

# Partnerships through Literacy

A preliminary report on the evaluation of Early Words



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Prepared for Childrenfirst Inc.

By The Family Action Centre  
The University of Newcastle

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research and practice into improving the health and wellbeing of families and communities has increasingly recognised the importance of early intervention and prevention, with policy responses increasingly focussing on the early years and influenced by ecological models of development that recognise the need for 'whole-of-community' approach. This is demonstrated in the Australian context through Commonwealth and (NSW) State Government initiatives such as *Communities for Children*, and *Families NSW*. In the context of such responses, early intervention programs can be broadly understood to occur within a cycle of intervention embracing such areas as learning, health and care that are both child and parent/family focussed.

The development of Early Words (EW) represents an important example of the nexus between local, community-led responses to early intervention, and national and international evidence-based research and practice in relation to early learning and literacy. This is illustrated in the development of the content of the EW resources which sought to build on 'what works' in the national and international experience whilst enabling sufficient flexibility in exploring the 'local' context – particularly in relation to the target populations of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal families and existing service networks in the program area. The result has been the production of twenty (20) early literacy resources, many of which have been translated into the nine (9) community languages identified for the target population and an additional 'cultural' translation of the resources for Aboriginal families, and the engagement of some eighty (80) partner groups from across the health, libraries, education, early childhood education services sectors in the distribution of this resource.

Consistent with models of service delivery that emphasise collaboration and partnership models, the development of relationships between children, families, and services providers to promote the benefits of early learning and literacy is central to the Early Words initiative (DoCS 2005). The findings of this research suggests some key conditions to support the realisation of successful partnerships, with the alignment of practice goals and focus identified as a key enabler to collaboration.

The utilisation of universal points of access, such as health service, provided increased opportunities for promoting early learning and literacy in the context of broader child development (i.e. child health), and the dissemination of resources, such as the DVD and tip-sheets developed under the auspices of Early Words, to parents and families accessing these services. The engagement of such providers was critical to increasing opportunities for families not already accessing early literacy programs including those that may be defined as 'hard to reach' such as those from the CALD and Aboriginal population.

The provision of information and relevant research and practice resources has been a defining feature of the engagement with service partners and reflects the emphasis on evidence-based practice and research which underpins Early Words. Findings from this research highlight the informal and formal professional development opportunities auspiced through Early Words as a key strength of the program. Further findings suggest that the active engagement of service partners has been supported through the facilitation of strategic linkages with early intervention service providers and practitioners through peak bodies and professional networks, such as *Playgroups NSW* and *Children's Librarians of Western Sydney (CLAWS)*.

Such learning highlights the potential opportunities for engagement of non- early education and learning providers, such as allied partners in health and medical services, in ongoing efforts to facilitate a 'whole of community' response to early literacy, a key outcome of the Project.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the recommendation of this evaluation that further consideration is given to:

- The review of the current terms of reference for the Project advisory groups, including reference groups. It is suggested that such a review be undertaken in view of the current status of the Project and focus on strategic and operational issues in relation to the following priority response areas:
  - Monitoring and evaluation of the Project
  - Client relationship management
  - Sustainability

It is suggested that provision be made within the terms of reference in relation to flexibility in membership or composition, to strengthen Project linkages within representative across partner organisations and reflect the current phase in the Project lifecycle and corresponding shifts in demand for appropriate skills/experience to support this process.

It is further suggested that the feasibility of following a cohort and use of control group be undertaken in any future monitoring and evaluation of the Project.

- A review of current resource requirements, including staffing and budget allocation, to support the next phase of the Project. It is envisaged that a preliminary review be undertaken in the immediate term in view of the aforementioned recommendations of this report. It is further recommended that application for additional, discretionary funding by the funding body be sought to support this process in view of existing resource constraints on the Project.
- Explore opportunities to utilise information and communications technologies, including existing online resources (i.e. web), to support project partners in relation to areas such as monitoring & reporting (online reporting; e-survey; mobile scanning devices), and professional development (webinars, online discussion forums)

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

EW	Early Words
BHHP	Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta
DoCS	NSW Department of Community Services
EI	early intervention
EIP	early intervention programs
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
C4C	Communities for Children
CHC	Community Health Centre(s)
CLAWS	Children's Librarians of Western Sydney
FDC	Family Day Care centres(s)
FNSW	Families NSW
KELM	Koori Early Literacy Management
LDC	Long Day Care centre(s)
LGA	Local Government Area
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
SACC	Schools as Community Centres

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In particular, the Evaluation team acknowledges the support of EW personnel Sue Pearce and Nancy Xuereb, who have assisted in the timely facilitation of data collection for the evaluation.

# TABLES OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Recommendations	ii
Glossary of Terms and Acknowledgments	ii
<b>Chapter One</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION &amp; OVERVIEW</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 The Project	
1.2 The Policy Context	
<b>Chapter Two</b>	
<b>THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 The Evaluation of Early Childhood Programs	
2.2 Scope of the Evaluation	
2.2.1 Project Management	
2.2.2 Timeframe	
2.2.3 Data Management	
<b>Chapter Three</b>	
<b>REPORT ON KEY OUTPUTS</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 What Did We Do?	
3.2 How Did We Do It?	
3.3 Is Anyone Better Off?	
<b>Chapter Four</b>	
<b>THE PARTNERSHIP STORY</b>	<b>17</b>
4.1 Overview of the Literature	
4.2 Overview of Key Partnerships	
4.2.1 Libraries	
4.2.2 Health	
4.2.3 Migrant Resource Centres	
4.2.4 Other Partners	
<b>Chapter Five</b>	
<b>FINDINGS &amp; CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>25</b>
5.1 Summary of Key Findings	
5.2 Findings by Key Partner Type	
5.2.1 Internal Partnerships	
5.2.2 External Partnerships	
5.3 General Issues	

## TABLES OF CONTENTS (continued)

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>30</b>
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**APPENDICES**

1. Relationship between program outcomes and performance measures by source data	32
2. Overview of selected ABS Census data (2006)	34
3. Data collection methods	36
4. Key findings by Results Based Accountability (RBA) performance measures	38
5. Performance in the context of population level data	46
6. Partnership case studies	53

**LIST OF FIGURES & TABLES****FIGURES**

1. Four types of relationships between organisations	17
2. Casual chain for relationship outcomes	
3. DVD Hospital Pack Distribution by Community Languages, Five Target LGA	
4. Tip Sheets distributed by Community Health by Community Language, Five Target LGA	

**TABLE**

1. Selected Characteristics: Distribution Of Early Words	11
2. Delivery, All Resources, by Partner Type	12
3. Early Literacy Questionnaire	13
4. Survey of Parents '0-3' resource	14
5. Survey of Service Partners	14
6. Selected Characteristics by Partner: Distribution of Early Words by Library Partners	18
7. Selected Characteristics for Library Partners	19
8. Distribution of 0-5 Year Population for 5 Target LGAs	53
9. Total Resources by LGA	
10. Early Words, Delivery Statistics by Resource Type, by LGA	
11. Counts of 0-5 Year Olds for Nine EW Community Languages	
12. Language Proficiency of Children Aged 0-5 Years by LGA	
13. Persons in Early Words Language Groups for 5 LGAs	
14. Proportion of Indigenous Population (0-2 years and 3-5 years) in each LGA	
15. Distribution of all Aboriginal Resources by LGA	

## 1. Introduction And Overview

The following seeks to report on the findings of the Evaluation of the Early Words initiative, an early literacy initiative funded under Families NSW and auspiced through Childrenfirst Inc.

The Family Action Centre at The University of Newcastle was engaged to undertake the evaluation of Early Words in September 2008. An overview of the evaluation framework and activities undertaken is included in the following section of this report.

### 1.1 The Project

Early Words is an early literacy project aimed at children aged 5 years and under, living in the five identified local government areas of western Sydney, NSW: Auburn, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Holroyd and Parramatta. Managed by not-for-profit community based early learning and child care provider, Childrenfirst, Early Words is funded under the *Families NSW* program.

One of the main outputs of Early Words has been the development of early literacy resources to increase access to early learning opportunities for children aged 0-5 years of age in the Project area. The resources build on national and international best-practice in early learning and literacy programs with interventions targeted to key stages in the developmental lifecycle and corresponding engagement with health and children and family service providers.

Consistent with the objectives of the Project and place-based interventions, particularly in relation to issues of accessibility, the developed resources reflect the literacy, language and cultural diversity of the target population for the project. As such, one of the key objectives of the Project has been the development of appropriate resources to increase access to early learning opportunities for CALD and Aboriginal families.

To date, all Early Words paper resources (i.e. tip-sheets, magnets), have been translated into nine (9) main community languages for the program area: Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Dari, Vietnamese, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu and Hindi. It is envisaged that translation of DVD resources will be forthcoming.

The development of culturally appropriate resources for Aboriginal families was a secondary component of Early Words and a key output and outcome of the Project resulting in a 'cultural translation' of resources into Aboriginal English. The engagement of key service providers and networks with responsibility for this cohort provided a critical link in the development and dissemination of the Aboriginal resource.

An overview of key project outcomes for the Project is included in this report in Appendix 1.

### The Target Population

The following should be read in the context of the target population for the Project, being all families with children aged 0-5 years in the five local government areas for the Project, with an additional focus on Aboriginal families and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families. In relation to the latter, the program also has as a specific focus emerging communities from Southern Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

With the exception of Baulkham Hills, key population characteristics for the area are higher than those in the general population both in relation to indicators of disadvantage and diversity. This includes:

- higher % population aged 0-5 year group
- higher rates of unemployment
- significantly higher proportion of people born overseas
- lower proportion of people who speak English at home

A summary of select demographic data for the target population is included as Appendix 2 of this report.

### 1.2 The Policy Context

As previously noted, the implementation of Early Words has occurred within the context of both Commonwealth and State Government early intervention initiatives targeting the early years, most notably through the Communities Government's Communities for Children (C4C) program and NSW Government's Families NSW initiative. Both adopt a place-based approach to early intervention and emphasise the partnerships in the delivery of early intervention programs.

The support for early learning during the program period, particularly in the Blacktown area, should be understood in the context of other early learning and care programs auspiced through both programs, including the support for early learning through Childrenfirst's C4C funded Communication and Language Assistance Program (i.e. Playtime! supported playgroup) and Mobile Book & Toy Library.

Other initiatives with a specific literacy focus, such as the 'Read Aloud' Summit (2005) and The Smith Family's 'Let's Read' initiative were identified as providing unrealised opportunities for collaboration in support of a whole of community response to early literacy within and beyond the project area<sup>1</sup>.

It is anticipated that emerging early literacy initiatives such as *Best Start*, provide an opportunity in the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the Project, specifically in relation to measuring its impact in relation to population level data.

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed further in this report in relation to the 'general' partnership story.

## 2. The Evaluation Framework

Following the engagement of the Centre to provide advice on the evaluation tools in August 2008, specifically survey instruments to be circulated to parents/families with the '3-5' DVD resource, the Centre was engaged to undertake an Evaluation of the Early Words Project. As well as identifying key learning from the Project to date, it was envisaged that the Evaluation would be useful in informing annual reporting requirements for the Project.

### 2.1 The Evaluation of Early Childhood Programs

The increased demand for evidence based policy and greater accountability in the public funding of social programs has led to an increase in the evaluation of early intervention programs. In spite of this trend, there has been a notable absence in the systematic review of such interventions and adequate resourcing of program evaluation where they exist. In spite of such challenges, US research (Shonkoff & Phillips 2004<sup>2</sup>) into the causal factors in early childhood development identifies four key components of effective early childhood programs:

- Individualised service delivery
- High quality program implementation
- Appropriate knowledge and skills of service providers, and
- Positive relationships between parents and professionals.

As Shonkoff (2004) notes in regard to the report: "the general question of whether early childhood programs can make a difference has been asked and answered in the affirmative a number of times. This generic query is no longer worthy of investigation. The central research priority for the early childhood field is to address more important sets of questions about how different types of interventions influence specific outcomes for children and families who face differential opportunities and vulnerabilities". (*From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine and of the National Academy of Sciences, in Shonkoff 2000, 2)

The consideration of such factors is reflected in the focus and analysis of primary- and secondary- data collection, respectively, undertaken as part of the evaluation of this program.

### 2.2 Scope of the Evaluation

The primary aim of the Evaluation of Early Words ('the Project') was to examine its impact on parent and community stakeholders in promoting the benefits of early literacy for children aged 0-2 years.

Consistent with a typical Impact approach to evaluation of pilot programs (Owen 2005), the Evaluation was focussed on both the implementation (process) and outcomes of the Project.

As per the agreed Evaluation Plan for the Project, the key objectives of the Evaluation were to:

- Identify and engage key family and community stakeholders who have utilised resources developed under the Early Words initiatives
- Establish the extent of the take-up of Early Words resources (for 0-2 year olds) among family and community stakeholders in the program area, particularly among CALD and ATSI families
- Explore the experience of key family and community stakeholders in their engagement with the Early Words initiative, particularly in relation to their use of program resources, and understanding and value of these resources, in supporting early literacy requirements.

The development of culturally and linguistically appropriate resources to engage the target CALD and Aboriginal populations has been one of the primary outputs of the Project. Whilst these resources have primarily been adapted from the universal (i.e. English language) version, the development of an Aboriginal resource has been a significant component of the Early Words 'story'. As such, the Evaluation has sought to engage key partners involved in the development of this resource.

Given the short timeframe for the Evaluation<sup>3</sup>, it was envisaged that the primary focus would be on those services or partner organisations participating in the initiative (i.e. 'community stakeholders'). (This approach was also predicated on potential constraints on the availability of 'family' data within the timeframe for the evaluation. This is

<sup>2</sup> *From neurons to neighbourhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Report by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, published as Shonkoff, J.P and Phillips, .A (2000) Washington DC, National Academy Press). Such research has influenced research and local policy interventions with contributing author Debroah Phillips the keynote speaker at the 2007 Australian Research Alliance into Children and Youth (ARACY) which proceeded the National Communities for Children Conference.

<sup>3</sup> The original Evaluation Plan was based on a two month period of August-September 2008.

discussed in more detail in relation to the *limitations of the evaluation*). As such, this report should be read in the context of reporting the above objectives in relation to community stakeholders or 'service partners' engaged in the *planning, development and delivery* of the EW resource.

### 2.2.1 Project Management

The Evaluation was undertaken by The Family Action Centre at The University of Newcastle. The value of external evaluators in relation to the perceived independence and corresponding perception of integrity is seen as a key strength on the successful negotiation of relationships required in the evaluation process (Owen 2006).

In view of the time limitations for the evaluation, the selection of an evaluation team versus a single evaluator was identified as essential to support the triangulation of data in addition to the utilisation of multiple methods and sources (Denzin 1978; Patton 1999). The team, which comprised Centre researchers' Maree Collins, Anthea Bill, and Gaye Sheather, has considerable experience of practice, research and evaluation in organisational and community-based settings.

### 2.2.2 Timeframe

Further to the initial brief for the Evaluation. Whilst the Evaluation was initially envisaged as a two month project commencing September 2008, the timeline for completion of deliverables was extended to November 2008 to enable both the facilitation and inclusion of data on parents'/families and their use of the EW resources, and accommodate the availability of key informants from service partner organisations to participate in interviews and focus groups.

### 2.2.3 Data Management

The Evaluation has employed a mixed method approach utilising both qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary data sources in its data collection and reporting. An overview of data collection tools utilised in the Evaluation is included is available in Appendix 3 of this document.

#### *Primary Data*

Where possible, interviews were sought with key internal and external informants. This included: interviews with key informants within the Early Words project team and partner organisations; focus group discussions with the project team and KELM reference group; e- and postal survey of partner organisations; a telephone survey of Aboriginal families

Due to scheduling and accessibility constraints, the Evaluation has not included a universal survey of parents in receipt of Early Words resources. However, one of the first tasks of the Evaluation was to provide preliminary advice on a survey to parents to be distributed with the 3-5 year DVD resource in October 2008.

In addition to key informant interviews within Childrenfirst and partner organisations, focus groups were held with the Early Words Project Team and the KELM Reference Group.

