

The importance of the early years is well established in literature with a convergence of opinion across many disciplines. Research also demonstrates that literacy is one of the most important foundations for success in school and life, and that the years from birth to age five are critical for building emergent literacy skills. This presentation will discuss the joint project undertaken by Goodstart Early Learning and Let's Read to pilot a professional development approach with early childhood educators at 15 Goodstart Early Learning Centres across Victoria.

All children benefit from high quality early learning and care, and children experiencing disadvantage benefit most. There is increasing evidence that access to good quality early childhood programs from an early age, together with programs that increase parents' capacity to assist children's learning can make a significant difference to children's opportunities in life. Evidence shows that across all early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings there are generally low levels of instructional support for language and early literacy development. In order to increase quality, there needs to be investment in educator capacity and capability to better support children and families.

A child's early literacy skills are a predictor of later literacy, academic achievement and opportunities in life for education, employment, income and wellbeing. Currently our primary school children are some of the worst performing internationally in literacy – Australian Year 4 children are ranked 27th out of 45 countries in reading. Practical ways in which emergent literacy skills can be fostered in young children have also been demonstrated by the evidence. The ECEC sector has an important role to play in working with families to support children's emergent literacy development.

Goodstart Early Learning partnered with Let's Read, an emergent literacy initiative of the Centre for Community Child Health, to conduct a training needs analysis and pilot a professional development approach. Goodstart and Let's Read worked together with educators in the 15 centres across Victoria to build service capacity and increase educator's skills, knowledge and confidence to engage with children and families in emergent literacy activities and foster literacy rich environments. The analysis of pre- and post-intervention surveys demonstrated the effectiveness of the professional development, resulting in a knowledgeable, skilled and confident group of early learning educators who are enthusiastic about Let's Read and want to share their knowledge and skills with others. Let's Read has drawn from this experience to explore cost effective options to scale up the training approach using eLearning technology. Goodstart and Let's Read are exploring options for further research on such interventions.

This presentation will discuss the journey undertaken by Goodstart and Let's Read, as well as lessons learned for those wishing to support evidence based professional development interventions in ECEC settings.