities to engage are limited, or when their role construction is not challenged in a meaningful way. It can be difficult for institutions to engage parents in this way, because it may challenge their role construction as well. Warren, et al (2009) address this directly in their research, which looked specifically at parental engagement in low-income neighbourhoods:

“When parents emerge as leaders, their roles change. Rather than sit at workshops as passive recipients of knowledge and communication from the school, they can begin to help set the agenda for educational change and program development. Rooted themselves in more extended parent and community networks, parent leaders can help shape initiatives that authentically reflect the values, concerns, and needs of students and their families...” (p. 2242)

Warren et al emphasise that building a mutually respectful relationship between teachers and marginalised parents is particularly difficult when there is a power imbalance. Teachers are well educated, and are functioning in their area of expertise, whereas parents from low SES may have fewer years of schooling, limited English, and uncertainty around pedagogical best practice. Additionally, teachers may have the mandate to engage with parents but are seldom provided with comprehensive guidance or strategies; consequently, they often name parent engagement as one of the most difficult aspects of their role. For example, a survey of U.S. teachers indicated they found engaging with parents effectively their biggest challenge – rated higher than maintaining discipline, preparing students for tests, or ensuring the classroom has enough resources. Teachers at low-income

schools were almost twice as likely to find engaging parents to be a challenge (Markow, D. & Martin, S., 2005).

6. This area may be the perfect space for schools and social service agencies to collaborate. As explained in point 5 above, schools and teachers often find it challenging to engage parents effectively – and low-income parents especially. Additionally, school representatives may come to the process with a preconceived, narrow notion of what parent engagement should look like. On the other hand, community service agencies tend to have knowledge on the complex challenges facing families, and have the skill set to engage effectively with them. Empowerment and self-efficacy sit at the heart of all interactions. This orientation may place social service agencies in the ideal position of assisting with this kind of exercise.

The following chapter provides a brief conclusion of this pilot, and the inspiring community that tested it.

9. Conclusion

At the heart of this research sits the story of a group of mothers and the community they and their children inhabit. It is a story that reveals the power of collective action, of self-advocacy, and of vision. In one way they are extraordinary. Their willingness to stretch beyond their comfort zones, to take on more projects and more work, and to strategically build support for their plan is both inspiring and humbling. But the power of their story also resides in their ordinariness; mothers who are doing their best to create a positive environment for their children – something all parents want.

It is the balance of extraordinariness and ordinariness which infuses this story with hope. This simple process, totalling less than ten hours, became a leverage point for community change that resulted in community members working collaboratively with government, schools and community service agencies, resulting in collective impact. Measurable progress has been made on virtually every component of their plan, resulting in steady and sustained community change.

The focus on community change was a surprise. Although Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service has a strong community development tradition, this project was specifically interested in parent involvement in children's learning as it is manifested in the school environment. The mothers approached 'learning' from a wider lens, and identified that the biggest potential threats to their children's holistic learning came from the wider community. This is where they have chosen to focus their efforts, although a by-product of their plan is a leap in school-based engagement as well. They are looking for individuals and organisations (including the school) to support them in constructing a healthy and nurturing environment for their children to live, learn and thrive. As always, we learn at least as much as we impart in these exchanges.

From a policy perspective, this pilot models one relatively simple, low-cost method of increasing parent engagement. Because it uses an empowerment framework, it is imperative that schools, community groups, and political bodies are prepared to share power and decision-making in a genuine and meaningful way. It would be unconscionable to use this kind of process but withhold the ability to influence and negotiate significant change.

It is hoped that this engagement process will be taken up, adapted, and used in a wide range of settings and that the learning from these events will be shared in order to strengthen practice. If the goal is lasting social change, it must start with honest dialogue and true empowerment.

