11. Children and families not participating in early childhood services

A challenge for many early childhood services, schools and transition programs is engagement with children and families who do not participate in an early childhood services prior to starting at school.

In some communities, there are a large number of children and families who do not access either early childhood services or transition-to-school programs, and arrive at school on the first day straight from home. This can be for a variety of reasons, including families who have newly arrived in the local area. It is important to acknowledge as part of this process that there are many families across Victoria providing rich home-learning environments and opportunities for their children without attending early childhood services.

Tailoring transition-to-school programs to meet the needs of families who have not been in contact with early childhood education services may produce greater family involvement during their child’s first year of school. This, in turn, contributes to successful child outcomes, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Strategies for engaging children and families not engaged in early childhood services

Many of the strategies and approaches noted in the other sections of this kit remain relevant for connecting with families who do not readily access early childhood and school services. Ensuring that families can easily access information about local transition programs and opportunities to participate is central to their engagement.

Connections between families who do not readily engage with early childhood services and schools can only be built in the context of good communication and trusting and respectful relationships, where the strengths of individuals and families are recognised, despite challenges and other difficulties. This process relies on families identifying the need for them to be involved in providing a positive start to school for their child.
For children who do not have any or limited experience of early childhood services when they arrive at school, schools have a valuable role in linking families to relevant services. Children and families whose children have not attended an early childhood service with early childhood services will most commonly first become known when a child is enrolled at school. Therefore, it is appropriate for the school to develop processes and programs to support those children and families.

Resources provided in this kit can assist school staff to complete a Transition Learning and Development Statement for a child. Schools can assist families not participating in early childhood services to complete Part 1: the family of the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Please refer to the Guidelines for completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement provided in this kit, and the strategies outlined. This information can assist schools identify where transition programs can be developed for children and their families.

It is essential to work in close collaboration with a broad range of other support services already involved with the children and family, especially where they have already gained the trust and confidence of the families involved. Consequently, the involvement of local support, health and welfare agencies as collaborators in the design and development of transition programs and processes is most important. This helps prevent families, especially vulnerable ones, from slipping through the gap.

Early childhood services and schools may like to consider how to make:

- information easily accessible and relevant, focusing on the importance of early childhood to children's futures and why families should consider being involved in transition-to-school programs, which also lists available services and how these can help
- services and information more visible in the wider community
- services more accessible by investigating what helps families engage (for example, help with communication, timing of conversations to allow for working family demands, transport, etc.).