#### *Review of Secondary Data*

As well as providing necessary background information on the Project, including the identification of key informants for the Evaluation, the secondary data provided a contemporary account of the development of the initiative that was useful to contextualise and supplement qualitative, primary data in relation to the process aspect of the Evaluation.

The review of secondary data included the analysis of: internal notes/minutes of meetings, reports to service partners, completed evaluation undertaken as part of Early Words initiated activities, and internal reports on web access and distribution/delivery.

### 2.2.4 Ethics and Confidentiality

Consistent with evaluation enquiry as a form of applied social research (Owen 2006), the evaluation is underpinned by the guiding ethical principles and codes of practice of the National Medical and Research Council (NHMRC) and Australasian Evaluation Society (AES).

Consistent with such guidelines, participation in the primary data collection for the Evaluation was voluntary with all material collected from participants confidential and stored in a secure place with access to this information restricted to the researchers employed on this project. The University of Newcastle will retain a copy of all material collected by the researchers for this project, including a verified copy of any de-identified data provided by the Client for a period of up to five years from the completion date of the project.

Any written record of interviews or any other discussions with participants that occurred as part of the Evaluation is available to the respective participant on request. No personal details or any other information that could potentially

identify participants have been included in any published material or report relating to this project unless previously agreed to by the participant(s).

### **2.2.5 Limitations of the Evaluation**

The findings of this Evaluation should be considered in the context of the timeframe for evaluation and typical issues in relation to data quality and reliability in the use of secondary and tertiary data sources.

As previously noted, the focus on *service* rather than *family* data in primary data collection was prioritised in response to the challenges of access and reliability, with access to families and related data dependent on the timely engagement of service partners.

#### ***Reliability of Data***

Whilst the issues of reliability in the use of secondary sources vary according to the type of source (i.e. public versus private organisations), Scott (1990, 6, in Bryman 2004, 381) suggests four criteria for assessing the quality of the data/information contained in these sources: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning.

Consistent with the use of qualitative research methods in evaluation, the Evaluation has not sought to verify and supplement data contained in the secondary sources by the collection of primary data through methods such as interviews, surveys and focus groups.

It is anticipated that in view of more streamlined reporting systems implemented in 2008 (see attached), including clearer guidelines for reporting in the procedures manual for partner organisations, and universal survey of families to accompany the distribution of the 3-5 year DVD, such data will be available to report in future.

### 3. Report On Key Outputs

The following seeks to report on key outputs/indicators and ‘story behind the data’ for EW in the context of identified outcomes for the project and selected population statistics. To this purpose, the structure of this section of the report adopts elements of the Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework which has been adopted as the reporting framework for the project.

#### 3.1 What did we do?

The development of Early Words (EW) represents an important example of the nexus between local, community-led responses to early intervention, and national and international evidence-based research and practice in relation to early learning and literacy. This is illustrated in the development of the content of the EW resources which sought to build on ‘what works’ in the national and international experience whilst enabling sufficient flexibility in exploring the ‘local’ context – particularly in relation to the target populations of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal families and existing service networks in the Project area. The result has been the production of twenty (20) early literacy resources, many of which have been translated into the nine (9) community languages identified for the target population and an additional ‘cultural’ translation of the resources for Aboriginal families, and the engagement of over eighty (80) partners from across the health, libraries, education, early childhood education services sectors in the distribution of these resources.

##### 3.1.1 Facilitating access through Design, Production and Development

As noted, the project drew on national and international best practice in relation to the design and delivery of early literacy programs and the resources which support such initiatives. In addition to the employment of early childhood and allied health practitioners in the development of resource content, the Project also employed a graphic designer to develop a visual identity for the project for the purposes of enhancing the accessibility of EW resources. The latter was particularly critical given the diversity of the target populations in terms of literacy, culture and language, and need to appeal to such a diverse audience. The DVD format was identified on the basis of its universal but user friendly format and opportunities for inclusion of additional information within this medium.

The utilisation of local families in the visual component of the DVD resource was aimed at facilitating access within the target population by ensuring a local identity and therefore sense of ownership in an inherently universal resource, whilst also adopting a strengths perspective in recognising and celebrating examples of positive parenting from across the local community.

##### 3.1.2 Dissemination of the Resource

A summary of selected characteristics is included in this report as Table 1 (below). A more detailed report on key statistics for the project in the context of identified outcomes and indicators is included as Appendix 4 of this report.

Table 2 illustrates that the strength of Early Words distribution rests on three key providers, all of which are in the health sector – hospitals (who distribute 37.8% of all items), Community Health Centres (who distribute 21.8% of all items) and closely followed by GPs (who distribute 19% of all items). Together these three providers account for 78.6% of distribution. Libraries account for only 6 per cent of distribution, followed by Support Services (6 per cent) and Migrant Resource Centres (3 per cent). The Table below also highlights the very large number of smaller providers, across the health, child care and education sectors, annexed by the Early Words team.

**Table 1: Selected Characteristics: Distribution Of Early Words**

<b>Number and type of products distributed by: language, suburb, distribution point</b>
All resources (type) (Mar 06 – Oct 08):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 289, 872 resources distributed to date</li> <li>▪ 53, 709 0-2 year DVDs/DVD packs (1,096 3-5 year DVDs<sup>4</sup>)</li> <li>▪ 4,625 Tip Sheets</li> <li>▪ 2,593 library packs</li> <li>▪ 4,464 book vouchers for children aged 0-6 months</li> <li>▪ 1,828 library bags with: 1,127 Baby Books (0-6 months) and 747 ‘Only Me’ books (REF)</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup>This figure should be understood in the context of the recent release of this resource in October 2008

**Table 1: Selected Characteristics: Distribution Of Early Words (continued)**

<i>Distribution of resources by key domain area:</i>	
Language	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Translation of print resources (i.e. tipsheets, magnets, posters), into nine (9) identified community languages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 16% all resources distributed were in languages other than English (LOTE) - 1 in 4 in Arabic; 1 in 5 in Chinese.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Development of an Aboriginal English version of the 0-2 year DVD</li> <li>▪ 6,461 Aboriginal resources, including 485 '0-2' DVDs; 1 in 10 resources distributed</li> </ul>	
Distribution Point/Partner Type	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 89 service partners engaged in the distribution of EW resources<sup>5</sup>, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 27 Health, 11 Early Learning and Care<sup>6</sup>; 18 Libraries</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ 22,943 DVD packs delivered ante-natally through Hospitals</li> <li>▪ 150 childcare centres engaged in delivery of 3-5 year DVD</li> <li>▪ 4,585 resources distributed 'Out of Area'</li> </ul>	

Source: *EW Program Statistics*

**Table 2: Delivery, All Resources, by Partner Type**

Partner Type	No. Early Words Items.	%
ABC Radio	23	0.0
Aboriginal Medical Centre	867	0.3
Advisory <sup>7</sup>	2,407	0.8
Community Health	63,312	21.8
Early Words	147	0.1
Family Day Care	783	0.3
GP	55,266	19.1
Hospital	109,524	37.8
Long Day Care	4,120	1.4
Library	17,017	5.9
Mother	13	0.0
Migrant Resource Centre	7,506	2.6
Playgroup	2,753	0.9
Preschool	2,896	1.0
School As Community Centre	5,901	2.0
School	207	0.1
Support Service	16,284	5.6
Support Service Aboriginal	240	0.1
University	48	0.0
Unspecified	558	0.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>289,872</b>	

Source: *EW Program Statistics (March 2006-October 2008)*

### 3.1.3 Support for Partners

A key aspect of the client relationship management in supporting the distribution of this resources and facilitating a whole of community response to early literacy has been the provision of professional development workshops and training. To date, the project has facilitated both off- and on-site professional development and training opportunities for individual practitioners and partner organisations, with over 118 practitioners in attendance. Additional support has been provided through the availability of these training resources on the EW website.

<sup>5</sup> Total number of partners engaged in delivery of EW resources for the period for April 2007 – August 2008 (Source: Delivery Summary by Partner, Early Words).

<sup>6</sup> This includes long day care centres, day care centres and preschools

<sup>7</sup> Organisations who provide EW with advice

One of the key outputs identified for 2009 is a program of 'Train the Trainer' workshops aimed at facilitating the use of EW resources in partners' practice.

### *Promotion of Early Words*

The project has sought to engage with early intervention providers at both a local, regional and state level.

In addition to the three (5) launch events to coincide with the release of EW resources<sup>8</sup>, the project has utilised existing community-based events aimed at families in the general population and target populations, to facilitate improved understanding and access in relation to early literacy. This has included participation and support for events aimed at children with additional needs (e.g. Kites for Kids; SCAN Conference<sup>9</sup>), and Aboriginal families (e.g. NAIDOC Week, Blacktown Council Fun Day and Blacktown Festival). The use of project mascot, 'Eddie Echidna' in association with local libraries has been used to facilitate recognition among children and families of the link between the EW resources and local literacy portals such as libraries.

The project has also utilised practice and service forums at both a regional and national level to facilitate a whole of sector response to early literacy both within and outside of the project area. In some instances, participation in events such as those auspiced through *Families NSW* have been instrumental in facilitating linkages with local service providers, particularly those working with the target population groups<sup>10</sup>. Similarly, national conferences such as the NSW Aboriginal Early Childhood Conference (April 2008) and Australian Principal's Conference (September 2008) has resulted in considerable interest in the Aboriginal resources from within and outside of the project area, with the spike in orders attributed to EW presence at the latter.

## 3.2 How well did we do It?

As part of the monitoring and evaluation of the project, a number of mechanisms have been established for obtaining feedback from both service partners and families. This included the incorporation of targeted or directed requests through surveys of service partners and evaluation of project activities, to general requests for feedback encouraged in communication and information circulated to partners.

### 3.2.1 *Families*

To date, minimal data has been collected on parent response to the resource and has been limited to some data collection as part of the *Early Literacy Questionnaire for Families* auspiced by the project team, preliminary responses to the survey circulated with the 3-5 DVD resource (see Tables 3 and 4 below), and data available through third party sources, including service partner data collection, much of which has been anecdotal in form. As such, the following should be read in the context of the reliability of such findings with regard to any generalisations that may be drawn in regard to the wider population. However, what the data does illustrate is that some parents, particularly within the general population, are falling through the gaps in regard to access to EW resources.

**Table 3: Early Literacy Questionnaire (n=16)**

- Sample of three partner organisations and parents attending early intervention programs, including two auspiced through MRCs (63% of all parents spoke Languages Other Than English at home)
- Just over half (56%, n=9) of all parents had received EW resources, with a similar rate for receipt of the 0-2 year DVD.
- All parents in receipt of the DVD (n=9) indicated they had viewed the resource at least once
- Responses were relatively evenly divided between those parents that did not know where to access the resource (56%, n=4), including those that had received EW resources (56%), and those that did (44%, n=4). Access was evenly split across MRC, library and early care and education partners.
- Approximately one in four parents attended the library to attend early literacy activities
- Three quarters of parents indicated they attended playgroup or 'Sing n Grow', with one quarter attending playgroup only (NB: this likely reflects the inclusion of playgroup in the sample)

Source: *Early Words Early Literacy Questionnaire for Families*

Anecdotal evidence from partners reporting on parents' reception of the resources suggest positive responses to development of the 3-5 year resources and recognition of their potential role in supporting transition to school.

<sup>8</sup> EW Launches – Holroyd LGA [2006], Blacktown LGA, and Baulkham Hills [2007]

<sup>9</sup> Donation of EW resources to Supporting Children with Additional Needs (SCAN) Conference (Aug 2007) which attracted over 170 delegates from early childhood education

<sup>10</sup> For example: discussion with the Baulkham Hills/Parramatta MRC in facilitating focus discussions with CALD families

**Table 4: Survey of Parents '0-3' resource (n=38)**

- Nearly two thirds (n=24/63%) of parents had received the DVD, with similar rates for receipt of the tip sheets (68%) and magnets (71%). Approximately 16% had received the DVD only, with less than half (n=18/47%) the parents having received the book bag
- The majority of parents (76%) reported they had learnt something new from using the resource and had introduced and/or increased the recommended activities (*see comments below*)
  - 84% looking and seeing and 89% singing and dancing, although drawing and writing remained significantly lower (13% n=5)
- Parent feedback on the resource was overwhelmingly positive (96% respondents; n=27)
- Over one third (42%) of parents were satisfied with the resource and recommended no changes

However, findings from the surveys of (distribution) partners and Aboriginal families auspiced through the Evaluation suggest that the barriers to parents utilising the resource may reflect the stage in parenting (i.e. ante-versus post- natal period) and corresponding priorities for parents at such stages. As discussed in the following, this has implications for future strategies to facilitate universal access and increase utilisation of this resource. This is reflected in the observations of one practitioner:

“Many parents have not yet watched the DVD prior to the first home visit so that when we mention it they are now in the land of parenting” and not just “awaiting birth” so are keen to be reminded”

Survey of EW (Distribution) Partners, September 2008

#### *What parents' said...*

“DVD is much interactive and can grab baby's attention. Book is tangible and baby loves it..book[s] are easy to buy and use...My baby will follow the music and sound from the DVD”

Survey of Parents, September 2008

“I liked the ideas and tips...magnets are fantastic reminders of the lessons”

Survey of Parents, September 2008

“Tells us in simple, easy language how to communicate with child and improve their brain development”

Survey of Parents, September 2008

### **3.2.2 Services**

Whilst partners reported that they were generally supportive of distributing the resource, the degree to which they supported this process varied between partner types and was largely influenced by: the alignment of the focus of the project (i.e. early literacy) with [their] practice; and workload. In some instances, this trend was challenged by champions within the partner organisation who indicated a personal commitment to early literacy and holistic approach to early childhood development, the latter whereby early literacy was identified as being a key component of early childhood development and by definition allied with their practice.

**Table 5: Survey of Service Partners (n=38)**

- Over two thirds of partners indicated they or another member of their staff had attended an EW workshop (27 out of 38)
- Approximately three in four partners (28) were interested in attending EW presentation or training sessions for the 3-5 year resource, with over half (5) of those who weren't interested indicating it would help if EW visited their organisation to conduct such training
- Three quarters of partners recommended the resource to parents/families
- Nearly half (17) of respondents had watched the DVD
- Less than half of partners distribute the resource on first contact with parents/families

#### *What the partners say...*

Some promotional material right in front of us at the desk might help – or a display rack – we have posters up,

but not near the desk – so when we are busy and stressed we forget

Library, Early Words Resources Survey, September 2008

We both returned very inspired by the course. Already literacy played an integral part in our programme but the course inspired us to come back to preschool and see where else we could help the children's literacy development. We added more elements of: reading stories (e.g. listening to stories on tape, listening to music and hearing the story behind the music, listening to poems), children having more one to one time with a book, we advertised and promoted our small centre child library more, encouraging families to borrow, discussing the book borrowed more with the family e.g. Seeking feedback about did the child like the book etc, learning nonsense rhymes and poems and generally talking and listening to the children as much as possible.

Pre-School workers, correspondence following attendance at Early Words Information Session, July 2006.

### 3.3 Is anyone better off?

In view of the gaps in Project data, particularly in relation to pre- and post- stages of intervention, it is beyond the scope of this Evaluation to establish the degree to which services and families are 'better off'. An overview of key outputs in relation to population level data is included as Appendix 5 to this report.

#### 3.3.1 Services

Feedback from service partners, particularly libraries, suggest EW has directly impacted on practice in relation to a number of areas, including the resources available to support practice and programs due to a renewed focus on early literacy. The professional development and training opportunities auspiced under EW has provided an opportunity for early intervention practitioners to increase their skills and knowledge in relation to early literacy in particular and early childhood development in general. Whilst this may have resulted in a consolidation and affirmation of existing skills and knowledge for some practitioners, this has been welcomed as an affirmation of current practice.

The dissemination of national and international research into best practice in early literacy has provided a particularly valuable professional development resource for allied practices.

For traditionally non-allied partners, such as those in health services, the resources have in some cases served as useful prompts and tools in practice.

Whilst some partner indicated that changes to the method of distribution have assisted the distribution of this resource, and presumably their receptiveness to facilitating this, other partners have identified such changes as contrary to best practice in learning and behavioural change. Whilst such conflicting views highlight the need for flexibility in the management of individual partnerships in response to the specific circumstances/conditions of the partners, it also highlights the need to balance issues of efficiency with those of effectiveness, in this case the apparent value of the initial method of dissemination.