References

- . (2013). *Hastings Neighbourhood Renewal, 2005 - 2013 Final Report*. Melbourne: Victoria State Government.
- Abbott-Chapman, J., Martin, K., Ollington, N., Venn, A., Dwyer, T. & Gall, S. (2013). The longitudinal association of childhood school engagement with adult educational and occupational achievement: findings from an Australian national study. *British Educational Research Journal*, 425 - 608.
- ACARA. (2013). *My School*. Retrieved January 22, 2014, from Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority: <http://www.myschool.edu.au/>
- AEDI. (2011). *Australia Early Development Index Community Profile: Mornington Peninsula*. Melbourne: Murdoch Children's Research Institute & The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne.
- AEDI. (2011). *Australian Early Development Index National Report 2009*. Melbourne: AEDI.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2012). *A picture of Australia's children 2012*. Canberra: AIHW.
- Baum, F. & Palmer, C. (2002). 'Opportunity structures': urban landscape, social capital and health promotion in Australia. *Health Promotion International*, 351 - 361.
- Baum, F.E., Bush, R. A., Modra, C. C., Murray, C. J., Cox, E. M., Alexander, K. M., & Potter, R. C. (2000). Epidemiology of participation: an Australian community study. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 414 - 423.
- Benhadya, E. B., Farrier, W. & Landvogt, K. (2010). *Sudanese scoping project: the needs of Sudanese refugees in the cities of Yarra and Brimbank*. Melbourne: Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service.
- Black, R. (2007). *Crossing the bridge: overcoming entrenched disadvantage through student-centred learning*. Melbourne: Education Foundation Australia.
- Black, R., Lemon, B., Walsh, L. L. (2010). *Literature review and background research for the National Collaboration Project: Extended Service School Model*. Melbourne: Foundation for Young Australians.
- Campbell, L., McGuire, M., & Stockley, C. (2012). *I just want to go to school: voices of young people experiencing educational disadvantage*. Melbourne: Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, Jesuit Social Services and McKillop Family Services.
- CCCH. (2013, September 4). *Linking Schools & Early Years*. Retrieved January 22, 2014, from The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, Centre for Community Child Health: http://www.rch.org.au/lsey/news_publications/Newsletters_Publications/
- Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE), University of Melbourne. (2008). *Participation and equity: a review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*. Deakin: Universities Australia.

- Chaskin, R. J. (2009). Building community capacity for children, youth and families. *Children Australia*, 31 - 40.
- Christakis, N. & Fowler, J. (2009). *Connected: The Amazing Power of Social Networks and how they Shape our Lives*. London: Harper Press.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, S95 - S120.
- DEECD. (2013). *Building Family Partnerships*. Retrieved February 4, 2013, from Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/partnerships/Pages/familypartnerbuild.aspx>
- DEECD. (2013, September 28). *Challenges to Successful Family Partnerships*. Retrieved December 9, 2013, from Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/partnerships/pages/familypartnerchallenges.aspx>
- DEECD. (2013, November 27). *Extended School Hubs*. Retrieved January 22, 2014, from Department of Education and Early Childhood Development:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/partnerships/pages/partnerhub.aspx>
- DEEWR. (2011). *Review of Funding for Schooling - Final Report*. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Government of Australia.
- DEEWR. (Year unknown). *Family-School Partnerships Framework*. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations, Government of Australia.
- Dixon, M. (2011). *Victoria as a learning community: extended special lecture - Melbourne Graduate School of Education*. Melbourne: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- Education and Training Committee, Parliament of Victoria. (2013, November 27). *Committees: Parliament of Victoria*. Retrieved February 4, 2014, from Parliament:
<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc/inquiries/article/2171>
- Education Services Australia, as the legal entity for the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA). (2011). Retrieved June 11, 2013, from The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership:
http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/_resources/AITSL_National_Professional_Standards_for_Teachers.pdf
- Emerson, L., Fear, J., Fox, S., and Sanders, E. (2012). *Parental engagement in learning and schooling: lessons from research*. Weston Creek: Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau.
- Epstein, J. L. (1987). Toward a Theory of Family-School Connections: Teacher Practices and Parent Involvement. In K. K.-X. Hurrelmann, *Social Intervention: Potential and Constraints* (pp. 121 - 136). Oxford: Walter de Gruyter.

