



# Literacy for Littlies

A whole of community approach to  
sustained improvements in early  
literacy

# Literacy for Littlies – A whole of community approach to sustained improvements in early literacy



# Acknowledgement of Country





# Sarina

A vibrant community, with challenges and opportunities

# An introduction to Sarina



- We are a community of extremes – many families on very low income/unemployed or seasonal work with the sugar industry, and many families on high incomes as mining employees or professionals.
- Anecdotal evidence emerging over past few years is that the gap in oral language development in our children is widening, potentially impacting negatively on AEDC results yet to come.

# Access to specialist support for children difficult



- Shortage of specialists to work with young children in our region – pediatricians, speech therapists and occupational therapists, and high turnover rates in public system means limited continuity of care
- This has been exasperated with the introduction of NDIS in 2017; wait times for initial consults are now up to 9 months.
- Those without transport have limited access to specialists, most available in Mackay, but some have to travel to Townsville or Brisbane.

The screenshot shows a job search results page from Jora. The search criteria are for 'Speech Pathologist' jobs in 'Mackay QLD', sorted by 'relevance', with a distance filter set to 'within 50km'. The results are categorized by listed date, job type, salary estimate, and category.

Category	Count
<b>Listed Date</b>	
Last 7 days	5
Last 14 days	3
Last 30 days	10
<b>Job Type</b>	
Full time	4
Permanent	3
Part time	3
<b>Salary Estimate</b>	
\$30,000+	11
\$50,000+	11
\$70,000+	8
<b>Category</b>	
Healthcare & Medical	11
Community Services	8
<b>Title</b>	
Occupational Therapist	10

*Snapshot of Speech Pathologist vacancies as at 28/3/18 – that's a lot of positions to be filled for a relatively small regional city!*



The start  
point – AEDC  
data

# The AEDC profile for Sarina

Figure 2 – Emerging trends in developmental vulnerability for this community, showing change in percentage (2009 to 2015).

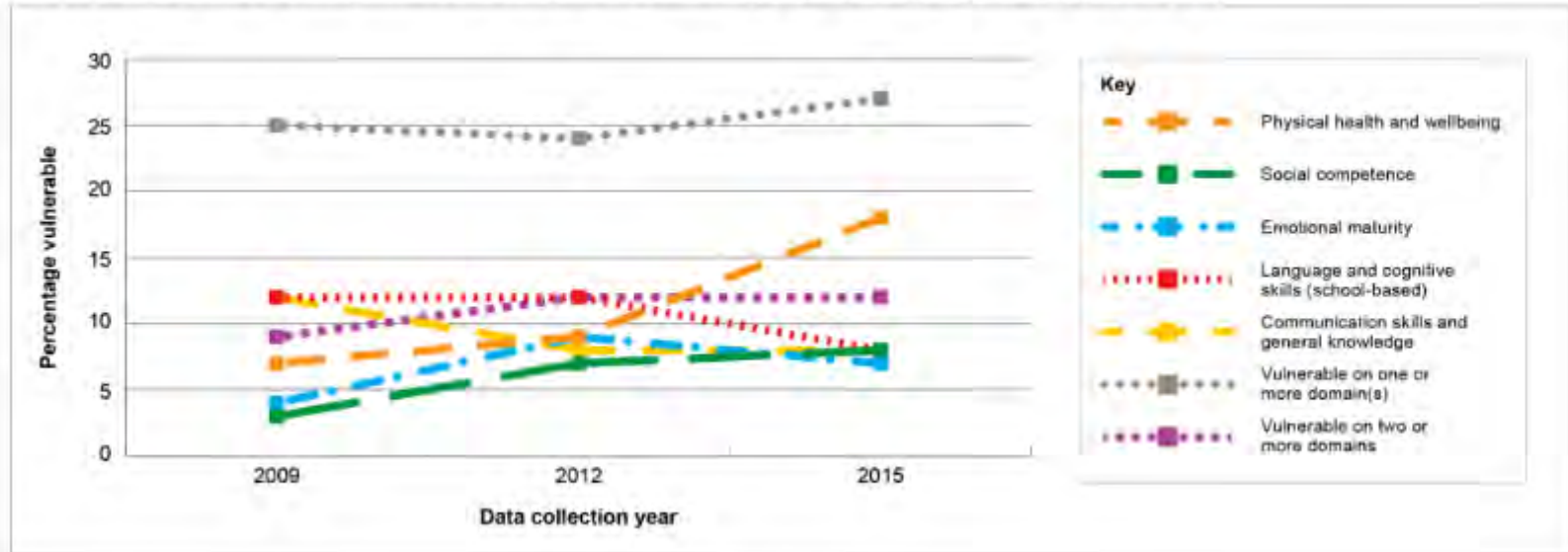


Table 7 – Emerging trends in developmental vulnerability for this community, showing change in percentage (2009 to 2015).