##### 3.3.1.1 Project Team

Consistent with the project lifecycle, the project has evolved and been refined over time not least in regard to: resource production; distribution; monitoring and reporting; client relationship management. The considered reflection on practice demonstrated in the focus discussion with project staff indicated a culture within the project team of reflection and continuous improvement typical of reflexive practice. This is identified as a key strength of the team, and is seen to be particularly valuable in the ongoing management of the project as it enters the next phase of the project with the dissemination of the '3-5' resources.

#### 3.3.2 Families

The availability of early literacy resources, a key output and outcome of this project, and reported increase in early literacy activities for 0-2 year olds, suggest increased opportunities for parents/families within the target area to increase their skills and knowledge in relation to early literacy. However, preliminary findings to emerge from data collected from parents/families highlights the issue that access to such resources will not necessarily equate to an increased use or awareness of early literacy. This is supported by findings from service partners in relation to the change in the method of distribution from the initial 'drip-feed' approach. The emergence of joint-early literacy activities such as those between the MRCs and libraries illustrate the opportunities for collaborations between partners and community-based organisations in supporting mobile or outreach programs to facilitate access to early literacy for those cohorts typically defined as 'hard to reach'. It is envisaged that such examples may provide a useful model of collaboration between libraries and early childhood education and Aboriginal service providers. It may be possible that through existing programs, such as those within the client organisation, (e.g. C4C funded supported playgroups), opportunities for the latter are available in the immediate term.

Whilst the format, content and subsequent translation of the EW resources were designed to enhance accessibility in relation to the literacy levels and cultural and linguistic diversity of the target population, partners indicate that feedback from parents suggest that an unexpected outcome of the project may be the use of these resources within the general CALD population to assist with literacy. While there was some concern that the preference for the English version of the resource over the relevant translated version would work against improved literacy outcomes for the target cohort, this should be considered against other factors, not least: the written language competencies of CALD parents in their first language, and the cultural symbolism of preferring the English version (to denote assimilation with the 'local' culture). It is anticipated strategies such as the intensive orientation to the resource implemented by partner migrant resource centres and collaboration between libraries and MRCs in joint-early literacy activities may minimise any potential risk of adopting the English language resource for CALD parents/families.

***What the Parents say...***

**"Helping with talking and writing, develop social skills, physical and motor development in each age and how you could help them with development of a number of skills tailored to their developmental stage"**

Early Words Parent Survey, September 2008

**"I listen to my child more carefully. I started singing and dancing while we rhyme...my child has shown more interest in playing and reading and admiring books than spending time near TV"**

Early Words Parent Survey, September 2008

**"It was very informative and helped me as a mother to know what to do at an appropriate age"**

Early Words Parent Survey, September 2008

**"Before I do not know that the baby of 0-6 months needs to read for them but now I do for my baby boy"**

Early Words Parent Survey, September 2008

## 4. THE PARTNERSHIP STORY

As noted, partners have played an integral role in the delivery of the project, including but not limited to: the development of the resource(s), the distribution of resources, and facilitation of community response to early literacy.

To reflect the different target groups for the Project, partnerships were explored with government, non-government, and community organisations with responsibility for, or engagement with, the identified population cohort.

In undertaking to report on the *partnership story* for the project, the following seeks to provide a general overview for all partnerships as well as a more detailed analysis of key relationships that are identified as partnership case-studies for the purpose of this report. Such consideration will include an analysis of the findings in the context of recent scholarship and practice literature on partnerships<sup>11</sup>.

### 4.1 Overview of Select Literature

The role of partnerships in program performance is explicit in the RBA approach, emphasising that the success of the identified program/service will be contingent on a number of factors, not least the contribution of partners (Friedman 2005). This is supported in the wider literature which acknowledges the significance of partnerships beyond their function as a policy or practice goal, but a key element of the process of program delivery.

Whilst the literature provides numerous definitions on the defining characteristics of partnerships, given the relevance of networks to the EW project the Evaluation has utilised the typology outlined by Williams, B, et al (FaCSIA, 2004), as per Figure 1, in examining the EW story.

**Figure 1: Four types of relationships between organisations**

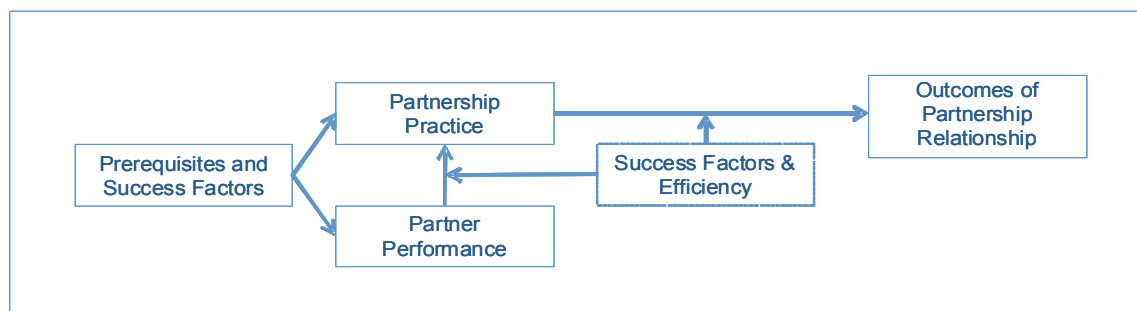
Level of network	Communication	Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration
<b>Key Descriptor</b>	Shared information	Shared information and mutual support	Common tasks and compatible goals	Integrated strategies and collective purpose

Source: Williams, B et al (2004, 2)

Suggesting that the key to successful collaboration is “maintaining the balance between the purpose, structures, processes and resources” (2004, 7), Williams et al (2004) notes the failure to achieve this balance in practice where the expectations, which may be orientated toward ‘collaboration’, are disproportionate to the level of support for such relationships. In relation to networks, Williams et al (2004) suggests the successful management of networks can largely be attributed to three key components: *influencing members to participate; securing commitment from members, and creating a favourable environment for productive work* (2004, 9).

However as Brinkerhoff (2002) notes in relation to the dynamism of relationships, the partnership process should be seen as an “evolving process” with the value of relationships considered outside of traditional typologies of partnerships types. Brinkerhoff (2002, 220) provides a useful framework (see Figure 2 below) for assessing such relationships which transcends the traditional, linear casual chain.

**Figure 2: Casual chain for relationship outcomes**



Source: Brinkerhoff (2002, 220)

<sup>11</sup> Williams, B, et al (FaCSIA, 2004) *Networks and Partnerships*, Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004, Issues Paper, April 2004, Commonwealth Dept. Family and Community Services and RMIT

## 4.2 Overview of Key Partnerships

The following seeks to provide an overview of partnerships for the project by partner type, including:

- Background, including the rationale for their selection/inclusion
- Involvement in the project
- Impact on and contribution of partner.

As suggested by the 'partnership' which has underpinned this project, the production of project results has often been a result of the collaboration efforts of the client and partner organisations. As such, the following seeks to report on key outputs that have auspiced by the client (i.e. direct) and those that have emerged within the partner organisation (i.e. indirect) as a result of their engagement with the project.

The following draws on quantitative and qualitative data drawn from both primary and secondary data sources including: delivery summary reports, surveys, interviews and focus groups. A summary of key statistics for the project is included in this report as Appendix 4.

### 4.2.1 Libraries

#### Background/Overview

As a neighbourhood location for resources and advice to support literacy, libraries typically provide the principal gateway for the wider public access to literacy opportunities. Whilst explicitly not identified in the original project brief<sup>12</sup>, Libraries were subsequently identified as a key partner due to this role and national and international experience in early literacy initiatives.

#### What did we do?

Library partners have played a key role in the development, promotion and distribution of EW resources and have provided a key linkage in facilitating a whole of community response to early literacy, a key outcome of the project. To date, all (22) libraries within the project area have participated in the distribution of EW which has included the distribution of the 'Library Tip sheet Pack' (n=2,566), 'Library Bag and Book' (1,828 library bags), in addition to inclusion of EW resources in their loan library.

The engagement of individual librarians and the sector through the Children's Librarians of Western Sydney (CLAWS) network has provided a unique collaboration in support of professional development and training for the resource specifically, and early literacy in general, as well as a forum for consulting libraries on resource type and content (e.g. recommended reading).

**Table 6: Selected Characteristics by Partner: Distribution of Early Words by Library Partners**

<b>Number and type of products distributed by: language, suburb, distribution point</b>
All resources (type):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 19 libraries engaged in distributing resources (Feb 08-Oct 08)</li> <li>▪ 2566 library packs (Feb 08-Oct 08) - 2,593 library packs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Auburn (308), Baulkham Hills (202), Blacktown (332), Parramatta (283)</li> <li>○ 195 Arabic, 405 Chinese</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ 1,828 library bags / 1793 library bags (Feb 07 – Oct 08)</li> <li>▪ 4,464 book vouchers for children aged 0-6 months               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 1,127 Baby Books (0-6 months) and 747 'Only Me' books (REF) - <i>Books distributed/redeemed: Baby Book (1086); 'Only Me' (425)</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

#### How well did we do it?

The Project has successfully engaged 100% (n=22) of all public libraries within the five LGAs targeted by the Project. This has included both main and branch libraries. The Project has also utilised the client organisation's Mobile Book & Toy Library, and in doing so, has modelled the potential opportunities for collaboration across early intervention programs that are focussed on the early years, in particular outreach or mobile services. This in itself, has enabled further opportunities for promoting the EW through non-allied partners, such as supported play groups and pre-schools and transition to school programs.

The Project's engagement with librarians through the CLAWS network represents a significant achievement in the engagement of libraries in the Project and milestone in the collaboration with library partners with the EW project

<sup>12</sup> It is understood this was implied by reference to local government authorities Blacktown and Baulkham Hills.

team member the only non-librarian attending this group. The contribution of the EW project team member to this group was recognised by Library partners as integral to the partnership, with partners reporting positively on the professional development opportunities provided by the EW member at these forums. Similarly, library partners reported positively on the availability of EW to support library-based early literacy events and activities, including the availability of the EW mascot, 'Eddie the Echidna'. The engagement of the Chief Librarian in this network has resulted in the purchase of EW resources by the State Library Service for dissemination outside of the Project area and recognition of the contribution of the EW partnership to the CLAWS network and in enhancing early literacy programs in the Project area.

Anecdotal evidence from some library partners attribute an increase in library membership to the introduction of and/or increase in early literacy programs which they attribute to their relationship with EW.

### Is anyone better off?

#### *Families*

Libraries have reported an increase number of activities and corresponding increase in families attending library programs as a result of the renewed focus on early literacy due to Early Words. In some instances, the introduction of early literacy programs, such as those aimed at 0-2 year olds, was directly attributed to their involvement with Early Words. In other cases, libraries reported that Early Words had supported their internal advocacy for early literacy programs, including those targeting 'hard to reach' groups such as fathers.

**Table 7: Selected Characteristics for Library Partners**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase in number of libraries delivering early literacy (0-2 years) programs from one library across five LGAs to all LGAs;</li> <li>▪ Increase in number of early literacy activities/programs: double the number of activities for 0-2 years between 2006 and 2008             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Year on year (YOY) growth in attendance at pre-school (0-2 years) activities (ie. Baby Rhyme Time) between 2006 and 2008: Blacktown (99% 2006/07; 54% 2007/08); Holroyd (85% 2006/7, 94% 2007/8)</li> <li>▪ Blacktown – Over four (4) times the number of children attending early literacy activities in 2008 compared with 2006<sup>13</sup></li> <li>▪ Auburn - Twenty (20) times the number of families attending 'Bubba Time' sessions in 2008 than in 2006 (<i>reflecting a very low base in 2006</i>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Facilitated membership to libraries – 118 (May 07 – Sep 08)</li> <li>▪ Libraries report increase in picture book loans             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase in the number of enquiries since partnership (15/18)* - not clear appears to ref: EW rather than general enquiries (PFF)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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Figures which indicate a corresponding decrease in number of activities targeting the 3-5 year group for the period may reflect the focus on early learning that coincided with the release of the 0-2 year resources.

#### *Services*

Libraries have reported an increase number of activities and corresponding increase in families attending library programs. Indeed, anecdotal evidence from some Library partners attribute an increase in library membership to their engagement with EW. Whilst such claims are unsubstantiated, they do illustrate the perception across library partners of the extent to which EW has positively impacted on local libraries<sup>14</sup>. This is further reflected in the feedback from some partners who report the value of EW, specifically through its involvement with CLAWS, and dissemination of current evidence-based practice and research, to assist in with internal advocacy to enhanced local early literacy activities. Indeed, the value of the contribution of the EW relationship through CLAWS in relation to professional development was consistently identified by library partners as a key strength of the relationship.

<sup>13</sup> Blacktown Library Statistics (July 07 – Jun 08), Planned programs

<sup>14</sup> Such claims are consistent with findings from the evaluation of Baby Bounce in South Australia (Hill 2006)

*What the Partners say...*

**“Early Words prompted start of our baby program, and gave us a good start. Early Words materials are handed out at the start of all our Baby Bounce and Rhyme Time sessions. Where we are getting 15-20 parents per session.”**

Library Partner, May 2008, Partner Feedback Form

**“Plan more stories that involve stories of other cultures, share more reading times through the day in smaller group-time.”**

Practitioner, Evaluation Feedback for Early Words Early Literacy 0-3 Years Seminar, Auburn, May 2006

**“[It] helped to reinforce my beliefs and practices. Group-time will be involving more literacy, encouraging parents to read more and focusing more on literacy at early age”**

Practitioner, Evaluation Feedback for Early Words Early Literacy 0-3 Years Seminar, Parramatta, November 2005

**“This has been an excellent way of promoting the Library Service and the many services we provide parents and their children...the [tip] sheets have provided valuable advice and information to parents about the importance of reading and interacting with their children from 2 months to 18 months. These resources are available in many different languages and this has assisted us in reaching all sectors of our multicultural community”**

General Manager, LGA Library and Community Services, April 2007

**“The active participation of Early Words representatives in quarterly professional development meetings with library staff supports the exchange of information and fosters the development of early literacy knowledge and skills in key children’s library staff across the region... Using libraries as pick up points for Early Words materials also encourages members of the community to visit their local public library and discover what it has to offer their family.”**

Letter from Manager: Funding and Advisory Services, Public Library Services, State Library of NSW, August 2008)

## 4.2.2 Health

### Background/Overview

The engagement of Health Services in the dissemination of the EW resource reflects current policy and practice in whole of community responses to early intervention, with particular recognition of the opportunities for aligning interventions at key stages in early stages of development where parents typically engage with health providers. The rationale of this is typically twofold. First, it recognises the interdependency of *health* and *learning* that are fundamental to early intervention programs. Second, the relatively universal access to health services provides a unique opportunity to engage families, including those defined as ‘hard to reach’, who may not otherwise engage with general child and family services. In addition to the local area health service and division of general practice identified in the project brief, EW has successfully engaged a range of health partners in the dissemination of EW resources that include: hospitals (both public and private), general (medical) practitioners, community health centres, early childhood centres, and Aboriginal health services.

### What did we do?

Reflecting their identification as a universal point of access for the early years, particularly in connection with key interventions in child health and development such as the immunisation process, the project has utilised health services to facilitate access to both the universal and Aboriginal resources with health partners engaged in the distribution of five resource types (see figure resources by partner). This universal access is reflected in distribution statistics for the project, with over three quarters (78.6%) of resources distributed through hospitals (37.8%), community health centres (21.8%) and divisions of general practice (19%). To date, access to EW resources has been enabled through distribution partnership with twenty seven (27) health services, which have included: 5 hospitals, 14 community health centres, and 8 general practitioners<sup>15</sup>.

Whilst not envisaged in the initial stages of the project, feedback from health partners lead to changes in the access points for all antenatal and birth resources which extended from hospitals only to include community health centres. Whilst the description of the process by which EW resources is distributed within practice suggests integration is largely an ‘add-on’ to activities/tasks, there are some notable exceptions such as the ability to link EW resources with PEDS assessment. The format of EW resources such as magnets was identified as a useful tool in supporting practice. Further refinements to the method of distribution from single item to resource packs whilst motivated by feedback from partners was initiated by the project team on observing the collation of the resource prior to distribution and reflection on impact of this process in the context of partner practice and existing workloads.