- Fischer, M. J. & Kmec, J. A. (2004). Neighborhood Socioeconomic Conditions as Moderators of Family Resource Transmission: High School Completion among At-Risk Youth. *Sociological Perspectives*, 507 - 527.
- Galster, G. C. (2010). *The Mechanism(s) of Neighborhood Effects Theory, Evidence, and Policy Implications*. St Andrews: Paper presented at the ESRC Seminar, "Neighborhood Effects: Theory & Evidence.
- Harding, D., Gennetian, L., Winship, C., Sanbonmatsu, L., and Kling, J. (2011). Unpacking Neighborhood Influences on Education Outcomes: Setting the Stage for Future Research. In G. a. Duncan, *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances* (pp. 277 - 298). New York: Russell Sage.
- AEDI (Re-issue 2011). *National Report 2009*.
- Jensen, B. & Sonnemann, J. (2014). *Turning around schools: it can be done*. Melbourne: Grattan Institute.
- Johnson, Jr., O. (2008). Who Benefits from Concentrated Affluence? A Synthesis of Neighborhood Effects Considering Race, Gender and Education Outcomes. *Journal of Public Management & Social Policy*, 85 - 112.
- Jupp, D. & Ali, S.I. with contributions from Barahona, C. (2010). *Measuring Empowerment? Ask Them: quantifying qualitative outcomes from people's own analysis. Insights for results-based management from the experience of a social movement in Bangladesh*. Visby: SIDA.
- Kruger, T. (Unpublished). *Standpoint: seeing schooling from the perspective of the least advantaged. Exposure draft*. Melbourne: DEECD, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service, Victoria University.
- LeBon, G. & Boddy, J. (2010). Working with vulnerable primary school aged children and their families: a review of the Australian literature on key principles, issues, and community level approaches. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, 1:1, 53 - 73.
- Markow, D. & Martin, S. (2005). *the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, 2004 - 2005: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships*. New York: MetLife, Inc.
- MCETYA . (2008). Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. (p. 19). Melbourne: Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Government of Australia.
- Parliament of Victoria. (2014, January). *Inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools*. Retrieved January 21, 2014, from Parliament of Victoria: <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc/inquiries/article/2170>
- profile.id. (2011). *Welcome to Morning Peninsula Shire Community Profile*. Retrieved January 22, 2014, from Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas Community Profile: <http://profile.id.com.au/mornington-peninsula/seifa-disadvantage?es=2&WebID=150>
- Pyne, C. (2014, January 10). *Media Releases: Review of National Curriculum to put Students First*. Retrieved January 21, 2014, from Pyne Online:

<http://www.pyneonline.com.au/media/media-releases/review-of-national-curriculum-to-put-students-first>

- Ray-Greig, M. (2012). *St. Joseph's community development project evaluation report*. Melbourne: Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service.
- Sastry, N. & Pebley, A. R. (2010). Family and Neighborhood Sources of Socioeconomic Inequality in Children's Achievement. *Demography*, 777 - 800.
- Saunders, P. (2007). Towards new indicators of disadvantage project. *Social Exclusion in Australia (SPRC Newsletter)*, pp. 7 - 10.
- Vinson, T. (2007). *Dropping Off the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*. Richmond / Curtin: Jesuit Social Services / Catholic Social Services Australia.
- Warren, M. R., Hong, S., Rubin, C.L., & Uy, P.S. (2009). Beyond the bake sale: a community-based relational approach to parent engagement in schools. *Teachers College Record*, 2209 - 2254.
- Warren, M.R., Hong, S., Rubin, C.L., & Uly, P.S. (2009). Beyond the bake sale: a community-based relational approach to parent engagement in schools. *Teachers College Record*, 11:9, 2209 - 2254.
- Welfare, A. I. (2012). *Picture of Australia's children*. Canberra.
- Willms, J. (2003). *Student Engagement at School: A Sense of Belonging and Participation. Results from PISA 2000*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Appendix A: Recruitment brochure

What can I do to help my child enjoy learning?
How can the school and I partner to better support my child?

UPLIFT

Parents and schools supporting children's learning

You can expect...

- Three morning workshop sessions
- Conveniently held at Wallaroo Community Centre
- **Free** food will be provided
- **Free** childcare, provided on site
- **Free** gift card for Coles, Target or Kmart as a thank you for full participation
- Workshops are facilitated by Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service

Workshop dates are...