AEDC domain	2009 (Percentage of children - %)	2012 (Percentage of children - %)	2015 (Percentage of children - %)
Physical health and wellbeing	7.5	9.3	17.6
Social competence	3.4	7.0	7.9
Emotional maturity	4.1	8.8	7.3
Language and cognitive skills (school-based)	12.2	12.3	8.5
Communication skills and general knowledge	11.6	8.1	8.5
Vulnerable on one or more domains	24.7	23.7	26.7
Vulnerable on two or more domains	8.8	11.6	12.1

Note: Percentage values have been rounded.





# Bringing a community together

Nat Virtue

# How we used the information to inform change



- Early Childhood services had attended both Mackay and Townsville AEDC conferences and heard of similar whole of community approaches.
- Critical reflection from Sarina ECEC services identified concern about the potential increase in the number of children arriving at school vulnerable and identified that a whole of community approach was needed for all of our children.



## Sarina & District Community Kindergarten

A non-profit community  
Kindergarten.



## Kids College Sarina

A family owned and operated  
long day care and Kindergarten.



## Grandma's Place

A family owned and operated  
long day care and Kindergarten.

# Collaboration was the critical starting point



- All services shifted away from focusing just on their children to a community approach and focusing on all of our children collectively.
- Establishment of an Early Years Network in Sarina – including all 4 ECEC services, Primary Schools and Department of Education (and now also includes playgroup and high school Cert III students).



# Collaboration was the critical starting point



- How the innovative approach came to being:
  - Initial meeting with all 4 ECEC services and a Department of Education Transition Officer to consider the Abercedarian Approach as a means of a whole of community response.
  - Successfully gaining a grant from Sarina Community Bendigo Bank to fund training for the project (over \$13,000), and each service to contribute in-kind time to implement the Approach.



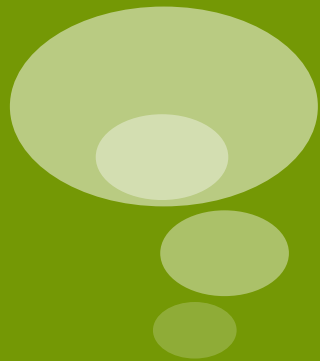


# The Abercedarian Approach

# Abecedarian Approach Australia

3a





# Our journey forward

Judy Hawkins & Nat Virtue



# Our journey forward . . .



- Training in mid 2017, each ECEC service supported with mentors from Department of Education and each service has plans to embed practices across all Educators/Teachers in 2018.
- A willingness for local ECEC services to work together, balance of grant funding to be used to bring Educators and Teachers together to support each other during 2018.





# Benefits seen to date

- **Educators have seen positive effects relating not only to the childrens' language skills, but also in other learning areas.**
- Michelle, Lead Educator says that in her service's 2-3year and 3-4year groups:
  - “Conversational reading has been a great resource for children with challenging behaviours, creating extended calmer moments to maintain interest and enthusiasm for reading and reciprocal conversation”.
  - “one on one strategies have helped children with speech delays” and “helped them build on initial sounds and incomplete words.”
- Dale, Teacher says that:
  - “by working with each child using Conversational Reading, we are ensuring that no child slips under the radar”, and
  - On a professional basis, it has enabled increased discussions between Educators/Teachers, building their collaboration.

# Difficulties encountered; Barriers we need to overcome



- The “we don’t have time!” barrier has, and is, the biggest barrier we need to continue to work on.
- All services agreed that attempting to implement Conversational Reading with each child every day was challenging. Each service focused initially on those children identified as potentially vulnerable.
- Each service is working towards increasing number of conversational reading capacity in 2018, as well as implementing Enriched Caregiving and Learning Games.

# Increased intentionality with all EC Teachers/Educators



# Suggestions to other communities



- Vital to form a local network to bring Educators and Leaders from ECEC services together to form a plan.
- Seeking funding to support training for ECEC Teachers/Educators is essential for a community approach, due to the long operational hours of some services (*thank you again to our local Community Bendigo Bank!*)
- Take a “Village to Raise a Child” approach – whole of community collaboration is essential for long term change to be visible in AEDC data.
- Take a 3-5 year approach – it takes time to bring a community together and it will take several years to see results reflected in AEDC data . . .

A green rounded rectangle with a dark green background. On the left side, there are three overlapping circles of varying shades of green, creating a layered effect. The word "Questions?" is written in white text on the right side of the rectangle.

Questions?



# Would you like to connect with us?

If you are interested in embarking on a similar journey with your community, please don't hesitate to connect with us . . . We are one big village and we would be delighted to be of any assistance to you ☺.

Ph: 07 4956 2876 or  
[admin@grandmasplace.com.au](mailto:admin@grandmasplace.com.au)