<sup>15</sup> Data is based on delivery summaries for the period Aug 07 – April 08.

However, key informants in some health partnerships indicate that in addition to typical operational barriers, there remains key structural impediments to health providers engaging with the project, not least perceptions as to the boundaries of practice which are reinforced in early academic/professional education.

### How well did we do it?

Responses from partners indicate a high level of satisfaction with the customer service provided by the EW project team throughout all stages of the relationship: from initial presentations to staff in the establishment phase of the partnership, to responsiveness to requests for resources and feedback on the efficiency of (then) current methods of distribution. However, structural changes within the partner organisation has positively impacted on some operational challenges, not least in resolving issues in relation to bridging the gap in access to account for lower than expected distribution at some (universal) access points and renewed awareness of the alignment of EW with the partner's practice. This is demonstrated in the changes at community health partnerships whereby the division of nursing practice from generalist to specialist roles (e.g. early childhood, aged care), provided a targeted focus and opportunity for collaboration in relation to early intervention programs aimed at the early years.

### Is anyone better off?

#### *Families*

The distribution of EW resources at key stages in interventions in child health across the health services sector, particularly primary care, has provided a facilitated an unprecedented level of access to early literacy resources for families.

The inclusion of community health nurses in the dissemination of this resource as been integral to bridging the gap and ensuring a number of mutually exclusive and/or alternative pathways exist for families to access this resource.

However, reports on results of internal data collection from one partner organisation suggest a lack of awareness of the resource among families, although the reliability of this data should be considered in the context of the survey design and sample<sup>16</sup>.

#### *Services*

Feedback from Health partners suggest support and resistance from across the sector based on perceived alignment of practice and the relationship between early literacy and (child) health. This is discussed in more detail in the following section of this report. Certainly, reviews to individual partner distribution processes and tailored support for some partners have assisted with the dissemination of EW resources, with a presumed subsequent improvement in access for the target population accessing these health services.

### *What the Partners say...*

"I have difficulty handing this information over to parents because I am mindful that it may not fit with their philosophy regarding reading and education. Also, this being a medical practice rather than a clinic our focus is necessarily health focused rather than educationally focused. We are hard pressed to ensure we adequately cover health issues in the time frame available. Also, there are difficulties having the resources available in each room. 3 out of 4 locations where children are seen here do not have the resources within handy reach. If we were to attempt to place them in each location we would have problems with stock level and space. We have a problem already with space. I wonder if parents should be encouraged to see early childhood centres for guidance such as this. I feel that parents are attending medical practices more and more for issues that are more appropriately dealt with by early childhood nurses."

GP, Early Words Resource: Evaluation Survey, September 2008

<sup>16</sup> The former is argued on the basis of the framing of the question on EW and context in which EW resources are distributed at hospitals in the ante-natal stage whereby some time may elapse between receipt of the resource and survey and parents may not recall the resource when considered out of context.

### 4.2.3 Migrant Resource Centres

#### Background/Overview

The engagement of migrant resource centres (MRCs) was in response to the identified outcomes for the project in relation to facilitating access to early literacy opportunities for CALD families, a target population of the Project.

#### What did we do?

The project has partnered with migrant resource centres (MRCs) across all phases of the project, with centres in Blacktown, Baulkham Hills/Parramatta, and Auburn engaged in the distribution of EW resources. In addition to facilitating access to EW resources, MRCs have facilitated access to CALD families for the purposes of reporting on satisfaction/use of the resource through early intervention programs such as targeted, supported playgroups for new and emerging migrant groups. Further relationships have been developed through membership to the Blacktown MRC Early Intervention Reference Group, and advice from key early intervention workers on the survey tools for families. The facilitation of linkages with peak bodies and other early intervention program providers such as Playgroup NSW and local libraries has provided further opportunity to facilitate both direct and indirect linkages with MRC programs in support of improved access to early literacy opportunities for CALD families. To date, migrant resource centres account for less than 3% of all resources distributed.

#### How well did we do it?

The facilitation of access to early learning opportunities for CALD families was a key outcome for the project. As part of the ongoing monitoring and reporting activities for the project, attempts have been made to secure the participation of CALD families in the evaluation of the project through surveys and focus discussion. To date, such efforts have been relatively unsuccessful<sup>17</sup>. The reflection of staff involved in these activities identified scheduling conflicts and breakdown in communication in relation to support requirements (e.g. provision of interpreting services, appropriate venues), in facilitating this engagement. It was suggested that in view of the scope of the project and staffing resources in both the client and partner organisations, may have not supported relationship management to support such activities.

Such issues highlight common issues in partnership management and community-based research, particularly those involving 'hard to reach' groups.

The collaboration with some MRCs highlights the different extent to which partner organisations have engaged in additional training and support in facilitating access to this resource for both practitioners and families. In the case of one centre, the parents are provided with a guided introduction to the resource which is underpinned by both formal and informal training on the resource by the MRC practitioner and the adoption of culturally appropriate techniques for engaging with this resource (i.e. 'group' not individual setting). The incorporation of the resources and the activities contained therein are further designed to reinforce the value of the resource and importance of early literacy.

#### Is anyone better off?

Whilst the relationship with migrant resource centres has been particularly beneficial in facilitating cross-sector linkages in support of early learning and literacy opportunities for CALD families, particularly through emerging partnerships with local libraries, the role of the centres as a distribution point is relatively small, with centres accounting for only 3% resources distributed to date. However, the participation of MRCs in the facilitation of data collection for this Evaluation and subsequent participation of families in the evaluation activities suggest the centres have been a critical link in facilitating early literacy opportunities for CALD families. This might reflect the strategies the MRCs have adopted in disseminating EW resources, including guided introduction/orientation to the resource and utilisation of the resources in MRC programs.

#### Families

Whilst information on ethnicity and language was not directly collected as part of the parent survey auspiced as part of this Evaluation, due to the engagement of service partners in the facilitation of the collection of this resource a significant number of returns were from migrant resource centre clients. Therefore, comments attributed to parents in the general findings section of this report should be read in the context of this information.

Reports from partners suggest the linkages with libraries facilitated through EW have been mutually beneficial for MRC staff and clients, and has resulted in (increased) library visits, and collaboration of libraries on craft and story-time workshops. (This is supported by qualitative data collected for libraries). The engagement of EW project staff

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<sup>17</sup> Refers to outcomes of focus group scheduled to coincide with the 'Sharing and Learning Playgroup' at BHHP MRC, November 2007

in the Blacktown MRC Early Intervention Reference Group provided the catalyst for establishing a local playgroup for Sudanese families<sup>18</sup>.

Anecdotal reports from partners suggest that CALD clients have responded positively to the availability of the resource in their first language, with the inclusion of activities such as singing and nursery rhymes prompting them to incorporate examples from within their own culture. In some instances, particularly in relation to emerging or refugee populations, this has been particularly important not least because of their disconnection with their own culture as a refugee.

### Services

As previously noted, the coincidence of *Early Words* with other early intervention programs, in particular those targeting the early years, has provided opportunities for collaboration offered by an alignment of practice and corresponding focus of activities. For one MRC, this included the utilisation of the resources to support their own practice including programs targeting school readiness, and facilitated linkages with the local library. The latter has resulted not only in reciprocal visits such as mobile (library) outreach services to MRC playgroups and playgroup visits to the local library, but facilitated community-wide events to coincide with national early literacy initiatives (i.e. 'Multicultural Story-time').

### What Partners said...

"...The CALD clients love that there is something in their language'

Survey of Distribution Partners, September 2008

"..the service I represent is delighted that much of the information has been translated into community languages"

Survey of Distribution Partners, September 2008

## 4.2.4 Other Partners

### Background/Overview

*Note: The following should be read in the context of the limited role of the identified partners in the distribution of resources to date based on the target population for these partners which are typically outside of the target cohort for these resources (i.e. children aged 0-2 years). It is anticipated that with the release of the 3-5 resource, partners such as schools as community centres (SACCS), long and family day care centres and playgroups will emerge as key partners in the project.*

### What did we do?

In addition to partnerships with health, library and migrant resource centres, the project has engaged with early childhood and education providers within the government, non-government and private sector in the dissemination of the *EW* resources which have included the 0-2 year DVD pack, and 0-2 years Tip Sheet Pack. This has included: long day care (LDC), family day care (FDC), schools as community centres (SACCs) and other support services.

In addition to the development of relationships with individual organisations within the sector, the project has engaged with the peak body for early childhood, Playgroup NSW, in facilitating access to *EW* resources. The development of this relationship has culminated in the participation of *EW* in 'Sing n Grow'<sup>19</sup> workshop, and the provision of targeted training for zone workers. Such opportunities have emphasised the opportunity for the utilisation of *EW* resources and/or recommended activities in practice and linkages with key service providers such as libraries to support early literacy. The relationship has also created opportunities for the wider dissemination of *EW* resources outside the project area.

The engagement of early childhood education and care providers is seen to be particularly critical in the dissemination of the 3-5 year resource, particularly in supporting 'school readiness' in the pre-school years. To this purpose, the promotion of the 3-5 resource has targeted transition to school programs<sup>20</sup> and promoted the availability of *EW* resource for parent information evenings<sup>21</sup>. In October 2008, access to the 3-5 DVD resource

<sup>18</sup> A MRC auspiced playgroup with advice from Childrenfirst

<sup>19</sup> NB: 'Sing n Grow' workshops were established separately in one MRC and attended by *Early Words* for resource development

<sup>20</sup> To is supported by a separate database that *EW* has established to facilitate the dissemination of *EW* resources and relevant information to support local 'transition to school' programs (DOCS, 2006/7)

<sup>21</sup> Partner Broadcasts, August 2008

was facilitated by the engagement of 150 child centres in the distribution of this resource. Additional access was facilitated through the distribution of two copies of this resource to local libraries within the project area.

Importantly, the client has recognised its own capacity to facilitate access to the resource through its day-care services and early intervention programs, including those activities aimed at supporting children with additional needs through their Communication and Language Assistance Program.

As previously noted, the project has been successful in engaging partners outside of the project area. This includes those developed through professional networks such as CLAWs, and Playgroup NSW, and the promotion of this resource at key events aimed at early childhood, learning and literacy, and by project partners, including the funding body.

### *Engagement with the Broader Community*

The engagement with the wider non-service community has provided significant opportunities for the project, not least access to in-kind and additional funding contributions to supplement the substantive funding allocation for the project through Families NSW<sup>22</sup>.

The engagement of volunteers from the wider community has been a key output of this project across all phases of the project. This has included the engaging families in the production of the resource, including narration and stock images, volunteers from school and faith-based communities (Blacktown Uniting Church) within the local area in the collation of the resources, to the engagement of individuals and organisations within the local and national media for the narration and translation of the resources<sup>23</sup>. The utilisation of local sporting club Parramatta Eels in the promotion of the resources was further aimed at facilitating a whole of community response, including families' not currently accessing services through the identified partner institutions, and the use of high profile male role models in promoting in early literacy ( and by implication, the role of fathers in this endeavour)<sup>24</sup>.

### **How well did we do it?**

In addition to Childrenfirst day care centres, *Early Words* has held presentations at 80% of Family Day Care organizations in the Project area with approximately 40% receiving additional training. It is estimated that EW will achieve similarly high levels of engagement with family day care services with the release of the 3-5 year DVD resource.

In support of evidence-based and best practice, the Project has sought and incorporated partner responses in relation to most aspects of the Project, not least in relation to partner training and information sessions<sup>25</sup>. To this purpose, the format for partner workshops was changed for childcare training to reflect feedback from previous participants as to the (then) existing format, changing it from one long workshop to two shorter workshops.

As previously noted, the lack of access to data and families accessing partner organisations has been identified as a priority response area in the ongoing management of the Project. The inclusion of a survey for parents in the 3-5 year old resource is aimed at improving existing data collection in relation to access to and use of this resource, including levels of satisfaction, and impact on skills/knowledge and changes in behaviour.

**"I must tell you how much I enjoyed the meeting at the AMS a couple of weeks ago. It really addressed some of the issues I have been grappling with, in relation to the playgroup mums. It was good to be involved in such a pro-active positive meeting."**

Email communication, Childcare worker, 2007

### **Is anyone better off?**

#### ***Families***

As previously noted, the gaps in data for children and parents accessing EW resources has been identified as a key priority response area for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the Project. It is anticipated that the distribution of the survey for parents with the 3-5 year old resource will enable the reporting against key areas such as changes in skills, knowledge and behaviour in future in support of whether 'anyone is better off',

#### ***Services***

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<sup>22</sup> This is in addition to the in-kind contribution from the client organisation

<sup>23</sup> This refers to the literal translation of the universal resources into the identified community languages.

<sup>24</sup> Parramatta Eels (Rugby League) Club Fun Day, [2007]

<sup>25</sup> Response rates for completed evaluations of *Early Learning Literacy Seminars* between the period 2005-2007 were just over half of all participants (51%)

The release of the 3-5 year old resource is likely to elicit a more active engagement of those early childhood education and care partners whose main client population comprise the target population for this resource. It is therefore anticipated that more detailed feedback on those partners which we have for the purposes of this report categorised as 'other partners' will be available for inclusion in project reporting in future. Certainly, responses to date from early education and childcare professionals have been positive, and suggest potential opportunities for collaboration in relation to early literacy initiatives and support for EW resources in future

### ***What the Partners say...***

**"I can't tell you how relevant your programme is for playgroup members. I am still excited about it. I already use your information in my talks. First time carers at Early Childhood Centres may come to understand the importance of singing, sounds and interaction with their babies. I have bookings for the year for all talks at Penrith centres, Merrylands centres, Pennant Hills and Epping."**

Email communication, Regional Development Consultant, Playgroup NSW, Feb 2006

**"We both returned very inspired by the course. Already literacy played an integral part in our programme but the course inspired us to come back to preschool and see where else we could help the children's literacy development. We added more elements of: reading stories (e.g. listening to stories on tape, listening to music and hearing the story behind the music, listening to poems), children having more one to one time with a book, we advertised and promoted our small centre child library more, encouraging families to borrow, discussing the book borrowed more with the family e.g. Seeking feedback about did the child like the book etc, learning nonsense rhymes and poems and generally talking and listening to the children as much as possible."**

Pre-School workers, correspondence following attendance at Early Words Information Session, July 2006.

## 5. Findings & Conclusions

### 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The findings of the evaluation highlight the importance of partnerships in all phases of the program cycle: from planning to development, implementation, and review (and evaluation). Not surprisingly, both the structural and operational environments of partnering organisations (including the client's) were identified as providing key opportunities and/or challenges for effective and sustainable collaboration. Findings of the evaluation highlight:

- The importance of shared practice goals and/or philosophy in fostering and sustaining collaboration
- The contribution of champion to external and internal advocacy for early learning in general, and the EW in particular
- The importance and value of recognising strengths of practitioners and partners organisation in building trust-based and effective partnerships (in particular, the appropriate role of generalist and specialist knowledge in planning and development)
- The impact of internal governance and management issues on building effective partnerships
- The value of existing practice support networks in engaging whole-of-sector responses to early literacy and facilitating the implementation of the Project
- The limitations on engagement in the context of voluntary partnerships (particularly in relation to prioritisation of tasks such as reporting).
- The value of consistent and responsive communication in client relationship management
- The importance of adequate resourcing to support quality client relationship management
- The flexibility for individualised service delivery in response to structural and operational environment of partner organisation

In principle, such findings are broadly consistent with general research findings in relation to effective early childhood intervention and partnerships, as outlined in the review of select literature included in this report (Brinkerhoff 2002; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000; Williams et al 2004). Similarly, preliminary findings from data collected to date from parents accessing EW resources (see Section 3 of this report) are broadly consistent with those identified in the evaluation of Baby Bounce in South Australia (Hill 2006).