- Wednesday 8 May, 9:15 – 12
- Wednesday 15 May, 9:15 – 12
- Wednesday 22 May, 9:15 - 12

What is the time commitment?
The workshops are held over 3 consecutive Wednesday mornings, starting at 9:15 and running no later than 12 noon. Dates are 8, 15, and 22 May.

How can I get there?
Good news – the workshops are being held right next door to the school, at Wallaroo Community Centre!


I'd love to participate, but I have young children.
Free childcare will be provided. We'll also share some food.

What are the benefits to me?
Each parent who comes to all 3 workshops will receive a gift card. It is also an opportunity to have a positive influence on the school and contribute to research which will help other schools do a better job supporting parents. Finally, it should be fun! It's a great opportunity to connect with other parents.



Charity gives, justice changes.

Susan Maury, Researcher
117 Johnston Street
Collingwood, VIC 3066
03 8412 7312
s.maury@goodshepherd.org.au
www.goodshepherd.org.au



UPLIFT

YOU ARE INVITED TO SHARE YOUR VIEWS OF SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO LEARN

A PILOT STUDY BETWEEN GOOD SHEPHERD YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICE AND HASTINGS WESTPARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

April 2013



UPLIFT

What is it all about?

Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service wants to hear your views on how parents and schools can support children's learning. Sessions are being run so parents can discuss these issues with each other. The goals of the workshops are to:

- Identify what effective parent support of children's learning looks like to you;
- Discuss the current situation, identifying supports and blocks; and
- Develop a plan for the future.

The parents' discussion group will choose what information you wish to share with the school and how you give that information.

The information will be written up in a report, as a model for how parent groups can create their own plan for supporting their children's education in other schools. No information will be linked to an individual. This ensures individual confidentiality for each participant.

Questions?

Call, write, or speak to any of the people below.

Susan Maury, Researcher, Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service
Tel: 03 8412 7312
Email: s.maury@goodshepvic.org.au

Iain Ritchie, Wallaroo Program Manager (Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service Peninsula Liaison)
Tel: 03 5976 7666
Email: i.ritchie@goodshepvic.org.au

Mark Watters, Principal, Hastings Westpark Primary School (School Liaison)
Tel: 03 5979 2664
Email: watters.mark.m@edumail.vic.gov.au



How do I sign Up?

Return this form to the school to participate. We'll send a reminder home with your child prior to the first workshop.

Yes! I would like to participate in the workshop sessions.

Name: _____

Child's name and class: _____

Please arrange childcare for me. I have a child _____ years old.

I (or my child) have the following dietary requirements: _____

Appendix B: Informed Consent



“Uplift: Engaging Parents in Schools and Learning” PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service is conducting a series of 3 workshops with parents of children who are enrolled at Hastings Westpark Primary School. These workshops provide a place for parents to discuss:

- what good involvement with their child’s school and learning looks like to them (indicators of success);
- how the school community is doing compared to the indicators; and
- what actions the school community might take to improve parent involvement.

All participation is voluntary. You can stop participating at any time.

The outcomes from the workshop will be written up in a final report. No information will be linked to any individual. There will be no list of who participated. The report will be shared as a possible method for parent groups at other schools to use.

At the close of the research, the group may choose to continue building on the outcomes from the workshops.

The group will decide what information is shared with the school, and how. No school representatives will be at the workshops unless the group invites them.

We will send a copy of the final report to you if you would like one.

What you say will only be used for the research. The only time the researchers would share information is if someone is at risk of harm; in this instance we have a duty of care to follow that up, after we have talked to you about it first.

You are welcome to request a meeting to discuss any issue with which Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service can assist. If we can’t help, we will refer you to somewhere which can help.

