

EARLY YEARS TRANSITIONS: SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING VULNERABILITY



OVERVIEW

- Acknowledgement of Country
- Background - Transition Rapid Literature Review & Practice Review
- The Project
- Findings
- What We Have Learnt
- Guided Reflective Task
- Next Steps



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BACKGROUND

- Victoria's Education State —a state where everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, is offered the best chance to succeed.
- The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) Education Transitions report (2015).
- Around 1 in 5 children in Victoria are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains when they start school (AEDC 2015).
- Revision of Transition: A Positive Start to School Kit.
- 'Early Years Transitions: Support for Children and Families at Risk of Experiencing Vulnerability':
 - Rapid Literature Review (ACER and Brotherhood of St Laurence)
 - Practice Review (Deakin University)

CONSIDERATION FOR SUPPORTING EARLY YEARS TRANSITIONS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING VULNERABILITY

- Children can experience a range of different transitions.
- At the heart of transitions is the child surrounded by their family, community and professionals.
- Successful transitions = partnerships with families and professionals.
- Secure attachments with familiar adults and learning environments help children build a sense of belonging and provide a strong basis for children's wellbeing and resilience into the future.

EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES



DEFINITIONS



Brief discussion with the person next to you

Q: What is *your* working definition of children and families experiencing vulnerability?

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING VULNERABILITY

Department of Education and Training definition:

children vulnerable to child abuse, neglect and exclusion “if the capacity of parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long term development and wellbeing is limited.” This may include:

- those affected by trauma
- those known to Child Protection and Family Services
- children at risk of intergenerational poverty
- refugees
- children in out-of-home care

TRANSITION PRACTICE REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Mixed method, state-wide data collection, stakeholders:
professionals, educators, families:

- state-wide survey across DET Regions (N=309)
- focus groups – professionals (126 participants)
- focus groups – families (19 participants)

Findings from the Rapid Literature Review informed the Practice Review methodology and findings.

SURVEY – MAIN FINDINGS

83% reported that they changed their transition approach.

Non-negotiables for supporting children and families experiencing vulnerability:

- partnerships – working as a team around the child
- joint meetings prior to school year
- open, strength-based and non-judgemental relationships with families & children
- creating a welcoming environment
- flexible and inclusive approaches to transition
- skilled staff
- designated key worker connected to child/family

SURVEY – MAIN FINDINGS (cont.)

Useful training and resources identified.

Feedback processes and evidence of impact of programs varied.

Barriers to effective transitions for children and families experiencing vulnerability:

- family level barriers
- lack of understanding, skills and/or time to make connections
- lack of effective transition approaches

SURVEY REPOSSES - professionals

“There is no blanket approach to supporting families as their needs are all so unique.”

Early Years Professional

“Each child with a vulnerability deserves individually tailored and resourced support to ensure the best outcome for their needs.”

Early Years Professional

FOCUS GROUPS MAIN FINDINGS – Professionals

The importance of collaborative transdisciplinary networks:

- taking a community-wide approach to transition involving skilled and committed people
- shared philosophy, language, strategies

Services sharing knowledge:

- effective coordinated service system

FOCUS GROUPS MAIN FINDINGS – Professionals (cont.)

- Supported early years transitions:
 - acknowledging families' diverse backgrounds
 - working 'with' families
 - programs, practices and initiatives
 - *reciprocal visiting & school involvement*
 - *tailoring approaches for families experiencing vulnerability*
 - *supported transitions for refugee children & their families*
- Importance of professional learning.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

“Our biggest (early years) transition is from those families who do not know anything about Australia, the community.

We encourage the families to ‘just knock at the door’ and knowing that there’s no wrong door they can enter. So that’s our policy, ‘no wrong door’ policy, whatever they need we try to do and accommodate.”

Integrated Services Worker



FOCUS GROUP MAIN FINDINGS – Families

The importance of a welcoming & responsive environment.

Acknowledging diverse family backgrounds & experiences.

Additional supports for families experiencing vulnerability making transitions.

Focus for improvement:

- provide better access and pathways to services and professionals for additional support
- actively assist families to access information
- actively promote multiculturalism and inclusivity

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT

The importance of collaborative networks.

Tailoring transition practices and approaches to the uniqueness and diversity of each family.

Variance of available resources to support transitions:

- personnel
- time
- teaching and learning resources
- information and support for families
- funding

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT (Cont.)

Partnerships with families:

- establishing connections with families and building trusting relationships
- working *with* families
- having a designated key worker
- diversity is understood, acknowledged and respected

Building professional knowledge, skills and attitudes.

GUIDED REFLECTIVE TASK



Scenario 1

Transitioning to Kindergarten

A refugee family from Sudan has recently arrived in Melbourne and would like to enrol their 4 year old twins in your kindergarten program at the start of Term 3.

The children have experienced trauma during times of conflict and do not speak English.

How would you support the children and family with their transition?

Reflection – small group discussion

- i. What reflective practice questions should you be asking?
- ii. Where would you find out more information?
- iii. Who could/should you be speaking with?

NEXT STEPS

- Reports are publically available.
www.education.vic.gov.au/transitiontoschool
- Strengthening of the Transition to School Kit and statewide PL.
- Exploration of options outlined in the reports, including:
 - professional learning and capacity building for ECEC professionals and school teachers
 - development of tools/resources to support professionals to evaluate the effectiveness of transition programs.

Any Questions?