Whilst it is not the objective of the Evaluation to evaluate the partnerships auspiced under EW, an understanding of the processes by which these relationships were established and maintained have important lessons for existing client relationship management strategies and as previously noted, the sustainability of the Project. The Evaluation findings suggest that whilst the engagement of distribution partners suggests a *collaborative* type of relationship according to Williams' (2004) broad criteria, the depth of this collaboration in terms of the two key components, integration and purpose, have varied considerably both across partners in general, but particularly partner types, and throughout different phases of the project lifecycle. This is further illustrated when considered in the context of the more detailed typology provided by Williams (2004, 11) which suggests that whilst some EW partnerships may have some features of a *collaborative* relationship but may be more akin to a *cooperative* relationship.

Certainly, the findings in relation to the engagement with library partners in general, and the CLAWS network in particular, suggest the presence of the three conditions to which Williams (2004) refers in relation to networks. Again, consistent with the literature which highlights the sustainability of network relationships as directly proportional to their level of activity, feedback from both the project coordinator and library partners indicate the strength of this network contributed to the success of the engagement between both partners.

## 5.2 Findings by Key Partner Type

### 5.2.1 The Internal Partnership: EW Project Team

As previously noted, the internal partnership represented by the project team has been integral to the success of EW. In spite of identified changes to the scope of the project, constraints on project resources and internal management issues, the team have emerged as key advocates of the resource above and beyond their employment on the Project. An overview of the internal partnership story is included as Appendix 6 of this report.

STRENGTHS/OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flexible staffing model, including EFT and appointment of 'internal' staff, benefited shifts in demand and corresponding changes to staffing levels throughout project lifecycle</li> <li>▪ Opportunities for learning exchange and skills development of project staff</li> <li>▪ Value of professional and personal networks in partnership development and management</li> <li>▪ Values and practice philosophy of staff identified as key enablers in supporting collaborative relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ (Historical) Internal management issues, including impact of non-inclusive management practice</li> <li>▪ <i>Sustainability of Project in current form – shortfall between actual project cost and project funding</i></li> <li>▪ Negotiating and agreeing boundaries of practice - conflict of interest, establishing clear protocols for communicating with third/external parties</li> <li>▪ Time (and resources) required to support partner relationship development/management</li> </ul>

### 5.2.2 The External Partnerships

One of the critical opportunities afforded by the Project, and one of its key outcomes, was the facilitation of collaborative, cross-sector partnerships to supporting early literacy. Whilst such collaborations were most successful in terms of identified reciprocal benefit (e.g. learning exchange) with those partners with a common practice focus, such as Libraries, the Evaluation identified the equal importance of factors such as: shared philosophies (both personal and professional/practice) that recognised a holistic approach to early childhood development and learning, and alignment with practice (including activities) of the partner organisation. Both factors were likely to account for the emergence of key advocates or champions within the partner organisation.

STRENGTHS/OPPORTUNITIES	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shared goals, philosophy and practice ('importance of early learning and literacy in child development)</li> <li>▪ Emergence of 'champions' or key advocates within partner organisation or sector (<i>linked with above</i>)</li> <li>▪ Alignment of practice goals/focus (including complementary activities/programs/initiatives)</li> <li>▪ Responsiveness of EW team</li> <li>▪ Increased opportunities for collaboration in response to identified need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Perceived lack of relevance to practice area (i.e. outside traditional domain of practice) – challenging prevailing practice norms within the constraints of the project</li> <li>▪ Impact of project on existing workload – increase in tasks/responsibilities within the constraints of existing resources</li> <li>▪ Prioritising status of Project within partner organisations(see points above)</li> </ul>

However, the quality and intensity of contact between the partner and EW team was also highlighted as a key factor in the success of the partnership, including outside of traditional allied-practices. There was almost universal acknowledgement of the EW team responsiveness to partner enquiries and requests, and willingness to collaborate and/or support early learning initiatives. Similarly, partners in non-allied practices noted the importance

of collaboration and flexibility in the approach of the EW team in response to identified concerns of the partner organisation.

The utilisation of established networks in engagement with communities is a fundamental principle in community development practice. The engagement of the EW Coordinator at the CLAWS network demonstrates the opportunities for capacity building and learning exchange to facilitate and the importance of established, professional networks in this process. It is recommended that the latter be identified as a key step in the engagement process for any further roll-out of EW. In the absence of alignment in practice backgrounds, such as with Health partners, it is anticipated that whilst such engagement might be difficult to establish in the immediate term, are likely to be beneficial in the medium-long term. In particular, it is anticipated that such efforts will likely to elicit immediate improvements in program reporting and enable the satisfactory reporting against program and population level indicators as per the Project's overarching (RBA) reporting framework. This is also critical in any ongoing evaluation of EW and to ensure the Project contributes to the body of evidence-based practice in relation to early intervention programs targeting the early years.

### **Challenges**

As implied by the recognition of the relationship between practice goals and support of EW, one of the key challenges of the partnership working has been with non-allied practices. The findings suggest that whilst a partner might be focussed on providing *early care* they may not perceive an early leaning or *early literacy intervention* as **directly** relevant to their area of practice. Whilst findings suggest that the impact of this attitude has shifted over the lifecycle of the partnership – from resistance in the early, start-up phase, to participation in the initiative – they remain a key challenge to program reporting specifically and opportunities for enhancing cross-sector collaboration around early literacy generally. This is discussed in more detail below in relation to partners within the health services sector.

However, the challenge of active support of partners in the reporting process is common to partners in both allied and non-allied practice. Whilst in some cases, flexibility in reporting has been clearly been a negotiated term of the partnership, in other cases, less than active commitment to reporting is simply a casualty in the prioritisation of workload in a resource constrained operating environment. Indeed, whilst the value of EW is acknowledged, the demands of practice mean that the universal support for EW partner organisations face the same challenges as any initiative which relies on voluntary participation for its support. Such challenges highlight the structural and operational impediments to program interventions, in addition to issues of 'compliance' where participation in the Project is voluntary.

It is beyond the scope of EW to challenge such barriers to improved or enhanced engagement, particularly those of a structural nature that challenge traditional practice paradigms. However, findings from this research suggest some practicable strategies to improving engagement include targeted interventions by partner type. The example of CLAWS and the opportunities of engaging with professional networks to a whole-of-sector/profession response has undoubtedly facilitated improved collaboration in relation to early literacy in general, and roll-out of Early Words specifically. This may be further enhanced by engaging identified champions within practice areas to (a) advocate on behalf of EW within their professional networks, and/or; (b) facilitate relationships between EW and the identified practice area.

### **Health**

It is suggested that there are a number of unrealised opportunities for further engaging partners within the health services sector to assist in facilitating access of families to EW resources. However, it is clear that there remain some structural and operational impediments to this engagement. Reflecting general research findings within the partnership literature, it is suggested that the relationship with health partners more closely reflects a *cooperative* rather than *collaborative* partnership, reflected in the profile and priority of EW within the organization's practice. Whilst this needs to be considered within the context of demand workload (and 'time poor' health practitioners) and prioritization of non-essential/core business, this is largely attributed to the perceived in-congruency in priority or focus areas of respective partners. As noted at the outset of this report, whilst the partnership model which typically underpins early intervention programs reflects the need for cross-disciplinary responses, there remains a disjuncture between support for this in principle and practice. *This is supported by findings from some health partners who underscore their commitment to early literacy as integral to their practice which adopts an ecological approach to child development that encompasses learning and health.*

A review of website content from a select number of local health services suggest that EW does not appear on their list of programs/initiatives, including those that list early intervention programs. Whilst this may owe more to the currency of the website content, in view of the findings of the Evaluation it may also reflect the *type* of relationship (i.e. cooperative versus collaborative) which reflects the perceived fit with the practice area. As noted in the findings

of this Evaluation, in spite of their involvement in multi-disciplinary early intervention programs targeting the early years, there remain some challenges to the engagement of this sector with such EIPs in practice<sup>26</sup>.

However, the relationship with library partners and select health partners provide a useful strategic and operational framework for strengthening the relationship with health partners. This includes the potential role of peak bodies and professional networks, and advocates within (health) partner organizations to advise on the framing of early literacy in relation to the practice of partner institutions, identification of opportunities within current partner practice to link activities, and the co-facilitation of professional development and training opportunities with this sector<sup>27</sup>. It is further suggested that opportunities through mobile/outreach programs, such as those auspiced under the client's Communities for Children (C4C) funded programs, provide a further opportunity for collaboration<sup>28</sup>. It should be acknowledged that collaborations to facilitate linkages with the sector have occurred in relation to advice on distribution<sup>29</sup>, and public relations opportunities for the project<sup>30</sup>.

### Libraries

The relationship with Library partners provides a clear example of the importance of such influences, particularly when compared with typical partnerships outside of traditional or allied-practice such as Health. Findings suggest that the alignment of practice goals and focus of activities around early learning and literacy facilitated a natural 'fit' between EW and Library partners that has supported the implementation of EW and ongoing opportunities for collaboration and learning around early literacy initiatives. In some instances, EW was cited as a direct influence on renewed focus on aspects of early learning, including the universal implementation of early literacy activities such as Baby Bounce and Rhyme Time in local branch libraries throughout the project area. In other areas, it has supported a re-thinking of practice focus with the EW team providing a key source of information, including evidence-based research and practical tools for facilitating engagement.

This includes between (distributing) partners such as the migrant resources centres and libraries as a result of their mutual involvement with EW. However, the practice background of key contacts within the EW team and partner organisation was also highlighted as a key influence on the success of the partnership. Again, this was demonstrated on the engagement of EW with the CLAWS network where EW Coordinator utilised the established network to engage with library partners at a sector-wide level to advocate for and facilitate universal access to EW and provide sector-wide support around identified professional development needs, such as access to resources around early literacy. The practice background of the EW Coordinator in early childhood education and advocacy in general, and reading recovery specifically, was noted as a key factor in facilitating this relationship, which was identified as one of mutual respect and trust due to the recognition of the strengths and therefore value of the partner practice focus.

However, families accessing libraries are by their engagement with this service already demonstrating an awareness of and/or active interest in early literacy. It is anticipated that outreach strategies, including use of mobile library services, such as the Mobile Book & Toy Library, and neighbourhood-based programs such as those offered through the supported playgroups and migrant resource centres, provide opportunities for engagement of 'hard to reach' families in early literacy activities.

### Other Partners

It is anticipated that the role of early childhood education providers will increase with the release of the 3-5 resources. It is suggested that the specialist background of project staff, such as that noted above, will be of further value in developing and consolidating the relationships to support such partnerships.

Opportunities through transition to school programs and supported playgroups identified to date provide clear outreach strategies for engagement of early childhood and education partners in the next phase of the project and will likely to provide further opportunities for facilitating access to 'early' literacy and dissemination of the 0-2 resource. It is envisaged that in the context of the Commonwealth Government's Early Childhood Agenda, such partnerships offer a unique opportunity to facilitate a whole of community response to early literacy that demonstrates the linkages between early literacy and transition to school *in practice*. The universal implementation of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) in 2009 should provide further opportunities for reporting against key population level data in future.

It is envisaged that in view of linkages established between local libraries and other partners (e.g. MRCs) through their involvement in the Project, EW could play a lead role in brokering relationships between local early childhood

<sup>26</sup> Note: RRMA (phcris.or.au) No category to reflect early literacy/child development

<sup>27</sup> For example: a review of divisional objectives and reporting requirements for key health partners provides the context for this collaboration

<sup>28</sup> This includes the Mobile Book & Toy Library which has ceased operation following the end of C4C funding

<sup>29</sup> This refers to the GP and Practise Nurse Advisory Group reported in *Report on Achievements*, 2005/6 and 2006/7??

<sup>30</sup> Employment of community health nurses in publicity in local print media accompanying the launch of the book voucher scheme

education and care providers and other service providers in support of improved access to early literacy opportunities.

### 5.3 *General Issues*

#### **Resource Development**

The use of advisory groups to the Project has been a key factor in the successful engagement of partners across allied and non-allied sectors throughout all stages of the Project lifecycle. This has included those individual practitioners and organisations that have provided advice on the content of the resources aimed at improving access to this resource for the target population.

Whilst models of 'collaborative' partnerships have been identified by both the project team and external partners as critical to success of the Project, findings from the evaluation point to potential conflict over direction of the Project and actual content between partners that reflect the divergent practice paradigms and professional interests of the respective partners. However, findings also suggest potential conflict between the primacy of specialist versus generalist knowledge at key stages in the project, particularly in content development, and the Project Manager/team in deciding the outcome of such discussions. This is illustrated in the changes to text to reflect 'generalist' advice in support of improved accessibility for culturally and linguistic diverse audiences that changed the intent of the content. Whilst it is not suggested that partnership models move away from the collaborative types demonstrated throughout the project, increased awareness of such tensions and clearer protocols to address potential conflicts of interest need to recognise the primacy of the Project Manager in the decision making process. It is anticipated that the recommendations of this report in relation to the Project's advisory groups support this process.

#### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

A number of issues in relation to monitoring and evaluation of the Project were highlighted in the process of this Evaluation, these include:

- The need to align reporting tools with indicators and outcomes established for the Project as per established reporting frameworks for the Project (i.e. RBA)
- The challenge of relying on third parties for data collection particularly the related issues of data quality, reliability and accessibility.

Whilst the question of access in relation EW might be understood to relate to that data collected by partner organisations as per the reporting requirements of the program, it could also extend to primary data collection which EW wants to collect through the partner organisation (e.g. client satisfaction with resource). In the latter, as EW has no direct relationship with the families, the collection of this data can be problematic as EW is dependant on the partner to 'broker' the relationship or recruit parents/families or rely on partners to collect data on behalf of EW. This is potentially problematic for a number of reasons not least due to the correlation between the priorities of the partner organisations. (Given the voluntary basis for the EW partnerships, in the absence of a formal agreement between EW and partners we have not used the term compliance which implies program reporting is a formal requirement of the partnership). Findings from the Evaluation indicate that some partners have indicated they neither regularly nor accurately report on the distribution of EW resources, with reasons principally relating to the priorities of the partner: their existing workload does not necessarily permit time for additional reporting (on non-core or 'marginal' activity) or its not central to their task and is therefore overlooked (difference between 'essential' and 'desirable').

It is suggested that further consideration be given to monitoring and evaluation of the Project as a matter of priority. Evidence from the Evaluation suggests that partners appreciated opportunity to adapt the distribution process to reflect their practice environment, and reported a corresponding positive attitude toward participating in the distribution of EW resources. Such reviews provide an opportunity for streamlining data collection – whereby data of mutual interest could be combined (e.g. demographic data).

As previously noted, issues of reliability of such data needs to be considered in future monitoring and reporting for the project. The inclusion of a survey in the '3-5' resource was aimed at improving data collection on parent/family use of and satisfaction. The inclusion of an incentive in the first phase of distribution was employed to facilitate the timely return of this feedback for inclusion in this report.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX 1: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES BY SOURCE DATA**

FAMILIES NSW OUTCOME	FAMILIES NSW PERFORMANCE MEASURE	RBA <sup>31</sup> PERFORMANCE INDICATOR
1. Facilitate access of families from target groups to relevant services	1.1 Increased number of families with children 0-5 accessing the relevant services	% of services distributing (hospitals, GP, practices, MRCs, ECCs (LDC and FDCs), Playgroups)
2. Provides extra support with access to culturally appropriate early literacy opportunities to CALD and Aboriginal families from target groups	2.1 Number of families from target groups gaining information to early learning opportunities	Number and Type of Product distributed by Language
	2.2 Number of sessions with appropriate service providers to implement early learning strategies	Number of training opportunities delivered
3. Facilitate a whole of community approach to literacy and early learning	3.1 Percentage of families or individuals accessing early learning opportunities	
	3.2 Percentage of families and individuals with improved understanding of value of early learning opportunities	
	3.3 Number of services and networks involved in the dissemination of information on the communities shared responsibilities for early learning	Distribution Point/Partner Type Consultations provided by Service Type
4. Facilitate with services to implement sustainable, culturally appropriate and supportive ways to promote the importance of book reading and storytelling to children	4.1 Number of groups (e.g. playgroups, parent support groups, cultural transition programs for target group parents and other groups determined by emerging specific needs)	Distribution Point/Partner Type
	4.2 Number of culturally appropriate guides to handy hints and book guides developed	Distribution of resources by Language
5. Increase their [target group] use of appropriate community early literacy services	5.1 Number of instances where support or assistance is provided by main support types including local libraries	
	5.2 Number of community opportunities to promote importance of early literacy	Consultations provided by Service Type
6. Develop outreach strategies to meet the needs of families within target group by community organisations	6.1 Number of service providers attending workshops for service providers working with families from target groups	Number of workers who attended these training opportunities by professions, service types
	6.2 Workshop evaluation survey	% service providers reporting positively on the accessibility of: EW resources, and consultation and support
	6.3 Participation in relevant planning and consultative structures	
	6.4 Number of referrals between agencies	
	6.5 Number of resources developed	Number and Type of Products
	6.6 Number of combined services information sessions for targeted families	
	6.7 Evaluation feedback for targeted group	

<sup>31</sup> Results Based Accountability (RBA) Performance Indicators as per RBA reporting framework for the Project



## **APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF SELECTED CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING DATA (2006)**

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### *0-5 year old population*

Looking at the demographics of Early Words' 5 target LGAs all have a higher proportion of residents in the 0-4 year age group than the national average (6.3% of the resident population are in the 0-4 year age group nationally). In Parramatta, 6.9% of the resident population are aged 0-4 years, in Auburn this figure is 7.5% and in Holroyd it is 7.3%. Blacktown has the highest proportion of residents in the 0-4 year age group of the 5 LGAs at 8.2%, and Baulkham Hills has the lowest at 6.6%, but it is still above the national average.