If you have complaints, concerns, or questions, you are welcome to contact the researcher or the Manager of the Social Policy Research Unit at any time; contact information is:

Susan Maury - Researcher
Social Policy Research Unit
Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service
117 Johnston Street, Collingwood VIC 3066
Tel: 03 8412 7312 Mobile: 0417 460 080
Email: s.maury@goodshpvc.org.au

Kathy Landvogt – Manager
Social Policy Research Unit
Good Shepherd Youth & Family Service
117 Johnston Street, Collingwood VIC 3066
Tel: 03 8412 7323 Mobile: 0438 266 785
Email: k.landvogt@goodshpvc.org.au

Thank you for your participation!



Charity gives. Justice changes.

“PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS AND LEARNING” INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PLEASE READ AND FILL IN THE FOLLOWING FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH

I have read and understood the Information Sheet explaining the purpose of these workshops.

YES NO

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time.

YES NO

I agree that my participation in the workshop can be used for the Good Shepherd research.

YES NO

I understand that my name will not be used in any report and my personal information is confidential.

YES NO

I understand that the researcher has a duty of care obligation to follow up with information concerning harm or danger to any individual.

YES NO

I understand that I can contact the researcher or the Manager of the Social Policy & Research Unit at any time.

YES NO

NAME:.....

ADDRESS:.....

SIGNATURE: DATE:

I would like a copy of the final report sent to me, to the address listed above.

YES NO

Appendix C: Workshop 1 Running Sheet

Uplift

Engaging Parents in Schools and Learning Workshop 1

Running time: 9:15 – noon (2.5 hours)

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| 9:15 – 9:30 | <p>Welcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Settle children in childcare as needed – Breakfast around the table – Introductions and icebreaker |
| 9:30 – 9:50 | <p>Orientation and housekeeping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Explanation of research purpose – Explanation of process and commitment – Explanation of confidentiality – Explanation of outcomes and what can be done with them – Explanation of report, distribution, use – Explanation and signing of Informed Consent forms |
| 9:50 -10:20 | <p>Process information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brief information on Good Shepherd, including work on Peninsula and prior relevant research into school-related issues - Share values, reflection and discussion/comment (flipchart) - Goals for Workshop 1 (flipchart) - Process for Workshop 1 (flipchart) |
| 10:20 – 10:35 | Tea break |
| 10:35 – 11:45 | <p>Focus question: What do we want for our children during their school years?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explanation of tree imagery - Discussion of vision - Aspects of ideal future written on paper ('leaves) and posted to tree |
| 11:45 – 12:00 | <p>Review/reflection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did we do? - Is anything important missing? - Did anything about the morning surprise you? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did you like/dislike about the experience? - Are you thinking differently about anything? |
| | Reminder for next week – Workshop 2 & how we will use the indicators |

Resources needed

- Childcare – worker, snacks, games etc.
- Tables and chairs, enough room for participants
- Flip chart
- Blue tack
- Sticky wall
- Ball point pens
- Informed Consent forms
- Notebook for notetaking
- Outline of child
- 4" x 6" cards
- Coloured paper
- Scissors
- Post-it notes
- Pre-made drawing of large tree
- Marking pens of various colours
- Food, plates, napkins, drinks

Appendix D: Workshop 2 Running Sheet

Uplift

Engaging Parents in Schools and Learning Workshop 2

Running time: 9:15 – noon (2.5 hours)

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| 9:15 – 9:30 | <p>Welcome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Settle children in childcare as needed – Offer tea, coffee, snacks |
| 9:30 – 9:50 | <p>Getting started</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Introductions as needed – Icebreaker: “feeling – thinking – doing” – Review/reminder of values & norms (post) – Review of goals for workshop (on flip chart) |
| 9:50 -10:20 | <p>Review of Workshop 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hand out graph of child skills & abilities; review and comment - Review groupings; finalize and name categories - Reflection |
| 10:20 – 10:35 | Tea break |
| 10:35 – 11:45 | <p>Focus question: “What specific actions can families – schools – community – take to support this vision?”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Option 1: Three groups, each one makes a collaborative drawing for each group (families, schools, community) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Share back to plenary for discussion and addition/amendment of ideas. – Write up actions on flip chart – Discuss necessary connections between groups b. Option 2: Discuss in pairs for “families.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Share thoughts back to plenary – write up actions on flip chart |
| 11:45 – 12:00 | <p>Review/reflection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did we do? - Is anything important missing? - Did anything about the morning surprise you? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did you like/dislike about the experience? - Are you thinking differently about anything? |
| | <p>Next week – final workshop. How to best use the time? Who to invite to share workshop outcomes?</p> |

