Case Study – Meadows Early Learning Centre

Background
The Meadows Early Learning Centre -Community Hub (MELC-Hub) is a Best Start partnership that began in 2004 with a focus on improving outcomes for children aged 0-8 years.

The community includes a large multi-cultural and refugee population, as well as many families who have experienced or are experiencing generational poverty.

Situation
Using Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) data indicated to MELC that up to 70% of children starting school were in the ‘at risk’ category and therefore vulnerable in terms of their learning. Early intervention was seen as the key to improvement. Working with schools so that they can operate as community hubs was identified as a way to address this issue. Schools as community hubs allow integrated services to be provided in a systemic manner and in a place that is accessible for all families. The MELC is one such hub.

What did you do?
The MELC provides a welcoming and inclusive setting for families through a flexible, open door policy and has recruited a number of family volunteers to assist with programs. The MELC introduced parent programs on how to teach your child at home, at playgroup, kinder and school. These included Parent-Child ‘Mother Goose’ program, literacy kits and toys and bilingual books for borrowing. Bilingual story tellers model the importance of home language and teachers show families how they can read to their child in an eight-week language enhancement program.

In addition, the number of playgroups that had been provided was expanded to enable access to culturally specific language groups. Many programs were started in the first language of the family, and English was gradually introduced to support the learning. Local schools hosted the playgroups and trained family members to be playgroup leaders. The emphasis in the playgroups and kindergartens was on how children learn and what families can do to support this development. Some families have undertaken certificate programs that can be counted towards further degree qualifications and are working in the local area.

Results
There have been increased numbers of children accessing playgroups and increased attendance at kindergartens since the MELC has operated as a community hub.

Families are active and ‘visible’ around the school, and there has been a recognisable increase in families helping other families as well as in the number of families volunteering in the school.

Note: see www.familyschool.org.au/news0905.htm for a further overview of the MELC.