### *Aboriginal population*

Of the 5 target LGAs, only Blacktown has a proportion of Indigenous (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) persons higher than the national average of 2.3%, with 2.6% of residents classified as Indigenous in the 2006 Census. In Parramatta this figure is 0.8% in 2006 for Auburn it is 0.7%, Holroyd is 0.8% and Baulkham Hills is the lowest at 0.3%.

### *CALD population*

The 5 LGAs also have significantly higher share of persons born overseas than the national average (22.2%). Auburn has the highest share, 53.2%- almost double the national rate, followed by Parramatta (40.3%), Holroyd (39.4%), Blacktown (34.3%) and Baulkham Hills (29.9%).

For the five LGAs other than Australia the main responses for country of birth are: Parramatta: (China, India, Lebanon, England, New Zealand), Auburn: (China, Viet Nam, Turkey, Lebanon, Korea), Holroyd (Lebanon, India, China, New Zealand, Sri Lanka), Blacktown (Philippines, India, New Zealand, England and Fiji) and Baulkham Hills (England, China, Hong Kong, India and New Zealand).

Another pronounced deviation from the national picture for these 5 LGAs is the much lower proportion of residents who speak English only at home. In 2006, 78.5 per cent of Australians spoke English only at home, however all 5 Early Words LGAs have rates below this figure. Auburn has the lowest proportion (only 22.1 per cent, or around 1 in 5, residents speak English only at home) and Baulkham Hills the highest (72.5 % of residents speak English only at home, fractionally below the national average). In Parramatta less than half, 48.8%, of residents speak English only at home and the figure is similar in Holroyd (48.6%). In Blacktown the proportion of residents who speak English only at home is 62.1 per cent, which is still below the national average.

In the 2006 Census the main responses to other languages spoken for each LGA are as follows:

- Parramatta: Arabic (10.7%), Cantonese (5.0%), Mandarin (4.7%), Korean (2.1%) and Hindi (2.0%).
- Auburn: Arabic (12.5%), Cantonese (10.6%), Turkish (7.2%), Mandarin (7.0%) and Korean (3.2%)
- Holroyd: Arabic (12.4%), Cantonese (2.5%), Tamil (2.4%), Mandarin (2.1%) and Hindi (2.0%)
- Blacktown: Tagalog (3.6%), Arabic (3.2%), Hindi (2.6%), Filipino (2.1%) and Samoan (1.2%)
- Baulkham Hills: Cantonese (4.5%), Mandarin (2.4%), Arabic (1.8%), Korean (1.6%) and Italian (1.4%).

Examining main languages spoken outside of English in the 5 LGAs listed above, (and given that Auburn, Parramatta and Holroyd have the highest proportion of English not spoken at home of the 5 target LGAs), the dominant non-English languages from the target area would appear to be: Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Turkish, Tamil, Korean and Hindi. These are all included in the nine community languages chosen by Early Words: Arabic (AR), Chinese (CH), Dari (DA), Hindi (HI), Korean (KO), Tamil (TA), Turkish (TU), Urdu (UR) and Vietnamese (VI).

### *Employment status*

Looking at economic data for the target LGAs in 2006, all LGAs with the exception of Baulkham Hills, have an unemployment rate above the national unemployment rate recorded by the 2006 Census (5.2%). The unemployment rate is highest in Auburn (9.1%), followed by Holroyd (6.9%), Blacktown (6.8%), Parramatta (6.7%) and Baulkham Hills (3.2%), whose unemployment rate is approximately half the other LGAs, and a third of Auburn's. Similarly Parramatta (\$1,172 per week), Auburn (\$999 per week), Holroyd (\$1,121) all have a median weekly family income below the national average of \$1,171 per week. The median family income in Blacktown (\$1,188 per week) is slightly higher and, it is substantially higher in Baulkham Hills (\$1,847 per week).

### *Household composition*

2006 Census data on family structure reveal all 5 Early Word LGAs have a higher proportion of couple families with children, than the national average of 45.3%. Baulkham Hills had the highest proportion of couple families with children (59.7%), followed by Auburn (54.6%), Blacktown (53.3%), Holroyd (49.6%) and Parramatta (49.2%). With the exception of Baulkham Hills, the target LGAs have a slightly higher proportion of sole parents than the national

average (15.8%). Blacktown has the highest proportion of sole parents (19.8%), followed by Holroyd (17.8%), Parramatta (16.2%), Auburn (16.1%) and Baulkham Hills (9.9%), which is below the national average.

*Measures of Dis/advantage*

According to the ABS index of socio-economic advantage or disadvantage for an area (SEIFA<sup>32</sup>, of the five (5) Local Government Areas targeted in the Early Words program, Auburn is the most disadvantaged and Baulkham Hills is the most advantaged according to the ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSED). Baulkham Hills is in the top Decile (top 99th percentile) while Auburn is in the 2 Decile (or bottom 20 per cent of LGAs in Australia). Blacktown is in Decile 5, (or the 49th percentile), Holroyd is also in Decile 5 (or the 49<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Parramatta is in Decile 7, (or the 61<sup>st</sup> percentile). Similarly Auburn ranks low on the Index of Economic Resources (which looks at income and assets of residents, such as whether owning home and number of motor vehicles) and is the most disadvantaged LGA of the 5 target areas. According to the Index of Economic Resources, Auburn is in Decile 3 (26<sup>th</sup> percentile), while Baulkham Hills is in Decile 10 (100<sup>th</sup> percentile or top 1 per cent); Blacktown is in Decile 7, (61<sup>st</sup> percentile), Holroyd ranks in Decile 5 (45<sup>th</sup> percentile) and Parramatta ranks in Decile 6 (51<sup>st</sup> percentile).

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<sup>32</sup> ) Whereby a high index value (and Decile rank) represents a relatively advantaged Local Government Area (LGA), and a low value is relatively disadvantaged Local Government Area

### **APPENDIX 3: DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

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#### *Primary Data Collection*

The utilisation of qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus groups were particularly useful in the exploration of key stakeholders' experience of their engagement with the Early Words initiative.

#### Interviews and Focus Group with Project Management Team

The Evaluation included key informant interviews with current and former senior members of the project team (i.e. project coordinators), and a focus group with the current project team. The interviews with project coordinators, both past and present, were critical in understanding the 'story behind the data' and together with the review of secondary data sources, critical in identifying key partners in the Project. (This was particularly important for the purposes of the key informant interviews).

In addition to satisfying the requirements of the Evaluation, the focus discussion with the current project team provided a useful opportunity to reflect on the 'internal partnership story' at a critical time in the Project. The questions to focus discussion related to the following areas (1) key attributes of participants, including project role, length of time with the project, and practice background; (2) overview of the EW team and their evolving role during the different phases of the project; (3) reflection of program outcomes and report on how these have been achieved; (4) Identification of strengths and challenges, and (5) reflections on the process.

The interview with the (former) project coordinator who was involved in the early stages of the Project was critical in providing a contemporary account of the development of the Project, *and thus important context to the current program.*

#### Interviews with a sample of key informants from service partner organisations

As part of the consultation with service partner organisations, semi-structured telephone interviews were held with key informants from partner organisations. These included key contacts within libraries, migrant resource centres, hospitals and general practitioners. Due to the time constraints on the Evaluation, the recruitment and selection of interviewees was undertaken on the basis of interviewing a cross-section of key contacts from partner 'types' (i.e. library, hospital, migrant resource centre), with at least one interview sought per partner type. Identification of key informants was undertaken further to advice provided by the Client and identification of key contacts following the review of secondary data sources. In total, fourteen (14) interviews were conducted<sup>33</sup> comprising representatives from the majority of partner types including: libraries (5), health (3), early childhood and education (2), migrant resource centres (3).

The selection of a cross-sector of partner types enabled the inclusion of different organisational and practice perspectives areas as well as those with responsibility for distribution of a diverse range of Early Words resources, including 'universal', Aboriginal and CALD resources.

#### Survey of (Service) Partners

Given the time limitations for this Evaluation, a survey of key contacts in partner organisations was undertaken concurrently with interview and key focus discussions. The design of the survey was undertaken in consultation with the client and informed by key informant interviews within partner organisations

As per the Evaluation brief, the client assisted in the dissemination and collection of this survey due to the time limitations for the Evaluation and need to facilitate a timely response from partners. In total, thirty eight (38) surveys were returned from partner organisations.

However, delays in the dissemination and return of the survey were experienced due to incomplete or incorrect contact details for some partner organisations.

#### Focus group with (KELM) reference group for Aboriginal resources

The development of an Aboriginal version of the EW resources has been a major output of the Project. In addition to achieving key outcomes of the Project, the production of the resource represents a key achievement in early intervention programs targeting Aboriginal families as the first early literacy resource of its kind in NSW and possibly Australia. Given the role of the KELM Reference Group in the development of this resource, the exploration of this partnership formed a critical component of the Evaluation and the 'partnership story' which underpins EW.

*Unfortunately, no Terms of Reference were available for the group.*

#### Surveys of Parents/Families

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<sup>33</sup> In total, 15 people participated in these interviews with one interview a group interview.

One of the first tasks of the Evaluation team was to provide advice on the survey instrument for families to be distributed with the 3-5 year old DVD. The purpose of this survey was to identify levels of awareness, utilisation, and satisfaction with the EW resources, and the impact of the resources on knowledge, skills and behaviour in relation to early literacy.

An abridged version of this survey was subsequently utilised in the survey of families disseminated with the 3-5 year old DVD resource. Due to the scheduled distributed of the 3-5 year resource (and therefore survey) outside of the proposed timeframe for the Evaluation, several strategies were adopted to facilitate the inclusion of preliminary data from this survey in this report in addition to the extension to the timescale for the Evaluation. These included: the active assistance of the Project Coordinator in the distribution and collection of the survey including facilitated visits to partner organisations to coincide with scheduled early literacy programs/activities; the inclusion of reply-paid; a prize draw of an EW resource pack for respondents.

#### Surveys of Aboriginal Parents/Families

Further to the key objective of the Evaluation in relation to take-up of Early Words resources (for 0-2 year olds) by families within the targeted populations, and specific focus on the Aboriginal resources developed under this initiative. Further interviews and telephone surveys were sought with parents accessing the Aboriginal DVD resource who had previously expressed interest in providing feedback on their use of this resource<sup>34</sup>, thereby providing a time series snapshot 'pre' and 'post' the EW intervention on parents knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour in relation to early literacy.

Of the fourteen (14) expressions of interest received, only four (4) mothers were able to be contacted and participated in the telephone survey. The low response of parents can be largely attributed to the inability to contact parents on the numbers provided due to the disconnection of the service. This highlights two important issues for future data collection and engagement with this cohort. Firstly, the reliability of this method of data collection due to the time elapsed between survey completion and follow-up interview and issues of access to telecommunications services for this group.

In addition to the telephone survey, key informant interviews were sought with two Aboriginal parents who provided feedback in the development of this resource, with interviews conducted with one parent.

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<sup>34</sup> Questionnaire for Aboriginal Families (Early Words, April 2008)

**APPENDIX 4: KEY FINDINGS BY PROGRAM OUTCOMES – WHAT DID WE DO**

WHAT DID WE DO	OUTCOME & PERFORMANCE MEASURE (PM)	SOURCE DATA
<p><b>Number and type of products distributed by: language, suburb<sup>35</sup>, distribution point</b></p> <p><b>All resources (type):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 20 ‘new’ resources (inclusive tip sheets and magnets per key stage) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 2 DVDs; 8 tip sheets; 8 magnets</li> <li>○ 7 resource ‘kits’</li> <li>○ website</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ 289, 872 resources distributed to date <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 53,709 Antenatal DVDs/DVD packs</li> <li>○ 1,096 3-5 year DVDs<sup>36</sup></li> <li>○ 109,000 Tip Sheets and Magnets</li> <li>○ 2,593 library packs</li> <li>○ 4,464 book vouchers for children aged 0-6 months</li> <li>○ 1,828 library bags with: 1,127 Baby Books (0-6 months) and 747 ‘Only Me’ books</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Develop outreach strategies to meet the needs of families within target group by community organisations (6.5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. resources developed</i></li> </ul> <p>Provides extra support with access to culturally appropriate early literacy opportunities to CALD and Aboriginal families from target groups (2.1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. families from target group gaining information to learning opportunities</i></li> </ul>	<p>Delivery Summary Code Lists</p>

<sup>35</sup> Data not available for suburb

<sup>36</sup> This figure should be understood in the context of the recent release of this resource in October 2008

WHAT DID WE DO	OUTCOME & PERFORMANCE MEASURE (PM)	SOURCE DATA
<i>Distribution of resources by key domain area:</i>		
<p><b>Language</b></p> <p>Aboriginal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of an 'Aboriginal English' version of the 0-2 year DVD</li> <li>▪ Distribution of 6,461 Aboriginal resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 485 '0-2' DVDs</li> <li>○ 916 Aboriginal Library Bags</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>CALD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Translation of universal resources (i.e. tip sheets, magnets, posters), into nine (9) identified community languages (PO 4.2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 16% all resources distributed in languages other than English (LOTE): 1 in 4 in Arabic; 1 in 5 in Chinese</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Provides extra support with access to culturally appropriate early literacy opportunities to CALD and Aboriginal families from target groups (2.1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. families from target group gaining information to learning opportunities</i></li> </ul> <p>Facilitate with services to implement sustainable, culturally appropriate and supportive ways to promote the importance of book reading and storytelling to children (4.2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. culturally appropriate guides to handy hints and books guides developed</i></li> </ul> <p>Develop outreach strategies to meet the needs of families within target group by community organisations (6.5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Participation in relevant planning and consultative structures (6.3)</i></li> </ul>	<p>Delivery Summary Code Lists</p>

WHAT DID WE DO	OUTCOME & PERFORMANCE MEASURE (PM)	SOURCE DATA
<p><b>Distribution Point/Partner Type</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 89 service partners engaged in the distribution of EW resources<sup>37</sup>, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 27 Health, 11 Early Learning and Care<sup>38</sup>; 18 Libraries</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ 22,943 DVD packs delivered ante-natally through Hospitals</li> <li>▪ 150 childcare centres engaged in delivery of 3-5 year DVD (PO 6.1)</li> <li>▪ 4,585 resources distributed 'Out of Area'</li> <li>▪ 22 libraries across 5 LGAs received two copies of 3-5 DVD resource</li> </ul>	<p>Facilitate a whole of community approach to literacy and early learning (3.3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. services &amp; networks involved with dissemination of information on the communities shared responsibilities for early learning</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Number of training opportunities delivered by: location, service type, and training type</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 6 'Early Literacy' (0-3 years) seminars held between Oct 05 – May 06 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Castle Hill (n=41), Blacktown (30), Auburn (11), Parramatta (21) and Baulkham Hills (15)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Facilitate a whole of community approach to literacy and early learning (3.3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. services &amp; networks involved with dissemination of information on the communities shared responsibilities for early learning</i></li> </ul> <p>Increase their [target group] use of appropriate community early literacy services (5.1, 5.2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. instances where support or assistance is provided by main support type</i></li> <li>▪ <i>No. community opportunities to promote early literacy</i></li> </ul> <p>Develop outreach strategies to meet the needs of families within target group by community organisations (6.1, 6.3, 6.5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. service providers attending workshops</i></li> </ul>	

<sup>37</sup> Total number of partners engaged in delivery of EW resources for the period for April 2007 – August 2008 (Source: Delivery Summary by Partner, Early Words).