Resources needed

- Childcare – worker, snacks, games etc.
- Tables and chairs, enough room for participants
- Flip chart or giant sticky notes
- Blue tack
- Sticky wall
- 4" x 6" cards
- Marking pens of various colours
- Ball point pens
- Informed Consent forms
- Food, plates, napkins, drinks
- Norms flip chart (posted)
- Cards in groups (posted)
- Child skills and abilities, copied to share

Appendix E: Children's graph

Skills and abilities, and interests of our children



Also mentioned:

- Dolls
- Computers
- Dress-ups
- Her bunny
- Horse riding
- Gardening
- Organizing
- Textiles
- Animals
- Leadership
- Running
- Beading
- English
- Indonesian



- Outspoken
- Helpful
- Playtime

Appendix F: Categorical Vision

VISION: "What do we want for our children during their school years?"

| Life Skills | | Guided Behaviours | | Equality | | Extended Learning | Active Fun |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Individuality | Self worth | Keep trying | Opinions are valued | Enjoy school and want to go | Be liked | Reading at home | Enjoy school |
| Teamwork | Time management | Feel valued | Communication | To be happy | It's okay to say no | Reading with mum/dad | Freedom to express creativity |
| Friendship | Persistence | Proper guidance | Eat healthy | Feel a part of community | No bullies | After school programs | Good memories |
| Success (as they see it) | Self reliability | Respect | Freedom | Less pressure | Protection | Consistency with rewards | Have fun & enjoy childhood |
| Values | Inner strength | Enjoyment | Trust | To be listened to | Respect | Music classes | Have fun with friends |
| Be a respectful citizen | Care | Love | To have friends | Caring | Safety | Creative out-of-school programs | |
| Honesty | Tolerance | Happiness | Praise | It's okay to fail | | Encourage Walker Learning Program | |
| Self confidence | Fulfilment | Sharing | Encouragement | | | | |
| Physical strength | Life skills | Good manners | | | | | |

Appendix G: Categorised Plan

| What specific actions can the community take to support this vision? | | What specific actions can schools take to support this vision? | | What specific actions can families take to support this vision? | |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| Improve Westpark | Re-design park for visibility (by neighbouring houses) | Healthy eating initiatives | Ask Trish to start an informal P & C group | Become active on the school P&C. | Address destructive behaviour in the community, e.g. community watch |
| Rename Westpark ("Wallaroo"?) | | | Organise social events for parents (and kids), e.g., movie nights | | |
| Community clean-up – ongoing | "Tip days" for pick-up of hard rubbish – automatic, no voucher/pay system | Education and facilitation for Working With Children Check (in conjunction with Wallaroo) | Awards system revised to be more equitable | Organise walking school bus – can end at breakfast club. Use buddy system – older kids help look after younger ones. | Encouraging and enabling kids to be involved in positive activities, e.g., cadets |
| Self-cleaning toilets | Regular police patrols and security cameras | | | | |
| Training for community leaders | Involve kids/teens in planning the park renewal | Specialist teaching sessions: Combine curriculum with whole-of-life-skills, for example cooking or personality development. Could be run by specialists and/or parents/community members. | Identify and use parent skills at school | Families should be active in community – create opportunities, e.g., barbeque in the park 2 times/month. | Model and teach kids good values and behaviours, e.g., sharing, kindness, perseverance, etc. |
| Education & facilitation for getting a WWCC | Community newsletter | | Utilise community members more – e.g., male role models | | |
| Transport from Westpark to other services/opportunities | Identify and help people who need help upkeeping their garden, etc. (Could the men's shed do this?) | Model positive relationship and values to children | Navy involvement | | |
| Use Wallaroo as a hub – promote activities | Community garden – publicise and use | Welcoming and facilitating community involvement | Fundraising | | |
| Transport to cadets/scouts | Teen hang-out, perhaps at Wallaroo? (Shed 11- like) | | | | |