<sup>38</sup> This includes long day care centres, day care centres and preschools

WHAT DID WE DO	OUTCOME & PERFORMANCE MEASURE (PM)	SOURCE DATA
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Participation in relevant planning and consultative structures</i></li> <li>▪ <i>No. combined services information</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Number of workers who attended these training opportunities by: profession, service type</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 118 persons attending Early Literacy Seminars (Oct 05 – May 06)</li> <li>▪ <i>NB: organisational details not available for all attendees</i></li> </ul>		
<p><b>Consultation provided by service type (teachable moments) research indicates importance of drip-feeding in capacity building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Over 13,000 service visits (Aug 07 – Feb 08)</li> <li>▪ ‘Train the Trainer’ workshops scheduled for 2009</li> </ul> <p>Presentations to regional and national forums:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Families NSW Early Literacy Forum (October and November 2007)</li> <li>▪ Presentation to Auburn Library (July? 2006)</li> <li>▪ Sing n’ Grow Training Session, Playgroup NSW (May 07)</li> </ul> <p><b>Libraries</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participation in quarterly meetings of CLAWS network</li> </ul> <p><b>Education and learning centres</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 5 presentations to ‘Transition to School Network’ meetings (Aug 08)</li> <li>▪ Promotion of 3-5 year DVD for Transition to School programs</li> </ul> <p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participation in community-based cultural and literacy events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NAIDOC Week (July 2008)</li> <li>○ ‘Simultaneous Storytime’, Library Information Week (May 08)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Facilitate a whole of community approach to literacy and early learning (3.3, 3.3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. services &amp; networks involved with dissemination of information on the communities shared responsibilities for early learning</i></li> <li>▪ <i>No. combined services information sessions for targeted families</i></li> </ul> <p>Increase their [target group] use of appropriate community early literacy services (5.1, 5.2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>No. instances where support or assistance is provided by main support type</i></li> </ul>	<p>Delivery Summary Codes</p> <p>CLAWS Reference Group: minutes of meetings</p> <p>NSW State Librarian, Letter dated: 6 August 2008</p> <p>BC0708</p> <p>BC0808</p>

WHAT DID WE DO	OUTCOME & PERFORMANCE MEASURE (PM)	SOURCE DATA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Little Book Club, Mem Fox Event, Blacktown Library(Nov 08)</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Partner feedback forms circulated etc</i></li> <li>▪ 1,096 surveys for parents distributed with '3-5' DVD resource</li> </ul>		

**APPENDIX 4: KEY FINDINGS BY PROGRAM OUTCOMES – HOW WELL DID WE DO IT**

HOW WELL DID WE DO IT	OUTCOME	SOURCE DATA
<p><b>(1) FAMILIES</b></p> <p><b>% of services distributing (hospitals, GP practices, MRCs, ECCs (LDC and FDCs), Playgroups</b></p> <p>% families reporting positively on the accessibility of EW resources</p>	<p>Facilitate access of families from target groups to relevant services (1.1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Increased no. families accessing relevant services</i></li> </ul> <p>Facilitate a whole of community approach to literacy and early learning (3.1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>% families accessing early literacy opportunities</i></li> </ul> <p>Develop outreach strategies to meet the needs of families within target group by community organisations (6.2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Workshop evaluation survey</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>(2) SERVICES</b></p> <p><b>% of service providers reporting positively on the accessibility of: EW resources, and consultation and support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Early Literacy Seminars – overall satisfaction: 61/118 sessions ‘very informative’, 29/118 ‘some good ideas’; satisfaction with information disseminated (i.e. handouts) – 64% (76) ‘lots good ideas’, 25% (29) ‘some’. Impact on practice –</li> <li>▪ Partner Survey</li> </ul>		<p>Summary Early Literacy Seminar 0-3 years, 2005/6</p> <p>Early Words Resources: Partner Survey, September 2008</p>

APPENDIX 4: KEY FINDINGS BY PROGRAM OUTCOMES – IS ANYONE BETTER OFF

IS ANYONE BETTER OFF	OUTCOME	SOURCE DATA
<p><b>(1) FAMILIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Families and individuals with improved understanding of value of early learning opportunities</i></li> </ul>	<p>Facilitate a whole of community approach to literacy and early learning (3.2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>% families with improved understanding</i></li> </ul> <p>Develop outreach strategies to meet the needs of families within target group by community organisations (6.7)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Evaluation feedback for targeted group</i></li> </ul>	
<p><b>(2) SERVICES</b></p> <p><b>Skills &amp; Knowledge</b></p> <p><b>Increased knowledge of service providers of the importance of early literacy skills and practices for children 0-5 years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ % training participants reporting positively on: learnt something new, can apply it to practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Early Literacy Seminars (05/06) -</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ % identified service distribution partners who report something new</li> </ul>	<p>Develop outreach strategies to meet the needs of families within target group by community organisations (6.7)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Evaluation feedback for targeted group</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Delivery Summary Code Lists</b> <b>2006-07 Annual Performance Report, DOCS</b> <b>CLAWS Report 03-08</b></p>
<p><b>Attitudes (from 2008 onwards)</b></p>		

IS ANYONE BETTER OFF	OUTCOME	SOURCE DATA
<p><b>Behaviour</b></p> <p><b>Increased use of appropriate early learning practices by targeted service providers (playgroups, ECCs and libraries)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ % of training participants at follow-up training sessions report they used something new</li> <li>▪ % of identified service distribution partners who report used new practice/strategy                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 80% (n95) seminar would change their practice</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		<p>Early Literacy Seminar Evaluation Summary, Early Words, 2006</p>

## APPENDIX 5 PERFORMANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF POPULATION LEVEL DATA

### Overall Distribution/Distribution of Resources by Population

By any measure the volume of the Early Words' distribution has been very high. Since its inception Early Words has distributed 289,872 items including: DVDs (0-3 yrs and 3-5 years), tip sheets (in 9 languages, as well as English and Aboriginal English), magnets, bookmarks, book vouchers, books t-shirts and Top Tips posters. The team have distributed 22,943 DVD packs antenatally and 1,096 3-5 year DVDs. They have distributed 63,312 items through Community Health providers and 55,266 through GPs. 81,845 items were translated into nine community languages, and 6,878 items were distributed (DVDs, tip-sheets, magnets and t-shirts) in Aboriginal English. Through an active engagement with local libraries Early Words has distributed 4,464 book vouchers for children aged 0-6 months, 2,593 library packs (consisting of tip-sheets and magnets) and 1,828 library bags, along with 1,127 Baby Books (for 0-6 months) and 747 Only Me books. Additionally 6,461 Aboriginal resources have been distributed (including 485 Aboriginal 0-3 year DVDs).

Simply dividing resources by population, where population is measured as the 0-5 year population in 2006 and resources are the sum of all items distributed, 4.35 resources have been distributed per 0-5 year old child in the 5 target LGAs. As the 3-5 year resource has only recently been completed, and many of the Aboriginal resources are yet to be released this is most likely an underestimation of the potential delivery per person for the 3-5 year population.

### Distribution by Local Government Area

Five disadvantaged LGAs in Western Sydney were identified as the target area for the EW program: Blacktown, Holroyd, Parramatta, Auburn and Baulkham Hills.

Given that Early Words at this stage has predominately focused on under 3 population, comparison of program and Census statistics are made for that age group. Counts of children from the most recent Census reveal almost half (40%) of the 0-2 year population for the 5 target LGAs are resident in the Blacktown LGA and 20 per cent are in Baulkham Hills; the distribution is very similar for the 3-5 year population. Comparing this to the EW program statistics, the distribution of Early Words resources fits well with the distribution for 0-2 year olds across the 5 LGAs from the Census.)

In pure population terms Blacktown and Baulkham Hills are potentially under catered for in terms of the distribution of EW items, and Auburn and Parramatta are perhaps over-catered for. However as the 2006 Census LGA profile above shows Auburn and Parramatta are relatively disadvantaged LGAs with a high proportion of non-English speakers, as such they are likely to include hard to reach families and families for whom English is not the first language, which may be amongst Early Words' target audience. Blacktown is however reasonably disadvantaged LGA, with a high proportion of families with children and Indigenous residents, so perhaps some reallocation resource distribution to match the very large share of 0-5 population found in this LGA, is worthy of future attention.

**Table 8: Distribution of 0-5 Year Population for 5 Target LGAs, 2006.**

LGA	0	1 Year	2 Years	0-2 Year Total	%
Baulkham Hills (A)	2,027	2,018	2,120	6,165	18.6
Blacktown (C)	4,561	4,517	4,377	13,455	40.6
Holroyd (C)	1,469	1,336	1,263	4,068	12.3
Parramatta (C)	2,220	2,106	2,054	6,380	19.2
Auburn (A)	1,104	1,014	982	3,100	9.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,381</b>	<b>10,991</b>	<b>10,796</b>	<b>33,168</b>	
	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years	3-5 Year Total	%
Baulkham Hills (A)	2,200	2,209	2,365	6,774	20.9
Blacktown (C)	4,472	4,477	4,615	13,564	41.9
Holroyd (C)	1,265	1,251	1,176	3,692	11.4
Parramatta (C)	1,965	1,845	1,827	5,637	17.4
Auburn (A)	915	889	889	2,693	8.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,817</b>	<b>10,671</b>	<b>10,872</b>	<b>32,360</b>	

Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2006.

**Table 9: Total Resources by LGA**

	Total Items	%	Ratio Resources to 0-5 Year Population
Auburn	38,014	13.3	6.56
Baulkham Hills	37,823	13.3	2.92
Blacktown	90,257	31.7	3.34
Holroyd	32,760	11.5	4.22
Parramatta	81,354	28.6	6.77
Out of Area	4,585	1.6	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>284,793</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>4.35</b>

Source: *Early Words, Program Statistics (March 2006-October 2008)* and *ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2006*.

Looking at the ratio of resources to population (see Table 9), Parramatta appears to be particularly well catered for and Blacktown and Baulkham Hills appear to be under catered for. Parramatta averages 6.77 resources per child and Baulkham Hills averages 2.92 per 0-5 year old child, however Baulkham Hills is relatively affluent LGA compared to the other target LGAs and this may be appropriate. Blacktown, as discussed, is also below average in its ratio of resource per 0-5 year old, 3.34, which may be of concern given its relative disadvantage with a high proportion of families speaking languages other than English at home (see SEIFA analysis in the Appendix).

Looking at LGA statistics for resource type (see Table 10 below), comparison is made difficult because Early Words hospital delivery statistics are recorded on the basis of the address of the partner rather than the recipient of the DVD. As Holroyd has no hospital and there are two major hospitals in Parramatta (Westmead Public and Westmead Private) the distribution figures for DVD are most likely skewed. No doubt many people who live in Holroyd are serviced by Westmead Hospital in Parramatta, and thus DVDs received by Holroyd residents are being counted in the Parramatta LGA. Given the poor reporting by partners of recipient's postcode this issue becomes difficult to untangle. Given Blacktown has 41% of the 0-2 year population, Blacktown's Early Words program statistics are somewhat below its population share both in terms of DVDs distributed by hospitals and library packs distributed by libraries (24% and 23% respectively), the distribution of DVDs and tip-sheets by Community Health nurses in Blacktown (as a proportion of total Community Health distribution), is however very high

**Table 10: Early Words, Delivery Statistics by Resource Type, by LGA.**

	DVD Hospital Pack	%	Library Packs	%	Library Bags	Tip-sheet (Community Health)	%	DVD Community Health	%
Auburn	3,997	16.1	474	18.5	517	553	12.0	475	11.2
Baulkham Hills	3,104	12.5	610	23.8	180	710	15.4	703	16.6
Blacktown	5,975	24.1	578	22.5	375	2,322	50.2	2,089	49.4
Holroyd	0.0	0.0	456	17.8	451	314	6.8	266	6.3
Parramatta	9,635	38.8	448	17.5	270	726	15.7	699	16.5
Out of Area	2,108	8.5		0.0			0.0	1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>24,819</b>		<b>2,566</b>		<b>1,793</b>	<b>4,625</b>		<b>4,233</b>	

Source: *Early Words, Program Statistics (March 2006-October 2008)*.

### Community Language Resource

In addition to Aboriginal English (AB), the Early Words' resource has been translated into nine community languages: Arabic (AR), Chinese (CH), Dari (DA), Hindi (HI), Korean (KO), Tamil (TA), Turkish (TU), Urdu (UR) and Vietnamese (VI).

**A Report on the Evaluation of Early Words (December 2008)**  
**APPENDICES**

Looking at the fit between the Early Words resource distribution for the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Groups across each of the languages, and the Census statistics of 0-5 year population for each of the nine language group in the 5 target LGAs, the resource distribution across the nine languages would seem to be a good fit. The Arabic population, which represents a significant share of the CALD 0-5 year population (37%, so over 1 in 3 CALD children speak Arabic) would appear to be under catered for relative its share of the population, receiving only 24% of all resources. Chinese and the other languages with the exception of Hindi are marginally over-catered for, given the population share of 0-5 year olds in the 5 target LGAs.

**Table 11: Counts of 0-5 Year Olds for Nine EW Community Languages, 2006.**

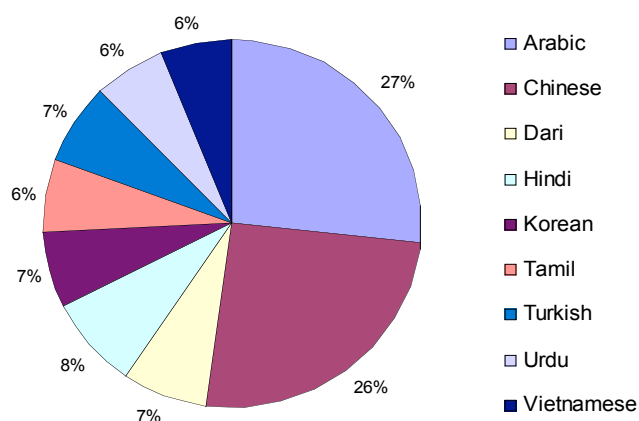
AGE	Dari	Arabic	Turkish	Tamil	Hindi	Urdu	Vietnamese	Chinese	Korean	TOTAL
0	146	774	116	144	202	74	86	514	112	2,168
1	174	1,476	210	236	282	144	126	808	224	3,680
2	128	1,738	290	280	460	196	148	1,008	246	4,494
<b>0-2 Years</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>3,988</b>	<b>616</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>944</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>2,330</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>10,342</b>
3	130	1,818	302	284	472	220	154	1,102	284	4,766
4	124	1,716	284	274	372	218	154	1,116	244	4,502
5	174	1,602	302	244	404	222	188	1,228	294	4,658
<b>3-5 Years</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>5,136</b>	<b>888</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>1,248</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>3,446</b>	<b>822</b>	<b>13,926</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>9,124</b>	<b>1,504</b>	<b>1,462</b>	<b>2,192</b>	<b>1,074</b>	<b>856</b>	<b>5,776</b>	<b>1,404</b>	<b>24,268</b>

Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing 2006

Comparing Census and program statistics, the distribution of the Early Words' DVD pack (as distributed by hospitals) across the nine community languages is in line with population statistics for under 5 population in each of the Community Languages in the five LGAs.

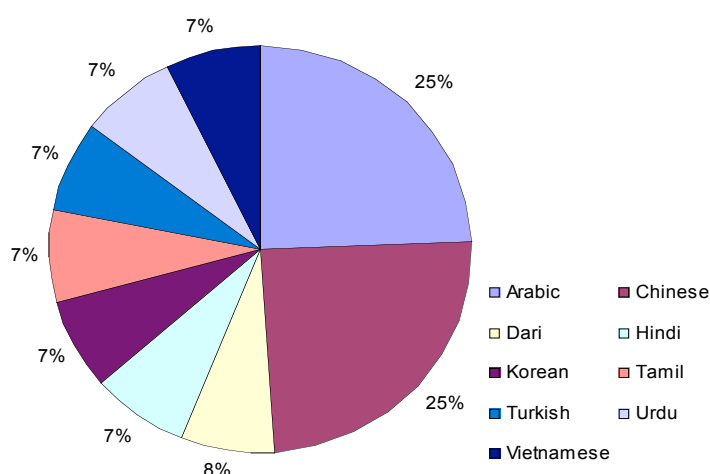
Figure 3 illustrates the proportional distribution of the Early Words' CALD DVD packs (as distributed by hospitals) across the nine community languages. This is in line with population statistics for under 5 population in each of the community languages in the five LGAs. The distribution of Community Health tip-sheets is in line with the population distribution across the 9 community languages according to the Census.

**Figure 3: DVD Hospital Pack Distribution by Community Languages, Five Target LGAs**



Source: Early Words, Program Statistics (March 2006-October 2008)..

**Figure 4: Tip Sheets distributed by Community Health by Community Language, Five Target LGAs.**



Source: *Early Words, Program Statistics (March 2006-October 2008)*..

Table 12 provides a very interesting breakdown of language proficiency for children aged 0-5 Years for the 5 target LGAs. As can be seen below, and as discussed in the background on each LGA, Auburn has a very high proportion of non-English speakers (of the nine community languages the majority of residents speak Chinese). Of total families in Auburn who stated their English proficiency, 43.6% of children aged 0-5 years are in families who report that they do not speak English well or at all. In Parramatta 24% of children aged 0-5 years are in families who do not speak English well or at all, and the same figure for Holroyd is 23 %.

**Table 12: Language Proficiency of Children Aged 0-5 Years by LGA, 2006.**

	Speaks Language Other than English		Speaks English Well/Not At All		Not Stated	Speaks English Only		Total
	Speaks English Very Well/Well	%	English Well	Not At All		%	%	
Baulkham Hills (A)	1,386	<b>13.0</b>	745	<b>7.0</b>	783	8,521	<b>80.0</b>	11,435
Blacktown (C)	3,549	<b>16.6</b>	2,554	<b>12.0</b>	2761	15,260	<b>71.4</b>	24,124
Holroyd (C)	1,685	<b>28.2</b>	1,353	<b>22.6</b>	1165	2,939	<b>49.2</b>	7,142
Parramatta (C)	2,413	<b>25.7</b>	2,258	<b>24.0</b>	1611	4,735	<b>50.3</b>	11,017
Auburn (A)	1,515	<b>34.0</b>	1,943	<b>43.6</b>	1,110	997	<b>22.4</b>	5,565
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,548</b>	<b>20.3</b>	<b>8,853</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>7430</b>	<b>32,452</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>59,283</b>

Source: *ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2006.*

**Table 13: Persons in Early Words Language Groups for 5 LGAs, 2006.**

EW Language	Holroyd	%	Auburn	%	Parramatta	%	Blacktown	%	Baulkham Hills	%
Arabic	11,176	13.3	8,094	14.1	15,834	11.5	8,814	3.4	2,926	1.9
Chinese*	4,326	5.1	12,024	21.0	14,838	10.8	5,469	2.1	11,402	7.4
Dari	1,118	1.3	1,481	2.6	1,069	0.8	1,071	0.4	243	0.2
Hindi	1,832	2.2	654	1.1	3,003	2.2	7,176	2.8	1,491	1.0
Korean	574	0.7	2,092	3.6	3,127	2.3	1,392	0.5	2,522	1.6
Tamil	2,169	2.6	1,370	2.4	1,581	1.1	1,956	0.8	1,119	0.7
Turkish	1,440	1.7	4,647	8.1	1,434	1.0	2,147	0.8	450	0.3
Urdu**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vietnamese	5,490	6.5	1,679	2.9	1,411	1.0	1,111	0.4	466	0.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28,125</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>32,041</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>42,297</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>29,136</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20,619</b>	<b>13</b>
Total, Speaks Other Language	40,581	48.2	42,978	74.9	64,425	46.8	88,043	34.3	38,894	25.2
Total, NS	5,575		7,612		10,586		14,849		4,870	
<b>Total</b>	<b>89,767</b>		<b>64,959</b>		<b>148,323</b>		<b>271,710</b>		<b>159,391</b>	

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing, Basic Community Profile, Table B12 – Language Spoken by Sex<sup>39</sup>.

### Indigenous Resource

Table 14 and Table 15 below provide a means of assessing the LGA level distribution of the Early Words' Aboriginal Resource against the Aboriginal under 5 year population as provided by the Census in 2006 for the target LGAs. The share of the all Aboriginal EW resources in each LGA is commensurate with the underlying population distribution, so the current distribution of resources is good. A higher share of Aboriginal resources are delivered to Parramatta than might be expected given its share of the Aboriginal 0-2 year population (18% resources and 9% of the population), and a slightly lower share of resources are distributed in Baulkham Hills. Looking at the number of resources distributed per child aged 0-2 years, the overall ratio is 8.5 resources per child aged 0-2 years, which is significantly higher than the overall distribution rate for the target area of 4.35.

**Table 14: Proportion of Indigenous Population (0-2 years and 3-5 years) in each LGA, 2006.**

LGA	0-2 Year Population, Indigenous	%	3-5 Year Population, Indigenous	%
Auburn	11	1.4	7	0.9
Baulkham Hills	27	3.5	22	2.9
Blacktown	609	79.6	600	78.4
Holroyd	42	5.5	43	5.6
Parramatta	76	9.9	71	9.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>765</b>		<b>743</b>	

Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Note: \*Mandarin and Cantonese. \*\*Not included in the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

**Table 15: Distribution of all Aboriginal Resources by LGA, 2006.**

LGA	All Resources	Aboriginal %	Ratio of Aboriginal Resources to 0-2 Year Aboriginal Population
Auburn	62	1.0	5.64
Baulkham Hills	84	1.3	3.11
Blacktown	4,516	69.9	7.46
Holroyd	352	5.4	8.38
Parramatta	1,172	18.1	15.42
Out of Area	275	4.3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,461</b>		<b>8.446</b>

Source: *Early Words, Program Statistics (March 2006-October 2008)*..

## **APPENDIX 6: PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES**

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The following seeks to provide an overview of the partnership story for two (2) key partnerships that have been critical to the success of EW:

- the Project Team
- the KELM Reference group

Included in the overview is the background to the establishment of the relationship and its significance in supporting the achievement of the identified outcomes for Project. The data is primarily obtained from interviews and focus groups with the identified 'partner' with supplementary information derived from primary and secondary data sources, including surveys, and organisational records of meetings.

### **CASE STUDY 1: PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM**

#### **Overview**

The management of relationships, both internal and external, is a critical factor in successful project management. Findings suggest that changes to the project management team within the lifecycle of the Project represented some of the significant opportunities and challenges for the Project.

The project team were asked to reflect both on their relationships that constituted the 'internal' partnership and their relationship with external partners including consultants to the Project and distribution partners. Due to the staffing changes within the project team, including a change of role for some members over the project lifecycle, the discussion provided a unique opportunity to examine the dynamics of the internal relationships including any shifts in perspective from the 'new' role.

The project management team is understood here to comprise those employees of Childrenfirst engaged in the development and management of the project. Project team members who participated in the Evaluation included: the project administrative officer, current and former project officers, and internal consultants to the Project comprising the early childhood educator, speech pathologist.

The following utilises data from interviews and focus groups with both current and former members of the project team. The continuity in project staff, including ongoing association of former staff with the Project, provided a unique opportunity to benefit from institutional memory/knowledge of the Project from key personnel engaged in the Project from its conception.

#### *The Team: Staffing model/arrangements*

There had been little staff turnover in the project team during the lifecycle of the Project, with the internal consultants assuming a project manager role following the departure of the original project manager. However, staffing levels have not remained constant over the lifecycle of the Project to reflect leave arrangements (including maternity) and peaks in demand at key stages in the project. The appointment of 'internal' staff to the project has enabled the flexibility in availability of project staff to respond to such changes. Staff acknowledged that this contributed to the low turnover within the project team.

#### *Skills and Experience*

The project team comprised personnel with both generalist and specialist backgrounds reflecting their role within the project team. This included: administration, early childhood education and advocacy, speech therapy, children and family services, occupational therapy. Staff identified that their discipline and practice backgrounds were particularly valuable in establishing and maintaining relationships with distribution and other key partners. This was highlighted by the current and former project manager in relation to their respective professional practice backgrounds in occupational therapy and early childhood education which they perceived as a key enabler in negotiating their relationship with health and library partners respectively.

However, staff acknowledged that they were required to develop new skills outside of their traditional area of expertise in response to demands of the project which provided opportunities for new learning. This included: refinement and development of project management skills, to cross-disciplinary collaborations including those outside traditional areas of practice. Factors such as trust and respect were identified as critical to the achievement of the latter. Staff also identified that their part-time engagement on the Project benefited the project in providing perspective or a 'fresh pair of eyes'. Staff acknowledged that through that the organisation's involvement with other early intervention and prevention programs provided further opportunities to leverage the Project in support of improved access for families and services.

### *Scope of the Project*

The team identified that the scope and scale of the Project had grown 'exponentially' from original brief, with staff identifying their own passion and commitment to practice and the project as a key driver in extending themselves to deliver the Project "above and beyond" available staffing levels, including voluntary work in addition to their paid employment on the Project. Staff identified the value of their professional and private networks in recruiting volunteers to assist in the development and the delivery of the Project which included the use of families in piloting the resource and engagement of volunteers from the wider community in packing and distribution of resources.

Staff indicated that the collaborative model envisaged by the project, in both the design and delivery of the Project, has meant a considerable component of their workload has involved relationship management. Staff identified this area as one of the key areas of opportunity and challenge for the Project.

### *Challenges*

Staff identified that key challenges to the 'internal' partnership as resulting from internal management issues, including those within the wider organisation, such as leadership and management styles. Further challenges to the project were also associated with external partners in relation to practice and professional-private relationship boundaries. The former was highlighted as a key challenge in the design of the resource, with tensions between the project team and consultants (including those in an advisory role) to the Project in relation to the content and design elements. Whilst staff identified a clear benefit in the opportunity for learning afforded by the 'steep learning curve' associated with new work

Not surprisingly, as key informants to the Evaluation were to point out, the success of the implementation of an initiative such as EW depends on the support from across the organisation. This is also true for the 'unpaid staff' who support the distribution process<sup>40</sup>. Whilst this has been a key strength of the Project, and highlighted the commitment and resourcefulness of the Project team to secure additional resources for the Project, it highlights the shortfall actual and estimated staffing levels to delivery the project.

The engagement of these volunteers highlights the value of personal and professional networks in supporting practice, with staff further reporting on the use of such networks to pilot the resources. However, the reliance on volunteer or unpaid staff highlights issues of resourcing of such programs and the disjuncture between the actual costs and the projected costs on which basis funding is allocated.

### **Key Lessons**

Staff identified the following key lessons to emerge from the project:

- The limitations of 'starting from scratch': steep learning curve, skills deficit, and under-estimating the time and resources required to develop resource and relationships, and provide ongoing support for relationships
- Limitations on internal, self-directed skills development and need for outsourcing 'specialist' expertise as and when required
- The importance of collaboration and inclusion in the project management process: the strengths and limitations of consensus management
- The need for adequate project planning, including financial and staffing resources
- Negotiating practice boundaries within partnership relationships: the need to clarify and agree roles and expectations of project partners
- Establishing practice boundaries – balance in 'expertise' of respective partners, including role of generalist versus specialist advice, e.g; maintaining the integrity of the product whilst respecting the contribution of each partner.

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<sup>40</sup> The deliberate choice of 'unpaid staff' versus volunteers has been used to highlight the additional staffing requirements to support the Project which are currently not met within the existing Project budget.

## **CASE STUDY 2: ABORIGINAL RESOURCE**

The KELM focus group represents an effective partnership between Early Words and members of the Indigenous community, as well as key federal and local government stakeholders. It has spanned over three years, beginning in late 2005 and involved the cultural adaptation of a 0-2 year DVD in Aboriginal English, and associated materials (t-shirts, magnets etc), and more recently the translation of the 3-5 year DVD from the mainstream script into Aboriginal English. In the formation of the KELM, Early Word's then Project Manager, was initially directed to potential participants in the Aboriginal community by a trusted community member, who acted as a "bridge" to respected Indigenous persons within Western Sydney. This process recognised cultural norms and displayed respect for stakeholders/gatekeepers. All invited members had qualifications and practical experience in relevant fields of early childhood education, child health and/or teaching as well as frequent direct contact with local Aboriginal children and families.

KELM members identified the emergence of strong professional partnerships through participation in the reference group. Those representing an external organisation suggested that the development of an Indigenous Early Literacy resource served to strengthen their organisations aims, even if only in the long term. In particular there was recognition of the need for multi-disciplinary and cross-sector responses to early intervention and prevention, which may have represented a change in focus from traditional core business (for instance if core business was chiefly addressing unemployment).

KELM members also highlighted a unique process of gaining consensus when making decisions within the KELM, *"Collaboration always/sometimes means that there is a smaller weaker part that just says yes for the sake of it, but the consensus here has just been an incredible privilege to be part of"*. Such a comment highlights the importance of common agreement in this decision making and the positive experience of developing the resource. This process was aided by the belief that all members had common goals: to improve the performance of Indigenous children and not make Aboriginal Mum's "feel bad". An implication of this process is that it may have strengthened the endorsement and subsequent take-up of the resource by the Aboriginal community (although this is not necessarily supported by attempts to gather primary data). Individually most KELM members suggested participation in such a decision making processes was personally and professionally empowering, an added benefit of engagement with Early Words.

### ***Strengths Perspective***

A key aim expressed by the KELM group was to develop linguistically and culturally appropriate tools, which recognise the literacy levels of the target audience. The reference group adopted a 'strengths perspective': focusing on parent's current literacy and the incorporation of everyday objects (grounded in everyday reality of parents).

Members of KELM were at pains to stress that the resource represented more than a straight translation of the mainstream resource, but was a cultural translation. To this end the mainstream DVD's graphic design and colour scheme was altered to reflect Aboriginal preferences, the script was simplified and altered to incorporate Aboriginal English, and new activities were added. The resource was seen as key in building parent confidence. To this end the KELM group concentrated on providing literacy activities that were accessible to parents, easy to replicate (in terms of cost and effort) and fun. The resource was narrated by a local Aboriginal woman, which further strengthens the cultural appropriateness and potential local ownership of the DVD, given the target audience. Members of the KELM were also keen to ensure that the resource was suggestive rather than being prescriptive or "over-bearing".

### ***Impact on Practice***

KELM members expressed that the experience had not only strengthened their awareness of early literacy issues (informing their practice), but also their belief in a consensus model of decision making, and the importance of trust and respect when collaborating. For one member of the group the process had provided considerable insight into engaging with Indigenous communities:

*What the Partners say...*

“..We want to support families. We don't just want people coming through the door looking for assistance. We want to do that preventative stuff, our involvement was about having participation in the project around that.”

“I think coming from a childcare background and having a look at what's out there and the difference with this resource, is that we have developed something which doesn't cost the Mums anything and the suggestions that are in there, and they are suggestions, are easy for the Mum's to do. Just count the potatoes and you don't have to go out there and buy special blocks or things to count, that's a big thing...”

“We've all come to the group with the one thing in mind, to put out resources that help our Mum's (our very young Mum's), also to make our community feel that they are doing a good job, not to make them feel that they are doing a bad job.”

“Another Aboriginal project that I have been given to look after, I now approach that in a completely different light. The first thing when I was asked to do that project, the first thing that I thought, is that it should be an Aboriginal organisation doing that not me, just from what you guys have taught me.”

Focus Discussion with KELM Reference Group, September 2008

“.....makes youth look at their intake of alcohol and drugs. Also bonding baby and self, very our culture”

Survey of Distribution Partners, September 2008